Internationalisation of Education:
Addressing Linguistic and Cultural Constraints on Learning Outcomes for International Students

Ursula McGowan
Centre for Learning and Professional Development

Overview:
- Introduction
  - Context
- Global citizenship
  - Potential
  - Constraints (linguistic and cultural)
  - Social and academic implications
- Conclusion
  - Institutional challenges
Introduction

Context: Higher Education in Australia

- The University of Adelaide
  - Changing demographic

- 2007 proportion of international students: 27%
  - International student numbers: 5,524
  - Total student numbers: 20,478 (The University of Adelaide 2008)

Introduction

Personal Context:

- 1991-2002 Academic student support (Language and Learning)

- 2002-2008 Academic staff developer

- Previous experience
  - Faculty-based lecturer (German Department)
  - Lecturer in ESL/EAL (English as Additional Language)
  - Personal experience of being an ESL learner
  - Formal qualification in multicultural education
Education for Global Citizenship

- Economic Facts:
  - International education dollar supplements federal funds
  - International education – Australia’s 4th largest export income (Bishop 2007)
  - Largest proportion from China
    - Adelaide: 38% of international students from PRC in 2007 (The University of Adelaide 2008)

Education for Global Citizenship

- Potential for Internationalisation: education for global citizenship
  - Social potential
  - Academic potential
Education for Global Citizenship

Social potential

- personal experience of different cultures
- broadening horizons
  - international students and staff
  - local students and staff
- trans-cultural friendships
- increased capacity to see the world through the eyes of others

Education for Global Citizenship

Academic potential:

- curriculum content to include cultural diversity
- incorporating first-hand trans-cultural knowledge and experiences into curriculum

“…students appreciated teachers who … allowed the negotiation of assessment topics with an Islamic focus; or who encouraged all students to contribute an intercultural focus.” (Asmar 2005 p 306)

“…there’s no need to focus on one way of thinking too much … and, yeah, even with local students, like now we’ve become more multicultural. And everything’s more globalised now. (Asmar (2005 p 306)
Education for Global Citizenship

- Constraints

  - Cultural expectations - misunderstandings
    - Insufficient induction?

  - Students’ IELTS entry level
    - no formal further development?

---

Education for Global Citizenship – Constraints

Cultural expectations - students


  - [I] don’t have many local friends … age difference … not enough time … can’t understand class mates …[local] students are ‘nice but distant’ (Taiwan student p8)
  - As a graduate of a Korean university, I find methodologies of teaching to be polar opposites … Here, I find that all responsibility falls on the student (Korean student p18)
  - I had to figure everything out for myself … It’s like self-teaching. I was confused by the system (Japanese student p18)
Education for Global Citizenship – Constraints

Cultural misunderstandings - locals
  • students constructed as ‘lowering standards’
  • ‘soft marking’ accusations

  ‘assess the ways in which international students, particularly students from Asia, were represented in the discourse of academic standards, and the conflation of the alleged “decline of academic standards” with internationalisation of higher education’ (p156)

  ‘It was notable that in the public debate the question of the quality of university courses and teaching was largely ignored’ (p162)

Insufficient induction as part of teaching?

---

Education for Global Citizenship – Constraints

Student IELTS entry level

  BAND 7 Good user. Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.

  BAND 6 Competent user. Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.*

  *IELTS Handbook (2007) p4
Education for Global Citizenship – Constraints

- Student IELTS exit level
  - Former overseas students tested for onshore visas DIMIA 2005-06
  - Birrell cites unpublished 2005-6 DIMIA data
    - 43.2% of visa applicants from China “fell short of the ‘competent’ [IELTS 6] standard
    - “English deficiencies … widespread across other source countries” (Birrell 2006 pp 58-9)

Education for Global Citizenship – Constraints

- Pre-requisite for global citizenship
  - Competent communication
    - spoken & written language
  - Trans-cultural understandings, competencies
    - Capacity to operate within different cultural environments

- Where are these explicitly taught in the academic curriculum?
Education for Global Citizenship – Constraints

- Implications for social and academic potential
  - International students
    - listening to lectures, speaking in tutorials
    - shame at own ‘poor English’ – at ‘making a mistake’
    - shame at own poor writing – accusation of plagiarism
  - Local students
    - embarrassment – so avoid social contact
    - in tutorials – some irritability at slow pace
    - perception of lowered academic standards
- Potential unfulfilled

Education for Global Citizenship – Current Advances

- Existing programs (at The University of Adelaide)
  - International Student Centre
    - Reception at airport, induction, financial issues, health issues counselling, academic monitoring … and preparation for returning home
  - Academic learning and language (at Adelaide: CLPD, Faculty of Health Sciences, Engineering Schools, Faculty of Professions)
    - Creative initiatives eg:
      - Writing Centre, individual consultations, Volunteer Program, Mentoring Scheme, paper and online resources
  - In Faculties:
    - Strategies for internationalising the curriculum
Learning Outcomes – More advances needed

Add-ons are highly valued by those who access them

To realise the potential requires systematic embedding within the curriculum

Need approach for the benefit of all students (Sovic 2008)

- Transition – time of apprenticeship (McGowan 2008)
- Explicitly and systematically addressing social and academic culture
- Focussing on students’ language development within the discipline (McGowan 2005)

Learning Outcomes – More advances needed

Unintentional plagiarism

An example from my advisory work: reviewing an international student’s essay:

A: This paragraph is not yours, is it?
S: Yes it is
A: But did you copy it from a book?
S: Yes
A: so It’s not yours, is it?
S: Yes it is. I believe this. This is what I think.

She could not write well, so she saw no reason for changing the text – and she had not grasped the underlying purpose of referencing.
Learning Outcomes -
More advances needed

To address the issue of unintentional plagiarism by
• providing a rationale for citation conventions
• explicitly stating assessment criteria – mark sheet
• providing academic language focus
• providing constructive feedback
• assisting, explaining, not threatening
for all students

An example for helping students understand the purpose of our referencing conventions: (McGowan & O'Regan, 2006)

Avoiding Plagiarism: Achieving academic writing
http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/plagiarism/staff/

Conclusion – Institutional Challenges

- Recognition of the changing demographic
  • requires changing approaches to the curriculum
  • grasp the advantages of intercultural learning (Leask 2005)
  • to achieve education for global citizenship for all students

- A culture of embracing diversity

- Systematic embedding in the curriculum
  • transition – time of apprenticeship for all new students

- Formal recognition of students’ continuing language development needs
  • variety of approaches to embed a language focus

- Achieve learning outcomes for all
## References


---

## References (cont)


