



Join us on [Facebook](#)
Follow us on [Twitter](#)

GLOBAL

Reimagining the HE curriculum for the 21st century



Betty Leask and Hans de Wit 25 November 2016

Share Tweet Share 0

Global social impact is a key feature of the evolution of higher education. Universities have always arguably been both national and international – located in a nation state, but connected in various ways with international communities. But the world of the 21st century is a very different one from that of the 11th century, when the modern university began to evolve in Bologna.

Today, in a world that is more connected and interdependent than ever before there is also an increased focus on nationalism and narrow-minded approaches to race and religion. In these times, perhaps more so than ever before in recent history, higher education institutions have an important role to play in making a meaningful contribution to the creation of dynamic and sustainable local and global communities.

The creation of such communities requires much more of universities than simply 'doing international things'. It requires new ways of thinking about the internationalisation of teaching, learning and curriculum in today's world; ways of thinking that are focused on promoting, to quote the US philosopher Martha Nussbaum, a "humane, people-sensitive democracy" through developing students' ability to recognise fellow citizens as people with equal rights, regardless of differences in race, religion, gender and sexuality.

Approaches to internationalisation of the curriculum that focus on connecting students with 'others' on campus, online, in classrooms and in communities using difference and diversity as a learning opportunity are crucial in today's world.

Rethinking the curriculum

This requires rethinking traditional approaches to internationalisation of the curriculum, which are frequently focused on mobility programmes, teaching in English or international student recruitment.

Responsible global citizens will understand modern contests for resources, space and quality of life, the relationship between the local and the global and will be committed to new pathways for human development and well-being, in their own communities and region as well as globally.

Such approaches are values-based and often connected to the development of global citizenship skills and intercultural understanding. They have seen a new paradigm of internationalisation of the curriculum emerging, which draws on a broad understanding of



Top Stories Last Week

GLOBAL

Do we need a new definition of education abroad post-COVID?

AFRICA-GLOBAL

Academic responsibility: The changing mission of HE

UNITED KINGDOM

Does UK universities' global rhetoric match reality?

UNITED STATES

Biden calls time on Trump's four-year moratorium on truth

GLOBAL

The pandemic is taking higher education back to school

CHINA

Campuses face new lockdowns to halt spread of COVID-19

GERMANY-EUROPE

the term 'curriculum'.

The term 'curriculum', in practical terms, is inclusive of the stated purpose of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning processes, of what is assessed in the curriculum and of students' experiences of learning beyond the classroom (on campus and in the community).

The intent of the curriculum is to enable learning. However, the curriculum can restrict learning if it is too narrowly focused. This issue is of particular relevance to reimagining the curriculum to develop responsible global citizens.

What is global citizenship?

While the rationale for internationalisation of the curriculum has repeatedly been associated with preparing graduates to live and work locally in a globalised world, the term 'global citizenship' is contested. Is global citizenship possible in a world in which the nation-state dominates politically and the gap between the rich and poor of the world is widening?

Some argue that the pursuit of global citizenship as an outcome of international education is not even desirable, that it will inevitably exclude some. This could inadvertently further increase the privilege and power of some groups compared with others, creating a stronger and even more exclusive global transnational elite. This would simply increase the negative impacts of globalisation.

Furthermore, as far as the use of the term global citizenship is concerned, a shift in focus and priority from meaningful contribution to society towards global professionalism and employability has been observed, whereas all aspects are important and interrelated.

Thus it is important to avoid a simplified use of 'global citizenship' as a fashionable synonym for internationalisation and international learning outcomes, without giving a real meaning and strategic focus to it.

Cosmopolitan learning and 'responsible' global citizenship

One way to do this is to develop the concept of 'responsible' global citizenship using a lens of cosmopolitan learning as the foundation for an internationalised curriculum for all students.

The lens of cosmopolitanism applied to the development of global citizens opens up new possibilities. For example, it points to a focus on developing students' critical understanding of the world through intellectual engagement with knowledge, people and ideas from across the world.

It suggests we need to develop new modes of learning focused on ethical engagement with others and the development of a deep understanding of self and situation – of how our own situation influences and is influenced by global social, economic and political connections and disconnections.

These new modes of learning will approach and engage with local issues within the broader context of the global. Responsible global citizenship, and those who seek to develop it in students, will recognise that all human beings need to think locally, nationally and globally and be committed to what Professor Fazal Rizvi calls a "collective well-being connected across local, national and global dimensions".

Responsible global citizens will be deeply committed to solving the world's problems and well equipped with the knowledge and skills

25 universities join European University Networks

GLOBAL

HE can do more to transform conflict and build peace

NIGERIA

Ministry orders vice-chancellors to start with classes

AFRICA

Academics empowered for challenges in 2021

University World News
needs your support

If you value what we do,
please click here to make a
donation.

required to create new and exciting possible worlds. They will be aware of how their actions affect others and they will show concern for the well-being of others.

They will demonstrate a commitment to action locally and globally, across social, environmental and political dimensions, in the interests of others. Awareness of self and others, of one's situatedness in the wider world, coupled with responsibility for the impact of one's actions on others, characterise responsible global citizenship.

What can higher education institutions do?

There is much that higher education institutions can do to develop responsible global citizens in today's world. The first is to recognise that approaches to internationalisation that focus on 'doing international things' such as mobility programmes for a minority of students, or solely on profit rather than on internationalised education for all students, are insufficient.

What is required are approaches to internationalisation of the curriculum that engage faculty and students as cosmopolitan learners.

The development of responsible global citizens requires curriculum content that engages with multiple and global sources of knowledge and people who are 'different from me', in which students explore how knowledge is produced, distributed, exchanged and used globally as well as their own situation in the world.

This requires a reimagining of internationalisation of the curriculum as a critical academic process that has the potential to create new pathways for human development and wellbeing at a critical time in the history of the world.

If we combine the ideal of developing students' compassionate imagination with an education that 'liberates' students' minds through engaging them in new modes of learning, we create new possibilities for the future through internationalisation of the curriculum.

There are some things that higher education institution leaders can do if they are committed to their institution 'becoming and being international' rather than simply 'doing international things'.

For example, they could promote an understanding of internationalisation as vision and values-informed practices at home and communicate the need to broaden the knowledge base of the curriculum beyond the European canon and Western-limited views. These two things combined with action-based approaches to learning and teaching are a powerful combination.

It is fundamentally important, however, that higher education institution leaders challenge their own long-held assumptions about the value of activities traditionally associated with internationalisation; review and rethink policies and strategies and current approaches to internationalisation, including whose knowledge counts in the curriculum; focus internationalisation of the curriculum on learning outcomes for all students; and support faculty engagement in the process of internationalisation of the curriculum.

Hans de Wit is director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, USA. Email: dewitj@bc.edu. Betty Leask is pro vice-chancellor (teaching and learning), La Trobe University, Australia. Email: b.leask@latrobe.edu.au. This is a summarised version of a chapter that the authors have contributed to: Global University Network for Innovation or GUNi (forthcoming 2017) Higher Education in the World 6; Towards a Socially Responsible University: Balancing the Global with the Local. Barcelona: GUNi-ACUP ed.