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*securing the FUTURE for International Education:
Managing growth and Diversity*

Learning at Home, Teaching Off-Shore: experiences of students and academics in an Australian degree taught in Singapore

Dr Michelle Wallace
mwallace@scu.edu.au

Ms Lee Dunn
ldunn3@scu.edu.au

Southern Cross University



Outline

Cultural and pedagogical issues inherent in 'exporting' Australian education to Asian countries.

This paper:

- ◆ analyses the literature pertaining to Western education offered in Asian settings
- ◆ presents a current, empirical exploration of teaching and learning issues in an off-shore program

And finds that:

- ◆ There are distinct benefits for the Singaporean students and their Australian university teachers but the educational, cultural and other challenges that need to be managed are often underestimated,
- ◆ There is a need for a more systematic sharing of experiences, induction and ongoing professional development of academics before teaching off-shore in any mode and greater communication and liaison with local tutors where they are employed.

Background

Australia's international education market has grown by an average of 15% every year since the late 1980s and Australia is the third largest provider of education to foreign students .

In Singapore, there is a high demand for university education. Government policy, while continuously upgrading school and Polytechnic education, has hitherto restricted the number of universities and places available .

Background

There are new moves to find ways to encourage and reward good teaching in the Australian higher education environment .

The renewed national emphasis on effective teaching and learning includes quality reviews of Australian universities' off-shore teaching programs (Nelson 2003).

Issues of knowledge, pedagogy, standards, delivery methods, culture are again to the fore.

What the Literature Suggests

Gallagher discusses different approaches to the 'export' of education between 'trade driven' and 'culture driven' strategies

'Is it any wonder that Australian universities appear to be parochial – they don't understand other people's cultures'.

Learning in international joint ventures between developing and developed countries tends to be viewed as a one-way process with Western partners assuming superiority both technologically and in management of the courses .

For-profit courses have a 'no-frills' and deliberately vocational focus that appeals to employers and to adults in search of qualifications to improve their position in the labour market (Morey, 2002)

Yet the rhetoric of higher education in Australia continues to focus on education for life, and the discourse about graduate outcomes tends to focus on generic capabilities such as critical thinking and problem-solving that are difficult to teach in a 'no-frills' way.

Entrepreneurial education on the international stage appears to be more focussed on selling and packaging courses and less on building cultural understanding with partners and students (Morey, 2002).

Literature

hegemony of Western knowledge and pedagogies? (Brooks, 2001)

'pedagogical imperialism' ? Goodfellow et al (2001)

OR

students are sophisticated and take what they need of the 'Western' experience?

Language difficulties?

cultural differences?

Tension between the growing value placed on teaching in Australian higher education and the building pressure for economic efficiency through the higher education sector = for-profit, off-shore courses.

Academics who travel off-shore to teach are professionals in their discipline, but are not necessarily experts in the culture and educational practice of the countries to which they travel.

English Language

- ◆ ‘Singlish’
- ◆ Dealing with Texts
- ◆ Academic language
- ◆ ‘Transmissive’ vs ‘Inquisitive’

Need for Professional Development of Academic Staff

‘There is almost universal lack of insight into South-East Asian students’ educational and cultural backgrounds’

(Maxwell et al, 2000, p.8)

Methodology

- ◆ Semi-structured interviews
- ◆ 23 students and alumni
- ◆ 5 academic staff
- ◆ Own off-shore teaching experiences

Learning and teaching

Language

- ◆ ‘The reading is tough ... the terminology is hard’ – Hegemony of English.
- ◆ Complex cultural understandings, technical language.
- ◆ Rote learning of text – implications for assignments and exams

Pedagogy

- ◆ The dumb question – experiential learning or moving from the known
- ◆ Self direction and mutual respect
- ◆ Survival techniques
- ◆ Unpacking assessment

Technology Assisted Learning

✦ Usefulness of e-forums

Roles and professional development of academic staff

It's a challenge going over there and interacting with the students. I integrate the material I use in Australia and try to improve it for Singapore. I work with the feedback I get from students and with hunches. Each time I go I feel I can do it better than before – I understand the culture better'.

I was thrown in at the deep end. I would have liked an induction. I would like to have seen the people's (students') workplaces – to make sense of what they need in terms of (my subject)'.

Conclusion

Culture + Curriculum + Pedagogy = professional development
of academic staff