

# Internationalisation in Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Higher Education: A Call for Further Reflexivity in Curriculum Development

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## Introduction

Social scientists have long-identified the importance of reflexivity and of positioning the researcher as an embodied and emotional presence in the design of studies, and the collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation of data. In doing so they, "reveal, understand and analyse, not only the *product* of knowledge but its *production* and therefore, its *producer*" (Aldridge, 1993:53 [author's original emphasis]). Such work problematises the notion of investigation as a straightforward and impersonal activity and interrogates the power relationships inherent in it. Curricula in Higher Education (HE), on the other hand, often appear simply to have evolved with little open acknowledgement of the cultural, political and personal dimensions of that process.

Recent experiences of working on an international project to validate a dual Masters programme jointly devised by universities in the UK and Russia have caused me to reflect on a range of issues regarding curriculum development and policies of internationalisation in HE. I found the experience of working collaboratively across institutions in two very culturally different environments to be uniquely rewarding and particularly challenging. Following the validation of the programme it occurred to me that, whilst as a social science researcher I acknowledge in my research outputs the role that I play as an interpreter of data and creator of knowledge, there is no obvious parallel outlet in the process of curriculum design. I have not hitherto considered reflexively the role I have played in creating curricula - or indeed the impact that such work has had on me. This aim of this perspectives piece is to address these issues.

In line with Botterill's (2007) call to include the 'situated voice' in tourism, I will use the context of this international curriculum development project to call for more reflexivity in hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism (HLST) curriculum development and to highlight some of the issues of internationalisation that I think merit discussion in future research. In particular I focus on the power relations that underpin the globalisation/internationalisation of HE; the potential for inter-cultural exchange; and the personal dimension of implementing policies of internationalisation.

## Internationalisation/Globalisation and Power Relations in Curriculum Development

Facing a range of economic challenges arising from changes to funding structures, political interventions and a shrinking pool of 'home' students to recruit, many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK have focused increasingly on two separate strategic imperatives to expand student numbers and generate income. First, the recruitment of international students; and second, the export of programmes to an international market. Of course it should be stressed that the economic imperative is by no means the only reason for HEIs to prioritise internationalisation of the curriculum. Factors such as globalisation of HE; European integration and the Bologna process; global migration patterns; and rapidly growing economies in areas such as China; have contributed to the mounting interest in internationalising programmes of study (Enders, 2004; Munar, 2007; Yang, 2004). As Knight

(2004:5) comments, "The international dimension of higher education is becoming increasingly important, complex, and confusing."

The globalisation and internationalisation of HE has given rise to a burgeoning field of enquiry regarding the student experience, the quality assurance challenges this poses for HE providers, and the implications for policy and decision-making in HEIs (see, for example, Knight, 2004; Stensaker *et al.*, 2008). In the subject areas of HLST specifically, an increasing number of papers published in previous editions of this journal have dealt with issues such as the learning styles and experiences of international students (Huang, 2007; Pereda *et al.*, 2007; Nield, 2007); the impact of Bologna on tourism education and scholarship (Munar, 2007); and the diverse HE environments that exist in different countries (eg. Akış *et al.*, 2007; Edelheim and Ueda, 2007). This internationalising of HE curricula, and the sharing of pedagogic practice and ideas between countries, provides a valuable added dimension to analyses of HE. However, as De Vita and Case point out, "an increasingly diverse student population brings with it new and demanding challenges, as extant pedagogical models strain to deal with attitudes, needs and expectations that have, heretofore, never been encountered" (2003:383/4).

One of the fundamental issues of internationalisation is the rationale that underlies the development of, and the potential power relations that influence, curriculum design. Some previous studies have explored this in the context of internationalisation and globalisation. Yang (2004), for instance, makes a clear distinction between *globalisation* (often with connotations of colonialism and inequitable power relations) and *internationalisation* (sharing practice across international boundaries potentially on a more equal footing). Enders (2003) too distinguishes between processes of internationalisation, with the goal of promoting further co-operation between different countries, and the notion of globalisation as a process of convergence and interdependence which could ultimately lead to an homogenised system of HE. It seems that internationalisation of HE is sometimes promoted with an almost philanthropic (even imperialist?) culture of sharing 'good' practice and standardising procedures. However, the danger here is that the specific cultural dimensions of pedagogy are overlooked and a 'one size fits all' approach pervades. At its best, the design of international curricula should be a dialogic process from which all parties learn. But this gives rise to some interesting questions of whose knowledge, systems and procedures form the basis for internationalisation, and what the power relations are that underpin this (Tribe, 2005). The questions, for instance, of whose practice is 'good' (or even 'best'), and who should be the judge are worthy of further exploration.

The synchronisation of quality assurance systems was certainly one of the biggest challenges in validating the dual Masters degree for the simple reason that teaching, learning and assessment practice tends to reflect the specific political, cultural and pedagogical environments in which the curriculum is designed. In writing the validation documents for the dual Masters degree the usual references were made to the Quality Assurance Agency's Subject Benchmark Statements; framework for Higher Educational Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education. However, I found it difficult on occasion to explain to well-qualified and professional staff from the Russian University why these systems and standards should take precedence over their existing ones. The reality, of course, is that the assurance of standards is an essential part of any collaborative endeavour to ensure consistency of experience for students. Nevertheless, there are interesting power dimensions to who ultimately makes decisions about the 'appropriate' means of ensuring quality in these arrangements which are seldom acknowledged. In this instance, the systems and procedures of the two institutions had sufficient commonality for agreements about standards and processes to be reached without conflict. It occurred to me though that this may not always be the case and I wonder how these issues are resolved in other circumstances where there is a less collegial environment. The extent to which systems and procedures are adapted to suit each partner is an interesting issue but seldom the concern of validating panels.

## **Internationalisation and Intercultural Curriculum**

Internationalisation of HE takes many different forms (Bennell and Pearce, 2003). A number of UK institutions have set out to recruit large numbers of students from particular countries or areas of the world; others have exported their curricula to different countries and sold their expertise in teaching, learning and quality assurance; still more have endeavoured to internationalise their curricula by offering 'international' versions of programmes in HLST to both home and overseas students. The student experience of internationalisation is therefore likely to be as varied as the approaches adopted. One of the greatest potential benefits of the internationalisation of HE is the possibility it affords for intercultural exchange. Through internationalised curricula students can be encouraged to learn about each other's cultures, traditions and societies, and to acquire intercultural competencies (Stier, 2003). The curriculum as "a whole programme of educational experiences that is packaged into a degree programme" (Tribe, 2005:48) has much to offer in terms of promoting international dialogue in HLST. Rather than teaching theoretical perspectives derived from what has traditionally been a Eurocentric or Anglocentric view of the world, a truly international curriculum will embrace a more global outlook. De Vita and Case (2003) suggest though that the marketisation discourse that underpins the design of many international programmes can lead to curriculum commodification, potentially limiting the potential for true intercultural exchanges to take place. If curricula become simply commodities on the open market, the possibility for a shared intercultural pedagogy is reduced. Without open reflexivity regarding how programmes are designed, there is a danger that this objectification of curricula may remain unchallenged.

In order to implement policies of internationalisation, many HE institutions are putting resources into structural support mechanisms for overseas students, but the extent to which curricula themselves are being adapted to reflect the needs of new cohorts from different cultures of learning is less certain. According to Lunn (2006), UK tourism and hospitality programmes offer great potential for embedding global perspectives in HE given that contemporary global issues appear in the curriculum of many such courses. However, her analysis also showed that many of the global aspects of the programmes are linked directly to business and management rather than broader social and cultural perspectives that could do more to promote full intercultural understanding. Thus, students are prepared for working internationally but less attention is paid to their understanding of broader societal issues. Internationalised curricula have a key role to play in the production of what Tribe (2002) describes as 'philosophic practitioners' but this will require students from the UK and overseas to be challenged to engage with concepts of globalisation beyond managerialist discourses.

There is a great opportunity for curricula in the growing number of 'international' HLST programmes being offered in the UK to encompass analyses of the positive and negative societal and cultural impacts of globalisation of HLST, and the consequent ethical issues facing HLST providers. This may require some rethinking on the part of curriculum developers, but it would be interesting to hear more about how and where this has been done successfully, and perhaps less successfully too. There can also be personal challenges in managing increasingly diverse student cohorts. As mentioned above, recent studies in HLST have begun to research the experiences of 'international' students but what of their impact on the staff and students they are studying with? To what extent do 'home' students feel that they benefit from internationalisation? Is there a feeling that intercultural dialogue is really taking place in this new international world of HE? I don't know the answer, but I believe they are legitimate questions to pose. In order to answer them, a more sophisticated interpretive approach would be beneficial. In contrast to the 'hoop jumping' procedure that can characterise the experience of HE curriculum developments, a more nuanced, context-sensitive and reflexive account would help to explore these important themes and issues.

## **Reflexivity and Curricula Design**

In adopting a reflexive approach to internationalisation, it is important to acknowledge that although curricula development in international programmes is shaped by policies and

structures; validation procedures; and quality assurance systems; in essence it relies on people. As Tribe states, "a curriculum is socially constructed, that is, it is the product of human thought and negotiation" (2001:447). In my experience there can be particular tensions in balancing the personal, political, institutional and professional relationships in international curricula developments. In the internationalisation of HE there is potential not simply to provide an intercultural experience for students but also for staff. The ways in which staff have shaped the internationalised curricula and the impact on them of teaching increasingly diverse student cohorts is, however, something we know little about as yet (Fallon and Berman Brown, 1999).

More than any other aspect of curriculum development I have been involved in, there is a personal and corporeal, as well as an intellectual, dimension to internationalisation. My work on the dual MA project highlighted for me a range of new experiences that were rewarding but also very demanding. The project involved a lot of travelling between the UK and Russia, necessitating periods of time away from my own teaching and home life. Sometimes we would literally get off long delayed flights and be driven straight from the airport to meetings to discuss curriculum developments. I had to adapt staff development activities to take account of the different cultural expectations of mobile phones being left on during sessions and calls taking priority over whatever else was happening. Long days of meetings followed by late evenings of formal dinners have their appeal but can take their toll on effectiveness too. That said, the opportunity to work with Russian colleagues, to experience very different approaches to pedagogy, and to learn more about HE in another country, has also been a very valuable and enjoyable one. Aside from the personal dimension of the project, those of us involved have had to manage the sensitivities of a changing political climate that has impacted on the UK's diplomatic relationship with Russia. Whilst such international politics can seem a world away from meetings to determine module specifications, the ramifications can ultimately jeopardise an international collaboration in which many people have invested a lot of time and effort.

Internationalising HLST HE curricula presents us with a range of opportunities and challenges that are likely to increase in the future. The real pedagogical project of internationalisation, the power relations influencing the development of internationalised curricula, and the personal costs and benefits of involvement in such endeavours, may be obscured by a focus on structures and the writing of a saleable programme. In their reflexive account of an international collaborative curriculum project, Etmanski and Pant (2007) advocate the use of Participatory Research as a means of encouraging self-reflection and a more dialogic approach to working collaboratively: a "self-aware and more equal approach to partnership" (2007:289). Robson and Turner (2007) too suggest that reflective dialogue and action research could assist us in creating truly international communities of learning in HE. Further reflexivity with regard to curriculum development and the implementation of internationalisation strategies might serve to uncover the benefits, challenges, personal, political and cultural aspects of this endeavour. Given that the curricula in HLST programmes advocate the education of the reflective practitioner it seems only appropriate that we adopt a more reflexive approach to curriculum design.

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