

6. Symposium: Internationalising the Curriculum: a Dubious Concept, Variouslly Interpreted – What is Going On in the UK and Europe?

INTRODUCTION

We offer this symposium based on a number of perceptions. Firstly, the conception of internationalisation represented by the strong tradition of staff and student exchanges is gradually giving way to a new and much broader and diversified notion of internationalisation in Higher Education (HE). Secondly, the trend towards rising numbers of international students in UK HE is likely to continue, further raising the profile of issues surrounding cultural diversity and intercultural learning within the sector. Thirdly, across Europe a paradigm shift away from diversity towards convergence and structural harmonisation is being fuelled by the continuing 'Bologna process'.

Despite these 'winds of change' there is little reference to the internationalisation of HE in the literature on UK HE policy, save the emphasis on HE as a tradeable activity. For some the emphasis on the export of HE is, in itself, a matter of increasing concern. Whilst ICT may offer opportunities for the expansion of learning in the distance mode it has - beyond the confines of Europe - been instrumental in HE losing its exclusive claim to being a public good and being increasingly regarded as simply another trade item to be negotiated under the General Agreement on Tariffs in Services. Clearly, the concept of internationalisation allied with distance learning has untold implications for UK HE yet in practice UK HE Institutions have relatively little guidance from government in determining their international missions, in contrast to other policy issues such as widening participation. This relative lack of guidance means that whilst HE Institutions enjoy extensive autonomy in defining their international missions they have to be particularly clear about what internationalisation means in the practical sense. Of particular significance is the influence on conceptions of pedagogy and the 'quality' learning experience.

Our approach seeks to stimulate a 'bottom-up' debate on the ways in which strategic aims related to internationalisation at the institutional level may translate into practical initiatives in teaching and learning methodology, drawing upon the principle of networked learning. In this way the opportunities to surface good practice will be maximised. The symposium is therefore structured in two distinct parts. The presentation of papers exploring theory and practice, based in part upon experience at the University of Salford in the first part will inform group and plenary discussion of current practice at other institutions in the second part.

Contributors will present an exploration of the potential of networked learning in internationalising the curriculum from a number of perspectives. Viv Caruana will present an institutional perspective by discussing the ideological and pragmatic rationales underpinning internationalisation in HE; critically evaluating different approaches to the concept and investigating the role played by ICT in internationalisation of the curriculum. A key question is however, what does internationalisation mean for curriculum design and teaching practice in distance learning and campus-based courses? Mel Lees will present a case study from a successful distance learning course delivered globally to Construction professionals, identifying how an international pedagogy deals with core curriculum in a variety of local contexts. Frances Bell and Janice Whatley will present a practice-based case study of three years of online collaboration between students in five European countries that is now being funded under the European Action, Socrates (Minerva). Our presentations will demonstrate the potential of networked learning for meeting the needs of expanding numbers of international students and equipping both home and international students with the knowledge, skills and intercultural literacy necessary to succeed in the global economy and society. The discussion that follows these presentations will elaborate current practice and identify practical steps that we can take to Internationalise the Curriculum (ItC).

Organised By: Frances Bell