



**Queensland University of Technology**  
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Hawkes, Lesley & Muller, Vivienne](#) (2010) Creative writing, literary studies, and global thinkers. *Tertiary Writers' Network New Zealand : Writing The Future*.

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/49570/>

**© Copyright 2010 [please consult the author]**

**Notice:** *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

## Creative Writing, Literary Studies and Global Thinkers.

### Abstract:

There has been growing interest in how to make tertiary education more global and international not only in context but, also in approach and methodology. One area of the education sector that has come under specific focus is the higher education sector curriculum and its design. This paper addresses the process of 'internationalising' the curriculum through the specific example of designing a new literary unit for undergraduate students, mainly literary studies and creative writing students. The literary unit entitled *Imagining the Americas: Contemporary American Literature and Culture*, has the added complexity of being a unit about national fiction. This paper explores the practical problems and obstacles encountered in setting up this unit while using a framework of internationalisation. The case study examines the practicalities in implementing strategies that reflect the overall objective of creating global thinkers within a tertiary environment.

### Introduction:

It is almost commonplace today to say that we live in a global environment. We accept that we live in an increasingly globalised community facilitated by economic and cultural exchange and by new technologies of communication. There has also been a huge increase in research into the effects of globalisation on the education sector and a growing interest in how to make education more global and international not only in content, but, also, in approach and methodology. One area of the education sector that has come under specific focus is the higher education sector curriculum and its design. This paper seeks to explore some ideas and issues around the topic of internationalising the curriculum with respect to the setting up of a unit within Creative Writing and Literary Studies focusing on American literature at our university in 2012. Our project has been funded by our university (The Queensland University of Technology) and is specifically located with the QUT International Strategy for students for 2007—2011. One of the objectives under this Global Outlook is the desirability of an internationalised perspective as one of the graduate capabilities. It aims to "Seek ways to internationalise all students' learning experiences, including increasing international content in units and courses and promoting opportunities for students to study in a global context, including through language and culture" (2010). The overall internationalising approach works well in terms of the content of units and of course, for attracting international students or students wishing to study abroad. But what does internationalisation mean in the wider practical educational context? What does it mean when it comes to the actual planning and design of specific literary and creative writing units, especially a unit strongly associated with notions of the formation of a national identity? This is the case for the unit we are presently planning in American literature.

The project raises more questions than it answers. One of the first what does internationalising the curriculum actually mean? Is it the content, the methods of inquiry, the teaching methods, the assessment, the students' perspectives or all of the above? These problems are magnified in our instance because the literary unit we are setting up is a national literature unit being taught to not only literary studies students but also creative writers. How do we teach American literature in a globalised world in ways that open out rather than close down options for student engagement and understanding? How can a literature unit whose title would suggest a unified culture "Imagining Americas: Literature of the Americas" and speaks of the national rather than the international, be used to encourage 'internationalised learning'? Can we discuss national identity and belonging in the novels we intend to set and still promote ideas of internationalisation for the students? One of the problems is the constant shifting between the macro level of a larger internationalising project and the micro level of our one literary unit.

#### Definitions and Terms:

J Knight's 2003 conceptualisation of internationalising the tertiary space is perhaps a good place to start in consideration of what implications there are for an effective teaching and learning environment. She comments that "internationalisation at the national sector and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (2003, 2). What this comment highlights is that for internationalisation to be successful it needs to be incorporated into all aspects of the learning experience—from grass roots to boardrooms. The macro and the micro levels need to be working together. It is not enough for the content of the units to be international. This merely brings about a traditional learning experience and outcome for students. How this more holistic goal is accomplished is of course very difficult and it is clearly the experience of many institutions of higher education that such an ambition cannot be satisfied at all levels and in all contexts at all times. In the Western world the research suggests that many institutions adopt a more piecemeal approach but also take as a given that they are the centre against which the internationalising process, and international understandings are measured. It is not the purpose of this paper to debate this, rather to acknowledge that internationalising is a relative term depending on whose perspective is being privileged as central. Apropos of this Tanaka points out the need for "constructions of knowledge" to be "radically redefined from heterogeneous perspectives rather than settling for having one's voice included" (2010, 267). Not surprisingly perhaps much of the research on internationalising the curriculum issues out of developed countries such as the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia.

Recent research from Canada, suggests that internationalising the curriculum design can be separated broadly into three basic categories

1. The add-on
2. The infusion
3. The transformational (Williams, 2008, 24).

The “add-on” approach is the easiest to apply to the design of a unit within a course of study. Williams suggest that the university environment is used to ‘adding’ into units or to making small adjustments rather than dramatic changes. These ‘add ons’ may take the form of adding on a language component to a unit or attempting to attract more international students. However, research indicates that simply bringing international and local students together either in a class-room situation or on the campus is not enough to guarantee an exchange of idea or the widening of boundaries of knowledge (Turner, 2002). What often occurs is ‘clusters’ of different types of knowledge rather than transferral of knowledge. In relation to our specific area—creative writing and literary studies - we have very few international students. There are growing connections being made with overseas universities and more local students are choosing to study abroad for a semester. Bench-marking has also been undertaken to see how creative writing is being studied overseas. However, the number of international students who take our units is still a relatively low percentage. Most of our students are drawn from the local population.

The “infusion” approach is content driven. It reflects the diversity of the cultures of the class-room and of the content of the unit. Previously, it was stated that most of the students studying in the unit were local students but there is still diversity in their backgrounds and it is this that can be profitably drawn on to structure less homogenous experiences. This approach is already widely used in many literary units which we teach. Thus in a unit such as the one we are designing we may include writers from diverse backgrounds and belief systems, so they represent varied ideas and viewpoints on what it means to be ‘American’. Although this approach is important and valuable, the material discussed in the classroom is often seen and used by students for the unit alone, so that there is little extension beyond the immediate educational context. In this respect, the students can often see this material as relating to the ‘national’ rather than the ‘international’.

The third approach is the most difficult to put into place. The “transformational” approach attempts to reveal the multiple realities of knowledge and ways of understanding. This approach can be seen to relate directly to one of the desired aims of higher education; the focus on critical thinking: “Critical thinking requires individuals to identify and evaluate multiple perspectives in an effort to make informed decisions in their personal and professional lives” (Brownlee Walker, Lennox, Exley and Pearce, 2009, 600). There should be a focus on not only the products of knowledge but on the processes of knowledge. How is knowledge formed, spread, informed, assessed? This transformational approach accepts as a

given the content of the infusion approach but takes it further and attempts to cover the methods of teaching, assessment and content.

One of our aims was to design a literary unit that encompassed global thinking while still engaging with students. Literature units can provide diverse content as well as reflective opportunities to navigate across national and cultural borders, and are potentially transformative sites for cultural exchange and interaction within an internationalisation at home model. We thought seriously about what had worked in the past experiences of our literary and creative writing teaching. Recently, we have begun to incorporate more and more creative writing tasks into our literary units. This came about because of a huge increase in creative writers taking our units and our discovery that creative writers prefer practical tasks. This does not mean that they do not engage with theories as they are actually very good at understanding them but they want to know how to apply them in a practical manner. They wanted to know how to incorporate the material into their professional lives as well as their academic studies. We had to think about what creative writers needed from conventional literary units. What modes of assessment would be beneficial to their overall learning experience? Therefore, when we were given the task of designing a new literary unit that would incorporate and lead to global thinking we drew on our past experiences of extending boundaries of literary engagement as a way to broaden and shift the boundaries of design of the unit.

- There were a number of questions that arose through our designing of this unit which have been identified by Mestenhauser (2008). These are crucial to the kind of transformational approach identified by Williams as they necessitate the individual stepping outside their own cultural positioning in order to open up a “thirdspace of dialogical meaning-making” (Kostogriz and Tsolidid, 2010, 133). Mestenhauser’s list of self-reflexive questions include the following: How is what I will teach culturally constructed and shaped?
- How is thinking in the discipline culturally constructed?
- What does this mean for the way I teach it?

These first three questions required reflection from us, the designers of the unit. We recognised that we are operating within a particular western paradigm of knowledge. There are in place sets of rules that have to be followed when designing a unit and templates that demand unit outlines. This itself is not a problem but it does reveal the complexities of internationalising the curriculum.

- What skills do I need to develop in students to assist them to understand the cultural construction of knowledge?

- What possibilities are there in this course for students to explore the ways in which their own and other cultures organise knowledge and approach professional practice? (Mestenhauser, as cited in Leask, 2008, 21).

This last point is an important one because it highlights the way that the insights gained from such a unit can also be applied in a professional setting. The knowledge can be transferred into different surroundings, demonstrating that an infusion approach can become a transformational one.. one of the overall aims of the unit was to demonstrate awareness of the implications of local decisions and actions for international communities and of international decisions and actions for local communities. In this way students can begin to see how the local, national and international are all interconnected.

#### Assessment and Learning Outcomes:

One of the key practicalities that needed to be addressed when approaching the designing of a unit was the assessment and this remains a major concern in this project. We have struggled, as many educators have, with ways to assess students. Should assessment be formative or summative? How does one grade and set a criteria sheet of clearly outlined rubrics when the knowledge is challenging what is familiar? There may be desirable outcomes identified by the staff but how do these align with assessment tasks and how are they measured or even measureable?

A crucial part of any designing of a unit should be the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are invaluable because they provide specific observable outcomes for students. Learning outcomes are the bringing together of teaching strategies and student learning and they demonstrate the result of engaging in the unit. Closely associated with the learning outcomes is the assessment. A number of assessment items may be beneficial to helping assess our learning outcomes, especially in terms of fostering global understandings. In this respect the assessment items, could be those best related to subjective and intersubjective responses. These might include

- Teacher initiated but student driven activities (these could include role-playing activities—acting or creative writing activities).

Tutorials remain an important site at which such activities can be generated.

- Journal writing— A ‘learning journal’, requiring weekly reports on reading and personal comment is potentially a crucial site of reflective and self-reflective learning and can be harnessed usefully to global understandings.

Indeed many researchers emphasise the importance of reflective and self-reflective tasks that identify affective and social aspirations (Gesche and Makeham, 2008, 254). In our experiences with other literary and creative writing units we have found that journals work extremely well and we are always very impressed with the quality and quantity of work submitted by the students. Creative writers are used to

reflecting on their own creative work and they are able to apply these skills to a broader approach in a journal that asks them to reflect, not only on their creative work, but, also, on their choices. Students need to understand how they see the world before they can begin to understand that other people may see it and interpret it quite differently.

- Writing exercises that focus on intercultural issues
- Rewriting (different points of view, not appropriation)
- Problem-solving
- Online learning and learner directed learning. An example would be for Australian teachers of American literature to have online classrooms with American teachers and students of American literature. We are at the moment in the process of doing this and have made contact with teachers from the University of Carolina for possible link ups in a virtual classroom.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this paper has been to identify some of the issues arising out of a commitment to globalising the curriculum. There have been many and varied approaches worldwide to internationalising the curriculum within and across disciplines in undergraduate and postgraduate studies in the academy. Our project aims to internationalise teaching and learning approaches to the implementation of a unit in American Literature. This has involved engaging with the numerous meanings of internationalising the curriculum with the many contexts in which it is used and for the manifold reasons it is instituted within the academy. It has become evident that it is not a straightforward task. The design process is complicated by the fact that, inherently, internationalising the curriculum challenges established knowledge systems and national boundaries and mandates the participation of students and teachers in new and challenging ways and it does offer possibilities for future directions.

### **Bibliography**

Brownlee, J, Sue Walker, Sandra Lennox, Beryl Exley and Sharyn Pearce (2009) "The First Year University Experience: Using Personal Epistemology to Understand effective learning and teaching in higher education" *Higher Education* (2009) 58: 599-618.

Knight, J. (2003). "Updating the Definition of Internationalization." *International Higher Education*. Retrieved November 2, 2010.

[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsetter/news33/text001.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsetter/news33/text001.htm)

Kostogriz, A. & Tsolidis, G. (2008). "Transcultural literacy: between the global and the local." *Pedagogy. Culture and Society*, 16(2), 125-136.

Leask, B. (2009). "Using Formal and Informal Curricula to Improve Interactions Between Home and International Students." *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13, 203-220.

Meyer & Land, M. (2003) "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practicising Within the Disciplines." *Improving Students Learning Theory and Practice*. Rust: Oxford, 412-424.

Tanaka, G. (2002) "Higher Education's Self-Reflexive Turn: Toward an Intercultural Theory of Student Development." *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(2), 263-296.

Turner, Y. (2009) "Knowing Me, Knowing You," Is There Nothing We Can Do? Pedagogic Challenges in Using Group Work to Create an Intercultural Learning Space." *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13, 240-255.

Williams, S. (2008). *Internationalisation of the Curriculum: A Remedy for International Students' Academic Adjustment Difficulties?* Unpublished final paper for the degree of Master of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St John's.

Wylie, M (2008). "Internationalizing Curriculum: Framing Theory and Practice in International Schools" *Journal of Research in International Education*, 7 (5), 5-19.