

Problematizing the Idea of Curriculum 'Internationalization'

In recent years, there has been growing acknowledgement that our interconnected world requires graduates with international and intercultural perspectives, a global outlook, or to develop as global citizens. One result of this has been greater recognition of the importance of curriculum internationalization as a central focus in a comprehensive approach to internationalization. Betty Leask recognizes the importance of the intercultural in this endeavor, as well as the international, in arguing that:

An internationalized curriculum will engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity and purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens. (Leask, 2015, p. 10)

Earlier, Josef Mestenhauser, one of the great scholar-practitioners and pioneers in the field, described international education as multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary, and cross-cultural (Mestenhauser, 1998), a view largely reinforced across the literature today. But this begs the question, what do we mean by 'culture,' and so what does it mean to talk of the intercultural when we refer to curriculum?

Adrian Holliday (1999) argues that the *default notion of culture* is really a *large culture* paradigm, for example, relating to nationality or ethnicity. Perhaps we fall too easily into thinking of our students as coming from a certain country, religious or ethnic background, with the result that stereotyping, biases, and assumptions may follow (Jones, 2017).

But in terms of curriculum, large culture thinking may play an even more insidious part. Mestenhauser warned of *academic ethnocentrism* whereby the role played by our own personal backgrounds and contexts can influence how we acquire new knowledge (Mestenhauser, 2002). Leask (2015) argues the need to ask ourselves whose knowledges, epistemologies, and methods are being valued and to challenge deficit paradigms of all kinds in curriculum design and delivery. Uncritical domination of Anglo- and Eurocentric worldviews can be a barrier to the way we think about internationalization and we must learn from other non-Western contexts, maintain Jones and de Wit (2012). Indeed, Stein argues that *without addressing [such a range of] larger contexts and questions, curriculum internationalization may reproduce rather than interrupt Western dominance* (Stein, 2017, p. 6).

So can curriculum internationalization or associated constructs, including internationalization at home or global learning, encompass the broad range of goals and drivers for its implementation, while addressing these issues and concerns?

I would argue that this is possible, but it requires us to think of both curriculum and ‘culture’ in the broadest terms and to connect these to closely related aspects beyond merely the international. Holliday’s alternative to large culture paradigms is the notion of *small cultures*. He argues that *a small culture paradigm attaches ‘culture’ to small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behaviour.* (Holliday, 1999, p. 1). This may be a helpful guide when we think about so-called ‘internationalization’ of the curriculum, as it suggests that the ‘intercultural’ may have much wider dimensions than merely nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion.

Equality, diversity and inclusion, social justice, decolonization, global power relations and geopolitics, human rights, anti-racism, gender identity and equality, ethics, multiculturalism, and sustainability are just some of the related elements which all have a role to play in broadening our understanding of internationalization. Many of these are linked to the international, but increasingly diverse societies in many parts of the world require us to think of internationalization as responding to diversity wherever it may be found. Small culture thinking may open our eyes to different conceptions of how we interpret the intercultural, and present alternative opportunities to ‘interculturalize,’ as well as to internationalize, our curriculum.

Traditionally, education abroad may have been seen as the way forward, on the assumption that travelling to other countries would offer such opportunities. Not only is international travel not a guarantee of these outcomes, but, more importantly, student mobility is restricted to a global elite. With around 220 million students in tertiary education in October 2021,¹ only 2.4% are estimated

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation#1>

to be mobile.² Restrictions on travel during the global COVID-19 pandemic have meant a rapid transition to digital pedagogies, including a rising interest in virtual mobility and collaborative online international learning (COIL). These may offer useful potential but, again, only relatively small numbers of students are likely to benefit.

Instead we should concern ourselves with the curriculum of all our students, focusing on the opportunities of diversity and alternative knowledge paradigms which may be evident in society more locally. These may include indigenous communities, those who have a heritage in different parts of the world, as well as recent arrivals through social, economic, or *forced* (Ergin et al., 2019) migration. To do this requires the intercultural (where culture is understood as small cultures in Holliday's terms) to take precedence in our thinking over the international. It has been suggested that *interculturalization* is a more appropriate term in this respect than *internationalization* (Garson et al., 2016; Jones, 2013, 2019).

For me, then, transformative internationalization, in the form of interculturalization, can come not only through international experiences but also through purposeful and constructive engagement with perceived cultural 'otherness' of any kind (Jones, 2020).

So how do we address this challenge? These suggestions may provide a starting point:

1. Think interculturally rather than simply internationally and seek to develop intended learning outcomes which are appropriate to
 - a. the discipline
 - b. the student body
 - c. the local, regional, and institutional context

and which have relevant, achievable, and appropriate pedagogical approaches for their delivery and assessment. These should be embedded within the core curriculum rather than added on, for example, as electives.

2. Focus on learning outcomes that require all students to encounter and challenge their own perspectives through meaningful and engaged connection with people who may reflect a broader range of 'cultural otherness' than their previous personal experience. Depending on the disciplinary field, these may include:

² <http://data UIS.unesco.org/>

- a. Community groups including religious organizations, community centers, or special interest groups for music, dance, the arts, or other cultural pursuits;
 - b. Business organizations such as multinational companies, or those with a diverse range of employees; and
 - c. Other kinds of organization including prisons; family refuge centers; shelters for people who are homeless or who have addictive behaviors; organizations supporting people with disabilities, those who have special needs, who are recently arrived in the country, or who suffer discrimination of any kind.
3. Provide guided opportunities for reflection on experiences of cultural otherness as part of an inclusive approach to pedagogy. For example, this may be through:
- a. Reflecting on diversity in the classroom or wider campus, such as through collaborative group work;
 - b. Engagement with diversity in the local context, for example, those suggested in (2) above;
 - c. Virtual exchange or COIL opportunities; and
 - d. Learning and applying knowledge from student colleagues returning from education abroad.

In short, we must think interculturally rather than simply internationally, and consider all of our students beyond the mobile few. Using the kind of ideas suggested here, we can attempt at least to:

create the potential for students to question their own assumptions, acknowledge alternative viewpoints and to cross cultural boundaries, extending their knowledge and understanding by respecting and valuing diversity as essential for living and learning in a changing society.
(Jones, 2019, p. 1)

The concept of *globality*, or consciousness of the world as a single place (Robertson, 1992), and indeed the consciousness of humanity, as opposed to nationalistic, culturally prevalent or socially dominant perspectives, are all relevant to helping students to challenge personal assumptions, biases, and stereotypes and to develop the kind of cultural humility which is at the heart of an internationalized curriculum. Thinking critically about internationalization and interculturality, while imagining their broader implications, is the starting point for this work. It can only be successful if we embrace the opportunities presented.

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