

International Mission Impossible? ICT and Alternative Approaches to Internationalising the Curriculum

Viv Caruana

University of Salford
v.caruana@salford.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Whilst Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) increasingly define their competitive and developmental strategies in terms of an 'international mission' the concept, in practical terms remains ill-defined. Particular uncertainty surrounds the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting different conceptions of, and strategies for internationalization. The University of Salford's (UoS) international mission provides a starting point for considering the rationales underpinning internationalization and the range of approaches which may be deployed in embedding an international dimension in the curriculum. The paper goes on to gauge the ways in which institutions are aware of and act upon internationalization in a strategic way; to investigate the dominant approaches to internationalization and suggest how ITC may be deployed as part of an internationalized learning, teaching and assessment strategy.

Key words

internationalization; curriculum; ICT; policy; strategy; rationales; constructivism

INTERNATIONALISATION AND ICT: RATIONALES AND THE UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD AGENDA

At present UK HEIs play host to approximately 240,000 international students, a figure which on the basis of worldwide research conducted for IDP Education Australia, is anticipated to more than double by 2010, assuming that UK market share remains constant. (THES, 25 July, 2003) Such trends herald a significant shift in the balance of the student population whilst developments in ICT continue to facilitate multicultural exposure and exchange. The University of Salford (UoS) currently attracts about 2,000 international students to its campus in Greater Manchester, a figure equating with some 50 or so, other UK HEIs and representing approximately 10% of the UoS student population. (International Office, University of Salford; THES 25 July, 2003) Its policy in respect of internationalisation is stated unequivocally in the Strategic Framework 2003-2004. The University sees its mission in terms of preparing students for careers that will be in the global economy, whilst at the same time enriching the wider student experience by integrating the knowledge and experience of its international students. The strategic mission in turn translates into four fundamental goals for the institution: to recruit, integrate and support international students; to internationalise the curriculum, including creating learning opportunities worldwide for students and staff; active development of international research activity and international partnerships to further a range of teaching, research and enterprise activities. (UoS, Teaching and Learning Development Sub-committee, 5.2.04) Whilst on the face of it, UoS' strategic position may be clear, outcomes in practical terms may depend heavily on the rationales or motivations for integrating the international dimension. Jane Knight and Hans de Wit (1995) have distinguished four groups of rationales including the academic, social/cultural, political and economic, each of which implies different ends and means. These rationales are of course not mutually exclusive and different stakeholder groups have a role in determining a hierarchy of priorities which may change over time and change by country and region. Motivation therefore is a crucial consideration for any UK HEI when contemplating international collaboration of any form.

In tracing the historical development of rationales for internationalization Knight and de Wit have noted that a predominance of academic and social/cultural motivations established in mediaeval times, gave way to political aspirations after the Second World War and the era of US hegemony, and this has in the post-Cold War years been superseded by the prevalence of economic considerations, reflecting the perceived need for a 'global workforce and the race for global technological supremacy. (Knight, J. and de Wit, H., 1995) Furthermore

David Elliott of the British Council has argued that in policy terms HE in the UK is regarded purely as a tradeable activity, a source of foreign currency. As UK HEIs contemplate their international missions then, there is the danger that in the absence of any meaningful educational rationale based upon sound and equitable academic and social/cultural principles, the commercial/economic agenda will take centre stage dictating an internationalization agenda driven overwhelmingly by a process of aggressive competition for overseas fee-paying students with little recourse to the means by which new and different attitudes and expectations are to be accommodated within existing traditional pedagogic models, (Elliott, 1997). The strategic aim of seeking to 'enrich the wider student experience by integrating the knowledge and experience of its international students' at UoS suggests that imperatives transcend the purely economic to embrace the educational and broader academic and social/cultural motivations of the internationalization agenda. Nonetheless issues of consistency of vision between stakeholders remain. Whilst UoS may have its own vision of internationalization as an institution is there consistency with international partners through time and space? Similarly, how consistent is Salford's strategic vision of internationalization with the agenda and priorities set by professional accrediting bodies operating at the programme level of many disciplines in the home institution?

Whilst seeking to internationalise the curriculum the UoS at the same time, pursues a Learning Technologies strategy, the primary objective of which is the transition from a predominantly face-to-face approach to learning to a blended approach where a 'significant proportion' of learning will occur via e-learning. Policy statements suggest an awareness of the difficulties inherent in developing e-learning on a piecemeal basis and the 'serious limitations in the extent to which an e-learning agenda can be grafted onto an infrastructure which has evolved to support a traditional pedagogical approach.' Thus UoS seeks 'broad ownership' of a process of staged implementation which will identify the implications of change for the whole range of support functions, including information services and staff development, and develop plans to 'evolve these support services so that they facilitate, support and incentivise the required behaviour and culture.' (UoS, Executive Group, Nov. 2003)

Considering the dual strategies of internationalization and e-learning together there seems to be a common assumption in the scholarly literature and policy statements that internationalization of HE is intrinsically linked to ICT in some way. Some see ICT as a central push factor for the internationalization agenda although why and how is rarely analysed (Castells, 1996) However the literature on ICT and internationalization remains fragmented and rarely empirically based, generally failing to differentiate adequately between two fundamental perspectives. Firstly the role of ICT in internationalisation, where ICT is introduced as part of existing international activities, as a supplement and secondly the role of ICT for internationalization where ICT itself becomes a central driver providing essential tools to facilitate the internationalization process. What limited evidence exists tends to suggest that across the HE sector generally, the bulk of effort has been devoted to international exchange and mobility with ICT supplementing the internationalization process rather than ICT driving a process whereby international dimensions and perspectives are firmly embedded in programmes of study. (Welle-Strand, A., and Thune, T., 2002) At UoS evidence suggests that internationalization and the extensive use of ICT in education is high on the strategic agenda, with extensive strategies identified for both areas. The University engages in student exchange programmes, boasts international programmes of study, recruits international staff and students etc. but the fundamental question remains: how are strategic aims to be put into practice across the University?

COMMON APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONALISATION

An examination of the course of internationalisation across HEIs in the recent past suggests a number of common approaches to internationalisation each of which extends the relationship between the concept and the curriculum and embodies different conceptions of the role of ICT in the process. It is important to note however, that the approaches identified here are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Knight, 1999) and indeed, HEIs may undergo something of a linear progression from one approach to another, which progressively embeds internationalisation into the everyday life of a University, its staff and its students.

The ethos approach

The so-called ethos approach to internationalising the curriculum assumes a 'campus culture' orientation whereby policy documents, mission statements etc. emphasise the creation of an international environment (Knight, 1999). (This is evidenced at UoS as suggested earlier.) In practice however, this approach often translates into a drive to simply recruit more international students and staff. According to Ulrich Teichler (1996) this is the traditional British way of 'internationalisation through import', but also dubbed rather derogatorily, 'internationalisation by osmosis' (Martin, 2000). This limited approach may be instrumental in

engendering the feelings of uncertainty, insecurity and confusion felt by international students embarking upon academic careers in the UK (as highlighted by Wu, 2002) because no account whatsoever is taken of cultural variations in conceptions of pedagogy.

Seeking to influence an institution's ethos may well succeed in embedding internationalisation into the physical structure and underlying values of an institution but is neither likely to have significant influence on the curriculum in terms of academic practice, nor to provide a quality learning experience (Leask, 1999). Many design models informing the use of ICT similarly reflect the marketing, efficiency and economy stance referred to earlier, with institutions maintaining a high-profile web presence but where the use of ICT in learning and teaching is limited to VLEs like Blackboard and WebCT being used as programme and document management tools with little reference to the pedagogy of e-learning (White, S., 2002)

Activity: student mobility

In Europe the question of how to internationalise the curriculum has been overshadowed by the assumption that the mobility of students under exchange programmes is the only, or at least the best, way to internationalise the curriculum (Nilsson, 2000). An assumption open to challenge as according to Edwards et al, (2003)

... the existence of staff and student exchange agreements, study tours... and so on ... may well reflect a core characteristic of the program, but they may also represent a list of 'add-ons' that give a veneer of internationalisation.

Student mobility is one area where ICT is regarded as an essential tool for support. There are obvious reasons for this: information is easily distributed and accessed globally; communication is made easier across geographical and time boundaries and ICT makes it easier to co-ordinate activities internationally (Welle-Strand, A., and Thune, T., 2002). In essence then ICT may prove to reinforce an existing concentration of effort on international exchange and mobility to the detriment of the more fundamental issue of determining goals and strategies for the integration of international dimensions in programme design. The debate surrounding ICT in this context ranges from those who on the one hand, herald new ICTs as the revolutionary substitute for student mobility and those who on the other, maintain that virtual internationalization will never be an adequate substitute for the intellectual and emotional experience of living abroad (Windham, D.M., 1996; Edwards, M., et al, 2003). However, this debate should not detract from the central issue that study abroad - virtual or otherwise - may provide students with new experiences but for new understanding to emerge the curriculum must support a teaching and learning strategy which encourages shared critical reflection (Martin, 2000).

Internationalisation through content

Bremer and van Wende (1995) define internationalised curricula as:

Curricula with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students and/or foreign students.

This definition is useful in reinforcing the need to provide an international dimension for both international and home students, which would include those who for one reason or another are not 'academically mobile'. However, in addressing issues of content it is important not to confuse the dimensions of globalisation of HE with the wider globalisation process itself (de Wit, 1997). Arguably, such confusion has permeated the study of business, an area of endeavour that has been undoubtedly internationalised in the post-war period. An early recognition of the need to incorporate an international dimension was followed by relatively little, in the way of guidelines on how the study of international business itself might be internationalized (Nilsson, B., undated). All too often the principles of globalisation are regarded as synonymous with uniformity and what emerges is a rather bland version of internationalisation which fails to engage with the rich diversity of the global economy and society, a diversity which can only be understood through the process of intercultural learning. For Patrick (1997) the kinds of generic 'one size fits all' models of flexible delivery in use assume the Western content being disseminated is 'universally relevant' and 'universally welcome' across cultural settings. Conventional approaches to curriculum tend to emphasise specialization in a given area of knowledge whereas internationalized curricula require inter-disciplinary strategies aimed at developing multiple skills alongside new cultural and technological literacies. It is ironic that as internationalization compels a greater awareness and recognition of the idea that knowledge is culture-bound, economic pressure to disseminate commercially viable courses narrows the range and depth of study available online (Walsh, L., 1999)

Competency or graduate attributes

The competency approach to internationalization may be regarded as what Hayden and Thompson (1995) term the pragmatic approach to internationalization, emphasising the development of international business skills, language proficiency etc. Undoubtedly the emphasis on employability pervades the HE sector on a global scale. Salford University prides itself on being in touch with the 'real world', aware not only of what students want to study, but also of the knowledge, skills and qualities employers are looking for in the staff they recruit. Academics in designing programmes to enhance employability may well find themselves engaging with outcomes similar to the G7 generic graduate qualities as developed by the University of South Australia.

The University of South Australia's G7# generic graduate qualities.

7.1	Display ability to think globally and consider issues from a variety of perspectives.
7.2	Demonstrate awareness of their own culture and its perspectives and other cultures and their perspectives.
7.3	Appreciate the relationship between their field of study and professional traditions elsewhere.
7.4	Recognise intercultural issues relevant to their own practice.
7.5	Appreciate the importance of multicultural diversity to professional practice and citizenship.
7.6	Appreciate the complex and interacting factors that contribute to notions of culture and cultural relationships.
7.7	Value diversity of language and culture.
7.8	Appreciate and demonstrate the capacity to apply international standards and practices within the discipline or professional area.
7.9	Demonstrate awareness of the implications of local decisions and actions of local communities.

Source: Leask, (2001)

Clearly this approach to internationalisation raises the profile of the concept in terms of curriculum design and is therefore a more deeply embedding approach than 'ethos', 'mobility', or 'content'. However, from an institutional perspective cohesion may still be lacking. A piecemeal approach is a barrier to internationalisation in the sense that 'tribes' involved in international teaching and programmes come to constitute separate domains and act as distinct clans relatively isolated from other faculty who may regard internationalisation as irrelevant to their discipline. This scenario is mirrored in ICT. Many academics have little experience or expertise in online learning. Those academics who feel comfortable working with technology in online environments are rare and there is generally little transference of skills to their colleagues (Oliver, R., and Herrington, J., 2002). Research conducted by Pollock and Cornford (2003) under the ESRCs Virtual Society Programme suggests that HEIs found the introduction of new technologies alongside more traditional methods of providing learning extremely difficult despite phenomenal interest in the growth of 'digital', 'online' or 'virtual' universities. The bottom-up course by course approach was seen as 'slow, labour intensive and prone to failure' essentially because of difficulty in keeping enrolled all those aspects of the University necessary to make projects work. Initiatives were confounded by problems in co-ordinating a wide range of actors across a large organization made up of disparate and diverse entities. For Pollock and Cornford at the heart of the problem is the very institution of the University itself, a problem which is clearly recognized by the UoS' Learning Technologies Strategy. Thus the international dimension even when supported by the use of ICT may flounder remaining a 'fragmented and parallel concept' – parallel to mainstream HE and the UK concept of gradueness as evinced in for example, benchmark statements (IAU, 2002). Indeed, ICT can in no way be regarded as the ultimate panacea for a flagging internationalization agenda as it may prove to introduce more dilemmas rather than provide solutions with practice becoming ad hoc and based on a few lead users, whilst the majority continue to use ICT as a supplement to traditional teaching methods.

CRITIQUE AND ALTERNATIVE – INFUSION

Clearly the foregoing approaches to internationalisation may be regarded as a continuum with 'ethos' at one end of the scale and 'competency' at the other. From the UoS perspective the competency approach may well commend itself in addressing goals related to employability. However, the second strand of Salford's mission

seeking 'to enrich the wider student experience by integrating the knowledge and experience of international students' (The Strategic Framework, 2003-2004, University of Salford) may require a more holistic approach. Leask (2001) has referred to '...bridging the gap between rhetoric and practice, including and valuing the contribution of international students' and in terms of the foregoing approaches to internationalization a number of issues remain unresolved. According to MacKinnon and Manathunga (2003):

The western template of knowledge can inhibit internationalisation of curricula unless it is identified, transformed, and broadened to become interculturally responsive.

It is interesting here to note that despite UoS's clear mission statement regarding the integration of the knowledge and experience of its international students - in other words to be interculturally responsive - the University's International Office informs prospective students that 'Teaching methods vary from discipline to discipline, but most undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes are delivered via lectures, seminars and tutorials...' What follows seems to suggest that only within a limited number of disciplines is there some departure from the traditional norm

'...Other methods of teaching include language laboratory classes, project work, scientific and technical practical and art and design studio work.'

<http://www.salford.ac.uk/international/faq/#taught>).

Learning, teaching and assessment based on a western version of knowledge which values only western ways of knowing and learning confound an existing mismatch of cultural knowledge, and lack of familiarity with the dominant cultural literacy, resulting in dislocation from the educational experience, a dislocation which may be compounded by teachers' orientations when encountering culturally diverse groups. Biggs (1997) refers to the phenomenon of 'conceptual colonialism' whereby the concepts of one's own culture are imposed on another, as if they were universal and in the face of difficulties in learning activities the teacher attributes the problem to student deficit, culturally induced.

Edwards et al (2003) propose a model of curriculum development which differentiates between different levels of development of international and intercultural literacy and the teaching methods and learning activities that support them. They recognize that in building upon strategies to foster international awareness and progressing to the level of international competence ICT may play a crucial role in a teaching and learning strategy based upon experiential and problem based learning, engaging local and international students and faculty. Thus ICT bridges the gap between international competencies at one end and international expertise at the other end of the learning continuum. (The immersion of students in global settings through study abroad and international work placements develops international expertise and consolidates international literacy.) Thus Edwards et al locate the use of ICT within a specific level in terms of cognitive processes and learning outcomes forming part of an overall teaching and learning strategy to support internationalization and inter-cultural dimensions. However, a word of caution is appropriate here regarding the potential of online learning for internationalization. There is a need to understand more of the virtual communities forming in cyberspace and the impact of the physical isolation necessitated by the medium. Human interaction online may be profoundly alienating for some, but liberating for others who cast aside normal social inhibitions. The complexity of this human interaction is only reinforced when negotiated across cultural boundaries. (Walsh, L., 1999)

On the face of it then appropriate teaching and learning strategies supported by ICT may embed a cross-cultural perspective, although in practice it is probably wise to proceed with caution. However, MacKinnon and Manathunga (2003) would argue that appropriate learning and teaching strategies alone will not deliver intercultural literacy:

'Assessment is the nexus where intercultural communication skills are developed within the curricula' and for students the 'crucial communication ...rests on assessment.'

Traditionally, most assessment centres on an end product, rather than the process by which that product is researched, constructed and presented. Socially and culturally responsive assessment acknowledges that the student requires both an understanding of the process of constructing an assignment, and how different cultural knowledge can be both relevant and valued, (MacKinnon and Manathunga, 2003). Here it is worth noting that the challenges arising from encounters with cultural difference may be intensified by the use of ICT.

'The success of international online learning relies on educators being able to create virtual learning communities that facilitate meaningful interaction in culturally diverse discourses.' (Walsh, L., 1999)

Reid (1997) maintains that:

'It is important that technology is not 'bolted on' to a curriculum which remains otherwise unchanged, but rather that pedagogical dimensions of new avenues of information transmission and retrieval are understood and their implications for teaching and course design addressed'

This suggests that if technology is to be integrated and used effectively in higher education it should reflect a constructivist model of learning where the learner constructs knowledge, rather than the traditional behaviourist model where knowledge is outside the learner, separate from the learning context (Jackson, B., 1998). Instead of providing and delivering information the teacher's principal function becomes one of creating collaborative, challenging and supportive learning environments within which the learner assumes an active role, encouraged to take control, make decisions and act in a self-directed manner whilst at the same time being provided with opportunities for reflection and articulation. Seemingly the principles of constructivism are central then to appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategies for both online learning and intercultural learning, and in this sense rather than representing 'parallel tracks' internationalization and online learning environments are complementary far beyond any basic notions of student mobility or graduate attributes.

Indeed, it may be argued that teaching, learning and assessment strategies based on constructivist principles have currency beyond the confines of internationalization and online learning reflecting the generic principles of good practice in higher education especially in the light of policies to widen participation in the HE sector.² However, the drive towards the inclusive learning environment should not neglect the needs of teaching staff:

"If our students are unable to grasp the aims and objectives, and are unable to position their cultural relevance within this process then both they, but more importantly we, fail to develop our intercultural communication skills and responsive assessment". (MacKinnon and Manathunga, 2003)

This implies a crucial point in developing inclusive learning, teaching and assessment strategies – the need for teaching staff to develop new skills, knowledge, attitudes and values which in turn suggests that internationalization cannot be measured simply in terms of performance indicators like exchange ratios, and further, a focus on internationalization in the home environment is a precognition for successful operations abroad. The management of internationalization determines whether it is seen as an add-on, rather than a substantial curriculum area in itself and evidence suggests the need for responsibility to be devolved from international offices to faculties/schools. (Welle-Strand, A., and Thune, T., 2002) If the approach to internationalization is not holistic a perceived conflict between the aims of internationalization and those of the subject curriculum may encourage legitimate dissent, expressed in such views as 'We have no space for this kind of thing in our programme. How will my students be good engineers, dentists, teachers without 60 hours in my subject? Those are subjects that should be dealt with elsewhere and not here.' (Nilsson, B., undated)

In an effort to pre-empt such a scenario the University of South Australia has assumed the infusion approach to internationalisation of the curriculum, using its Graduate Qualities as a framework for curriculum development (including G7). A team-based approach to curriculum development for international teaching has been adopted, which in itself provides clarification of what internationalisation means in different subjects within a discipline. A model of staff development based on small group self reflective dialogue about cross-cultural pedagogy, involving subject specialists, learning advisers and staff development consultants all working together at school level, is deployed as an integral part of the internationalization strategy, (Leask, 1999). The model embraces Alderson's (1996) notion of academic staff development for internationalisation as:

a journey which at each stage requires exploration and negotiation of understandings, re examining of currently held beliefs, reflection on current practice, gathering and learning information from a variety of sources, and opportunities for social construction of knowledge.

Such collaborative strategies ensure that international perspectives permeate teaching methodology, the content of subjects and the structure and organization of courses. Programmes ensure cultural inclusivity and curricula develop multicultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills, whilst achieving the specific knowledge and skills appropriate to the discipline., (Leask, 1999).

Arguably, the challenges of internationalization are reflected in similar challenges regarding the role of ICT in the process, challenges not only of infrastructure, but of competence and pedagogy also. Skills and understandings developed through face to face teaching are generally insufficient to support student needs in an online learning environment (Oliver, R., and Herrington, J., 2002). As suggested by constructivist principles in designing effective online learning materials the most important first step is to create a role for the teacher as one of coaching and scaffolding as an alternative to the more commonly used didactic forms of teaching, the holistic and interdisciplinary approach as practiced by the University of South Australia may have currency in

² For Biggs good teaching practice is inclusive and 'needs to make few concessions to presumed cultural differences' nonetheless there is a growing literature addressing the persistence of 'cultural discontinuities' in learning and teaching.

preparing staff to cope with the increasingly complex and profoundly challenging phenomenon of electronically mediated internationalization.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

In concrete terms the concept of 'internationalising the curriculum in HE remains ill-defined, despite increasing trends in the recruitment of international students and international collaboration and partnership. This paper has explored approaches that have been developed with a view to embedding an international dimension in the teaching and learning process, with special reference to the potential role of ICT in that process. Strategies that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, are viewed as a continuum along which institutions may progress from 'ethos' through 'activity' based on academic mobility or content, to 'graduate attributes' and ultimately 'infusion'. Whilst the Graduate Attributes approach supports the University of Salford's goals in terms of graduate employability, a more holistic approach is required in order to 'enrich the wider student experience by integrating the knowledge and experience of our international students' (The Strategic Framework 2003-2004, University of Salford.) It is argued that fundamentally, the challenges of internationalizing the curriculum are synonymous with the challenges of e-learning and as such, a dual strategic approach is likely to be more beneficial to both initiatives rather than the pursuit of parallel strategies and initiatives. Secondly, in translating policy into practice the overwhelming requirements of staff development in terms of constructivist notions of learning suggest the need to 'get it right at home' before forging ahead with a drive for ever increasing international collaborations. Thirdly, fundamental developments in internationalization and intercultural learning through e-learning require devolution of responsibility from central administrations to faculties/schools engaging the support of ICT specialists, education developers etc.

In exploring the possibilities for 'concretizing' the University of Salford's international mission, further research should examine the University's existing programmes of study to ascertain where the institution sits in relation to the strategic continuum. In the context of the quality learning experience, research should also address the views of both home and international students, gathering and analyzing data regarding their perceptions and experience of the international dimension in their learning and their encounters with ICT in this domain. Of equal significance are the perceptions of staff involved in student learning, guidance and support across schools, faculties and support services. Finally, the process of 'infusion' needs to be examined in greater detail within the local context of existing structures, - such as the Communities of Practice - with a view to determining the possibility of more firmly embedding internationalization and raising the profile of ICT in programmes of study firmly rooted in constructivist models of learning.

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