



Book Review: Internationalizing the Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalizing the Curriculum*. Abingdon: Routledge.

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Most universities around the world have made some form of commitment to internationalisation, international partnership or global influence over the last decade. In many countries these commitments highlight the wish to attract more international students to study at their university, or an aspiration to set up new partner campuses in other countries. We are witnessing a massive growth in the mobility of both students and staff across countries and institutions, and this has implications for the ways in which we design curricula. Internationalising the curriculum is one way in which institutions can implement and enact some of these aspirations. It is against this backdrop that Betty Leask's book is a welcome addition to our understanding of internationalisation and internationalising the curriculum.

The book covers both theoretical and practical considerations, and for staff wishing to internationalise curricula, it provides a set of really excellent practical resources that are well explained and which are based on real research and extensive experience. This includes some case studies illustrating how different institutional teams have internationalised curricula.

The book is comprised of 10 chapters divided into three parts. Part I focuses on "Concepts and Processes" (p. 1), Part II focuses on "Practical Matters" (p. 68) and Part III provides "Resources and Case Studies" (p. 118). Leask explains that much of the book is based on research that she undertook as part of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council National Teaching Fellowship and she states that "...this book is an argument for, and a guide to, a more international and critical approach to internationalization of the curriculum, teaching, and learning" (p. 3). She draws on extensive experience of working with disciplinary staff teams to internationalise curricula.

According to Leask, internationalisation of the curriculum is "...the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study" (Leask, 2009, p. 209). She also synthesises ideas about internationalisation of the curriculum where scholars and practitioners agree: 1) "...Universities have a responsibility to prepare their graduates to live and work in a global society", 2) "...academic staff members are key players in the process of internationalization of the curriculum..." and 3) "...approaches to and interpretations of internationalization of the curriculum vary across disciplines" (p. 12).

Leask argues that too often we focus on international students rather than on broader questions of how subject specialists conceptualise and teach their subject in a way that supports all students to develop "graduate capabilities, global citizenship and intercultural competency" (p.53). She presents "a conceptual framework for internationalization of the curriculum" (p.26) to underpin her arguments and practical resources. This framework places disciplinary knowledge at the centre, surrounded by a set of curriculum concerns and the institutional, local, national and regional, and global contexts in which we work. She also provides the reader with a detailed overview of a five-stage process for internationalising the curriculum.

In order to ensure internationalisation is at the heart of the curriculum, Leask argues that we should design "intended international learning outcomes" (p. 72) at institutional, programme and course levels and she discusses "using student diversity" (p. 89) as an asset rather than a deficit within curriculum design. For most readers trying to internationalise curricula, they will be familiar with some of the challenges faced in undertaking this process, and so it is helpful that Leask acknowledges cultural, institutional and personal 'blockers' as well as suggesting some practical solutions. The cultural barriers include for example, that some disciplines view their subject as culturally neutral and are, therefore, not so open to the idea that they need to internationalise. Institutional barriers include organisational structures and personal barriers include the limited experience and expertise of staff in internationalising the curriculum.

In my view the book has some weaknesses. Assessment seems to form a disproportionate part of curriculum within the conceptual model, which is not really justified and there is limited discussion of assessment within the book. There is relatively little conceptualisation of the curriculum, and given the contentious nature of this term in higher education, more attention here would have been welcome. Barnett and Coate's (2006) useful curriculum work is cited and discussed, although in chapter 1 mention of

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“knowing, doing and being” (p. 2.) is not referenced to Barnett and Coate, but clearly comes from their work. The absence of any reference to Fraser and Bosanquet’s (2006) seminal Australian paper on curriculum definitions seems an oversight, as their work highlights the need for curriculum to encapsulate the relationship between the teacher and students. Indeed, despite Leask’s chapter on “using student diversity” (p. 89), this book provides little acknowledgement that students might have a role in the design of learning teaching and curricula. Acknowledging students’ potential role in curriculum design could be one way of ensuring that the diversity of students’ backgrounds, influences and ensures more internationalised curricula. There is also very little said about the possibility of a diversity of staff being an asset to internationalising curricula.

Leask argues that we need to move on from the dominance of western educational models relating to internationalisation, and so it appears contradictory that we are not given the country of origin for any of the case studies, although most seem to be of Australasian or US origin. She also doesn’t inform the reader of the sites for some of her previous research which took place “in Australia and beyond” (p. 3). This seems to undermine her argument about needing to ensure that in seeking to internationalise curricula we need to adopt a more international perspective, and the book would have benefitted from some developing country examples with details of how the context influences the approach to internationalising curricula. We are left wondering if internationalisation of the curriculum is only of concern to developed nations.

Having made these criticisms, the book remains incredibly useful. Overall, I think it offers an extremely practical set of advice, strategies and resources, which makes this a very usable and helpful book.

Biography

Dr Catherine Bovill is a Senior Lecturer in the Academic Development Unit at the University of Glasgow. She has co-ordinated in the past, and continues to contribute to, the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice and the MEd Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Her research and publications focus on students and staff co-creating curricula; peer observation of teaching; and the internationalisation of higher education.

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