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Imagine, Interrupt, Innovate: Internationalising Teaching and Learning Practice

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Imagine, interrupt, innovate: Internationalising teaching and learning practice

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Abstract

Internationalisation of the curriculum is a key research area at the intersection of teaching and learning. Increasing numbers of international students in Australian schools and tertiary institutions necessitate the reconceptualisation of curriculum to incorporate global perspectives and develop intercultural competencies of both students and teachers. Accordingly, this research project identified key discipline areas at Avondale College of Higher Education in which to perform pedagogical intervention with an internationalisation focus. Three lecturers undertook action research in the areas of Primary Education, Business and Theology, resulting in the production of culturally-informed perspectives, increased cross-cultural awareness and the identification of areas for future research and innovation.

The experience of international students is increasingly a critical topic for Australian education providers. In 2009 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recorded Australia as the OECD country with the highest proportion of international students, and globally as the third largest provider of international education services (ABS, 2012). According to the Department of Education and Training (DET), international students account for almost a quarter of all university enrolments in Australia (DET, 2014). Further, international education is Australia's largest service export, indicating that education both at home and abroad contributes significantly to the nation's economy (Universities Australia, 2014). Statistics reflect modest growth in international student commencements in primary and secondary schools between 2011-2014 with approximately 18,500 year-to-date enrolments nationally in December 2014 (DET, n.d.). Given that trends indicate transnational education has been increasing over the past three decades and shows no sign of slowing (ABS, 2012), the impact on quality of experience for international students should be a central concern for education providers in all sectors. Domestic students are also key stakeholders in a globalised education economy, as reflected in graduate attributes of Higher Education (HE) institutions. In a survey of 29 Australian HE providers, 19 included the terms 'global', 'international', or 'cultural diversity'

> In 2009 the Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded Australia as the OECD country with the highest proportion of international students, and globally as the third largest provider

as graduate attributes (Bowman, 2010, p. 39). As Jones (2014) writes: "The ability to interpret local concerns within a global context and to judge the impact of global issues on their personal and professional lives should surely be an attribute of all graduates in contemporary society" (p. 78).

Contextual perspectives

The term 'Internationalisation' in a HE context broadly refers to "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight in Luxon & Peelo, 2009, p. 53). These six elements signal the wide range of forms internationalisation can take within universities. It affects all stakeholders – academic and non-academic staff, domestic and international students; legislators and service providers in the home and hosting countries; and the community through intersections of language and culture. While research in this area has proliferated in the past decade, the work of Betty Leask (2009), one of Australia's foremost scholars in this field, has focused specifically on Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC). She proposes that "An internationalised curriculum will engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity. It will purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens" (p. 209). This approach to internationalisation acknowledges that curriculum is more than simply content. As Breit et al. (2013) note, culture, backgrounds, learning styles and attitudes may be implicit, but these are critical components of an internationalised curriculum: IoC "can and should generate uncertainty about what is taken for granted and the relevance of the dominant model of education within a disciplinary context" (p. 121). Jones and Killick (2013) also highlight the need for intervention into traditional tertiary contexts. They argue that introducing global perspectives can extend "comfort zones in a controlled manner by challenging cultural assumptions and extending knowledge and experience through the responses of fellow students" (p. 168).

Rationale, aim and contextual purpose

Responding to this research, Avondale College of Higher Education (ACHE) academic staff aimed to identify areas in which intercultural and international competencies are produced, and innovate by destabilising routine pedagogical practice to develop and deepen these competencies. The rationale for this research project recognises that internationalisation "has been driven largely by the marketisation discourse that has come to prevail in [Higher Education]" (De Vita & Case, 2003, p. 384), and is in danger of neo-liberalising agendas that emphasise economic over educational outcomes (Leask & Bridge, 2013; Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010). The researchers contend that the College's special character not only invites but necessitates engagement and integration with students' racial and culturally diverse backgrounds. Avondale's motto: "For a greater vision of world needs" reflects the College's Christian ethos of service, and underpins graduate attributes which include "an informed respect for individual worth, cultural and social diversity, and environmental sustainability" and "the facility to lead and to work collaboratively in professional and community contexts" (Avondale College of Higher Education, 2014). Therefore, through internationalisation this project aims to facilitate "complex holistic interconnections and relations between students, teachers, and curriculum within which power relations are recognised and difference valued" (Ilieva, Beck, & Waterstone, 2014, p. 880). Secondly, the project's rationale responds to calls for empirically grounded research to inform curriculum issues in the tertiary sector (Rasi, Hautakangas, & Väyrynen, 2014; Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010). It has been noted that the unique context of each tertiary institution calls for a tailored approach to IoC (Jones & Killick, 2013), which is in fact helpful for framing interventions. Extensive research has been undertaken in large institutions to date, but the small number of international students at ACHE precluded large-scale interventions. The focus of the research, therefore, was to extend IoC research through case studies in Business, Theology and Education.

The specific aim was to initiate the internationalisation of discipline areas as staff performed action research through pedagogical intervention.

The international students participating in this study originated almost exclusively from either New Zealand or the Pacific islands. Given this cohort, studies investigating the educational experience of students with Pacific Island background provided valuable background to inform this study. A longitudinal study of tertiary Pasifika students in New Zealand, for example, was commissioned to "assess the impact of successive Tertiary Education Strategies (TES) on success for Pasifika learners" (Horrocks et al., 2012, p. 4). A key theme in the study was the high correlation between visibility and sense of place felt by Pasifika students, with one observation being: "if students remained 'invisible', this could reflect the fact

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that 'being "actively Māori" or "actively Pasifika" in an institution [was] to make a *highly* political statement'" (Horrocks et al., 2012, pp. 38–39). One reason for statistically low retention and completion rates was captured succinctly by one student who suggested that some individuals "think they're invisible...they just sort of disappear...they don't put their hand up if they're stuck, they just quietly fade off the scene" (Horrocks et al., 2012, p. 39). More recently Leach (2013) reported findings of a similar study which included international students in New Zealand. The research question was "How do institutional learning environments influence student engagement with learning in diverse tertiary settings?" Findings included the need to address the highly rated responses from ethnic groups that suggest belonging is key to a positive tertiary experience for Pasifika students; thus, it was a priority to foster "a sense of belonging and cultural respect for students, particularly those who are 'fish out of water'" (Leach, 2013, p. 122).

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Research method

Two forms of data collection formed the research methodology. Each researcher kept an action-research diary, noting significant issues and reflecting on personal and professional observations throughout this project. Thematic analysis of the data identified reccurring topics and points of relevance to internationalisation. In addition, during this first stage of the project, the researchers also administered a student survey instrument designed by Mak, Daly and Barker (2014) to capture students' perceptions of internationalisation issues and provide feedback for pedagogical interventions. The survey was made up of two sections, the first an 8-item measure of students' perceptions of how culturally inclusive a multicultural class may be, and the second a 12-item measure of cultural learning development. Students indicated level of agreement using a five item scale with 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree. Past research established high reliabilities for each scale.

Results and recommendations

The following section presents the discipline-specific approaches, interventions, results and recommendations from the initial stage of this study.

Case Study A: Education

The Education unit targeted for the first stage of the project was the third-year primary Curriculum Studies unit: *Humanities & Social Sciences II* (HSIE) (Avondale College of Higher Education,

2015c). The focus of this unit is preparing pre-service teachers to teach History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, and Economics and Business in Australian primary schools from Foundation to Year Six. The majority of the content for these curriculum subjects is centred on the individual primary student (their background and location) and Australia. The curriculum content for these subjects at school begins at Foundation, moving from the individual, to the family, to neighbours, then to local, national and lastly international communities.

At first the possibility of internationalising this unit seemed limited and quite unrealistic as the content focus is predominantly on individuals and Australia, with only the latter primary year levels moving towards international parameters. However, the broad scope of the term 'internationalisation' is significant and suggests that all aspects of pedagogy can intentionally be included, irrespective of content. As a result of this the chosen areas to target for internationalisation in this unit included: the planning of relevant cultural content, identifying and intentionally engaging the cultural diversity of the classroom, and the development of lecturer-student relationships.

Before the semester began, three changes were implemented in the planning of the unit. The first change was to intentionally reword some sections of the unit to internationalise learning outcomes, for example, identifying values as a cultural aspect specific to Australia. The second planning change was to update the recommended reading list and web resources to reflect international perspectives. This change meant including readings and websites that presented relevant worldviews and perspectives other than Australian. Content was adapted to include the way HSIE subjects are taught in primary schools in other countries, for example, South Africa, England and New Zealand. The third planning change involved identifying international students and other ethnic backgrounds within the class prior to classes commencing. The fourth planning change implemented was to invite a guest lecturer of different international experience, to present a series of four topics relevant to this unit, thus including another perspective, and in this instance, wider cultural exposure for the students in this unit.

The next focus area for internationalisation in this unit was to identify and highlight the cultural diversity within the class interactions. A teacher's knowledge, understanding, and ability to work with various cultures within a classroom demonstrates cross-cultural competency—a vital component of internationalisation. As mentioned

previously, the identification of the students and their cultural backgrounds was important to implementing internationalisation. At the beginning of the semester the lecturer identified one international student and a number of cultures represented within the class. Another important aspect of cultural diversity for this unit included the background of the lecturer and that of the guest lecturer. In this case, the culturally-diverse background of the lecturer has significantly shaped her identity and significantly contributed to the development of cross-cultural competencies. After being born in South Africa and living there for 25 years, this lecturer worked in South Africa, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia. The guest lecturer also contributed to internationalisation as, although he grew up in Australia, he has strong French connections which he highlighted throughout his lectures. In the lectures presented by the primary lecturer there were opportunities to highlight internationalisation to the pre-service teachers when looking at Indigenous education and the government drive of 'closing the gap'. These lecture topics were prime instances where pedagogy for culturally and linguistically diverse students could be included in the unit. This presented an opportunity to include some English as a Second Language theory, specifically targeting culture and differences in Australian society, and the aspect of speaking English as a second or other language when teaching these subjects in the primary school.

The final intentional strategy implemented in this unit for internationalisation was that of building authentic relationships between the lecturer and students, as well as among the students themselves. Throughout the semester the lecturer developed classroom relationships with the students by getting to know their names, enquiring about their ethnic backgrounds, considerately questioning about their cultures and intentionally personalising the content throughout the semester to reflect the diversity of the class. It was important to learn of the students' cultural experiences. Building this cultural profile of the class group enabled intentionality in forming authentic links for the students and a modelling of internationalisation within a class, specifically for these pre-service teachers.

The student survey generated for this multi-discipline project was administered at the completion of this unit. A total of 40 students were enrolled in this unit and 28 completed the voluntary student survey in week 12. The results show that 67% of these students perceived cultural inclusiveness positively in this unit; however, 21 of

the 28 students did not know whether the lecturer specifically helped the international student. This response could have occurred because the students did not know who the international student was, or they were unaware of what constitutes 'help' for internationalisation. Further results show that in the section of the survey covering cultural learning development there is, overall, a positive response by these students. All students stated they are more conscious of cultural knowledge and interacting with people from different cultural groups, further they felt more comfortable participating in multicultural groups. This indicates a raised awareness of cultural diversity and representation of cross-cultural processes as outcomes within the class. The lecturer's research diary also reflects on her personal journey through this unit, and the process of awareness developed for herself and her students regarding internationalisation. The most significant are listed in the findings that follow.

The first key finding from this case study is that *forming relationships is important*, and that lecturers need to model this for their students where possible. The second key finding is *the importance of articulating when internationalising interventions are occurring*. It is important not to assume that students are aware and understand what is transpiring as intentional regarding internationalisation. For the lecturer it was important to highlight the implications, *make the links explicit for the students*, and not to wait for them to perceive the experience as being relevant to their international experience or intercultural development. In the next stage of internationalisation, the lecturer plans to again highlight her culturally diverse background during her introduction to the unit. However, *time will also be allowed for students to introduce themselves to each other in groups*, with an emphasis on identifying and highlighting the various cultural groups and languages spoken within the class. At the start of the semester, *international student/s will be introduced to the class in an inclusive manner, and an intentional effort will be made to connect with these students regularly at the end of each of the lectures*. This will ensure that domestic students are visually aware that the lecturer is assisting. The lecturer plans to ensure that assumptions are avoided, and that the students will know when they are having a cultural experience; this will be explicitly highlighted, raising awareness and building on knowledge, awareness and understanding of internationalisation for both lecturer and students.

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Case Study B: Business

The business unit chosen for this research project was a second year management subject: *Strategic Principles* (Avondale College of Higher Education, 2015a). The content of this unit explores the development of mission and vision statements, assessing both the internal and external business environments, crafting business strategy both domestically and internationally, and also explores cross border alliances, mergers, acquisitions and other cooperative strategies while considering new business ventures and strategic change. The researcher began preparation for this unit by determining how many international students were enrolled. Of the twelve enrolled students, two students were from New Zealand and the remaining ten were Australian citizens. An intentional focus was on aspects of national culture, and the impact this has on how business decisions and strategies are formed. In the first class the lecturer asked the students to research the cultural origins of their names, and to share examples of culture specific business practices that take place within those origins. This set the scene well for exploring culture within a business context.

The nature of this subject and the size of the class fitted in well with the planned approach to make use of corporate case studies that had a strong international flavour. Intentionally chosen were businesses such as Nokia, Lenovo, Apple, IKEA, Volkswagon, Virgin Mobile and QANTAS. By using case studies of corporations originating from different global locations, awareness of both international business practices and cultural diversity could be emphasised. These cases provided opportunities to generate better awareness and understanding of cross-cultural business practices, as well as the role of national culture in the chosen field of study for the student. Class discussions were lively and had a high level of contribution from across the student group. An exploration of cultural diversity and business practice was built into assessment for this unit. For example, students in groups of two were asked to address case study questions relating to the content explored in the unit, but to additionally highlight and lead discussion relating to cultural specific business practices and culture. A Lenovo case study proved to be a good example of student led discussion, with discussion ranging from the extended use of the practice of having family members on corporate boards, through to relationship building with international business partners, negotiation techniques and individualistic versus collective cultures, as well as short term versus long term culture orientations.

Twelve students were enrolled in this unit and seven voluntarily completed the anonymous survey undertaken in week 12 of the semester. In the section exploring cultural learning development, all seven respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they had gained awareness of the role of culture in their chosen field of study, with six indicating that they had developed a greater awareness of cultural diversity. All seven students indicated that there had been opportunities for students to learn about different cultures. All students also indicated that they were now more conscious of the cultural knowledge they apply to cross-cultural interactions. Again, the students who completed the survey indicated that they felt better prepared to adjust their cultural knowledge as they interact with people from an unfamiliar culture.

In the section addressing perceptions of cultural inclusiveness, all seven students indicated that they perceived cultural differences to be respected at this institution, while also indicating that they felt their classmates were accepting of cultural differences. Only three students indicated that the lecturer understood the problems that international students encounter, while the other four students responded with "I don't know" on the same question. Students also had difficulty determining whether the lecturer was making special effort to help international students, with two suggesting this was always the case, and the remaining five students indicating that they did not know.

Two key findings emerged from this research. Firstly, *the lecturer had to encourage the students to think outside of their own experiences* and to consider how cultural diversity and cultural factors led to different business practices. This process did not come as easily as anticipated. It is important, therefore, to recognise that some students will show more interest and awareness of cultural diversity and internationalisation than others. Secondly, a general consensus formed by the students was that *a more explicit statement of expectation for how to prepare and give consideration to the internationalisation elements focused on in the unit would have been beneficial*.

Through this intervention it can be concluded that lecturers must be not only open to thinking about internationalisation in new ways, but must be open to anticipating different responses from students. Each intervention should be considered an open-ended learning experience. Additionally, articulating expectations to students as they prepared their case study presentations was a challenge to be met. Students' responses to internationalisation were often reflective of their general approach to the subject. Higher performing

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students tended to embrace the idea of exploring culture and the subsequent links to business practice more than students who performed at a lower level. Lecturers may need to be prepared to work more closely with under-performing students to help such links appear meaningful.

Case Study C: Theology

From the mid 1990s increasing numbers of students with Pacific island background enrolled in Avondale's Christian ministry course. While they came from several Pacific islands, the majority were Samoan. A significant number of students came after some years of residence in New Zealand; however, some came directly from their respective islands. Pacific island students' gradually increasing presence was not met with any formal faculty-wide analysis of, or response to, their needs to be embedded into the academic culture. Their situation was the topic of frequent faculty discussions, however, and lecturers individually made ad hoc efforts to help them adjust and cope as they worked toward achieving course requirements. In response to faculty recommendation, Avondale College appointed to the faculty a culturally and academically well-qualified Samoan ministry lecturer. But after less than three years in the position, he was recruited to a different position at church headquarters.

Academic staff, individually and collectively, are 'at the coal face' of curriculum internationalisation. This self-evident 'truism' has recently been confirmed by a study published by Leask (2012, p.40, 41), especially in findings 4 (policy is not enough), 5 (influences external to a discipline exist) and 6 (IoC blockers and enablers must be managed). During second semester 2014 Christian ministry and theology lecturer Kayle de Waal mapped internationalising features and needs of his first-year Christian ministry subject titled *New Testament Epistles A* (Avondale College of Higher Education, 2015b). He kept a diary which was "designed to reflect on the international composition of the students in the class as they interacted with the unit material" (de Waal, 2014). This diary consisted mostly of reports of student comments made during weekly tutorials. He also administered to the class the student survey designed by the Avondale College internationalisation research team. Three of the 17 students in this class were female, and three were of Pacific island origin (one Fijian, two Samoans). The 10 respondents to the survey included two females, and the three of Pacific island origin.

Diary highlights included quite different responses, by culture, to attending a house church. Those with island backgrounds reported it as providing a new source of "fellowship and friendship" while the Australians reported "no impact" from their attendance. Probing led to discussion of individualistic versus collectivistic societies and their respective responses to small groups, and of the Christian gift of hospitality (de Waal, 2014). In another highlight, one Samoan student shared his culture-bridging insight into the oratory style of the apostle Paul. Students were encouraged to reflect on the cultural context of a selected speech, and to consider it in the light of their own cultural context. This student responded in the following way:

> Prior to this reading, I've always seen Paul as an incredible philosopher, teacher, and preacher. Now, after this reading, I'm convinced he is an elite orator...and possibly a Samoan? …I'm reminded by the way Samoans are trained in speech when formally representing their family/village to address the audience of other family/families or village/s. You must first briefly introduce yourself, and briefly trace your history and by doing so (if you have done your research and are skilful), will mention names that connect you with the other family/village. This in turn breaks the hard ground and brings you to familiar terms. Credibility is won, and all the main content maybe addressed. Furthermore the closing is an affirmation. An absolute attempt to ensure that bridges are reinforced and none are burned. Romans [chapter] 1 has for the first time in my life, had Paul standing with a Samoan orator stick and **fue**, and has won me over even more so.

Responding to assigned reading by giving a post-colonial interpretation of Paul's letter to Romans, one Australian female student realised for the first time that Paul addressed a community in a specific time, place, and cultural context. She also disclosed that she gained insight into the way slave-owning readers of the letter might understand some of the apostle's declarations. A third student, aware that Paul tailored his addresses to the culture of his listeners and readers, asked rhetorically in a powerfully reflexive moment: "How significant is it for us to have a pre-[service] understanding of a culture/audience/place before we present the gospel?" In one of the final diary entries, the lecturer himself wrote: "I appreciated being more intentional about the various groups in the class… it was a privilege to reflect on and see the diversity in the class." On the need for internationalisation, he concluded: "There certainly is a need for lecturers to consider how they are engaging with students from varied cultural backgrounds and to be intentional about international integration in their unit outlines, class interactions and discussions

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and assessment tasks."

In the survey administered to this class, the first section featured questions on student-lecturer relationships and interactions. The majority of students strongly agreed that their lecturer encouraged and facilitated contact and cooperation (questions 1, 2, 8). At the same time, 40% felt their lecturer did not understand problems faced by international students. The other 60% responded "I do not know". A majority of students reported in responses to two questions that classmates respected one another's cultures, and worked together. However, the "I do not know" responses to six of the eight questions in this section by over 30% of students is perhaps representative of the first year class's demographic, as they were still "getting to know the place"; it also possibly represents a tendency to submerge personal cultural features in order to better integrate with the dominant institutional culture.

The final questions explored students' growing awareness of the need to recognise and allow for cultural difference. Overall responses to those questions indicate generally positive evaluation of other culture awareness and acceptance, and for inter-cultural communication and cooperation: 5% of students selected "strongly agree", 40% "agree", 30% neutral, and only 5% chose "disagree". A key finding of this class' response to the survey was their *lack of confidence that their lecturer was aware of the cultural problems they faced as they adjusted to first-year tertiary education*. This finding is consistent with those in Case Studies A and B, and indicates that there is more work to be done by lecturers to demonstrate cultural awareness and inspire confidence that unique, culturally-triggered issues will be met with understanding and appropriate action.

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Conclusion

The first stage of interventions performed by ACHE lecturers has highlighted the need for intentionality in a curriculum-level approach to internationalisation. Of the three units described in this paper, none obviously lent themselves to internationalisation. However, setting goals to incorporate international perspectives and develop intercultural competencies destabilised routine practices, necessitating an innovative approach to teaching and learning. This kind of intentionality helped lecturers to see their units through "fresh eyes" and with global perspectives. There is strong evidence that these interventions also facilitated productive experiences for students as they were challenged to consider cultural features of texts and contexts. While levels of engagement ranged from low to high, insightful responses from a number of students indicates that the interventions achieved their aim of producing culturally-informed readings and cross-cultural awareness.

This project has also reinforced that, as suggested by Jones and Killick (2013), a tailored, contextual approach is important when internationalising curriculum. Approaches taken responded to the particular needs of each lecturer and class as identified on a unit-by-unit basis. Importantly, each intervention also revealed areas that are in need of further development. These will be addressed in stage two of the research project, with particular focus being given to making internationalising practices explicit, so that students are aware that their competencies and knowledges are being developed and can work intentionally to maximise their own learning experiences.

These implications are relevant for educators at all levels. As has been observed, elements ranging from types of knowledge valued, to textbook choice, to opportunities for supported intercultural interactions are all part of the hidden curriculum (Leask, 2009). Internationalisation can begin to highlight areas that are often overlooked, and illuminate opportunities to produce more nuanced, culturally-inclusive and globally-oriented learning experiences for students and educators alike. TEACH

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