

The Reality of Internationalizing the Curriculum at a Canadian Polytechnic Institution

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Internationalizing the curriculum is identified as the most difficult element of internationalization (AUCC, 2000). Earlier literature (AUCC, 1991; Knight, 1995, 2000; Francis, 1993; McKellin, 1998) indicated that there was a discrepancy in terms of commitment to internationalization between the administration staff and the faculty members. However, in the past ten years, Canadian post secondary institutions have shown a greater interest in internationalization at the curriculum level. AUCC (2008) has identified internationalization as both student mobility and “bringing an international dimension to the curriculum” (p.1). Another AUCC (2009) document maintains that “Internationalization activities are also driven by champions on the ground [faculty], whose work can then be supported and built upon to ensure sustainable initiatives on campus.” (p. 5).

It is well recognized at Canadian post-secondary institutions that the most important reason for internationalizing the curriculum is “to prepare graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and interculturally competent” (AUCC, 2007b, p. 1). Furthermore, an internationalized curriculum provides the opportunity for students to develop an international perspective with an understanding of their place in this complex world. For the instructor, it provides new perspectives in teaching and learning methods which make the material relevant to domestic students as well as international students (AUCC, 2009).

Despite the increasing interest in internationalizing the curriculum, the majority of the literature focuses on conceptual questions such as definition (McKellin, 1998; Nilsson, 2000; Schueholz-Lehr, et al., 2007; van der Wende, 1996), strategies and approaches (Knight, 2000, 2004; Raby, 2007; van der Wende, 1996), and learning outcomes (Stanley & Mason, 1997; Stone, 2006). Only a few studies have been conducted on the perceptions of faculty on internationalized curriculum (Bond, Qian & Huang, 2003; Odgers, 2006) and institutional initiatives to support faculty members on curricular changes (Schueholz-Lehr, et al., 2007) in the Canadian context. Also, these studies have mainly focussed on practices and perceptions of faculty in universities. Less common are empirical

studies in higher education settings other than universities. Less is known on how – or if – faculty provide a means for their students to achieve learning outcomes that have an international dimension.

In this context, this study was conducted in a non-university setting in Canada. The purpose was to investigate faculty's perceptions on their teaching practices involving an internationalized curriculum, as well as students' perceptions of those practices. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the understanding of faculty on internationalizing the curriculum?
2. What have faculty done to incorporate an international or intercultural dimension to their teaching?
3. What challenges do faculty face in incorporating an international or intercultural dimension into their teaching?
4. What can be done to support internationalization of the curriculum efforts of faculty?
5. To what extent have students achieved learning outcomes with an international dimension?

Conceptual Framework

Based on Nilsson's (2000) definition, an "internationalized curriculum" is defined in this study as a curriculum which provides international and intercultural knowledge, skills, and abilities, aimed at preparing students (both domestic and international) for performing (professionally, socially, emotionally) in an international and multicultural context . This definition was used because it emphasizes the international and intercultural components of an internationalized curriculum, and it also relates to both cognitive and affective learning outcomes.

Green and Olson (2008) call the curriculum the "centerpiece of internationalization". They propose that the curriculum is where one begins to make the transformative move to internationalizing the campus. An OECD survey (van der Wende, 1996) proposed nine types of internationalized curricula, which are more about changes on the program level than on the course level. Looking at it critically, Nilsson (2000) emphasized intercultural learning as a very important component that was "not found to be a very important or even an explicit objective" (p. 23) in the typology. The strategies proposed in *Progress and Promise* (Knight, 2000) are for implementation at the institute level as well as course level:

- Development of international partnerships
- Abroad service learning
- International or visiting experts
- International or intercultural case studies
- International field tours
- Students as learning resources,
- Student mobility

Literature also suggests that faculty support is critical to internationalizing the curriculum (Bond, Qian and Huang, 2003; Raby, 2007; Shute, 2002; Teekens, 2000), and that there is potential of faculty resistance if their support is not solicited (Ellingboe, 1998; Maidstone, 1996; Mestenhauser, 1998; Otten, 2000). In terms of learning outcomes, “internationally knowledgeable” and “interculturally competent” are used to describe the outcomes as a result of internationalization (Stone, 2006), and various areas of learning outcomes with an international dimension have been identified (Stanley & Mason, 1997), and have shed light on this study.

This study is also informed by Jane Knight’s (2003) definition of internationalization and framework of internationalization. Knight (2004) examines internationalization in terms of policy and programs at the national, sector, and institutional levels. At the institutional level, internationalization activities have been categorized into two streams: internationalization at home (i.e., activities on the home campus) and internationalization abroad (i.e., activities happening across borders). The concept of internationalization at home has emerged as a consequence of an effort to address the needs of the vast majority of those students who gain their education at home, and to call attention to those aspects of internationalization that involve an intercultural and international dimension of teaching and learning, as opposed to activities such as student mobility and off-shore delivery of programs (Wachter, 2000). The notion of internationalization at home informs the scope of this study.

In light of Knight’s (2004) approaches to internationalization at the institutional level, this study adopts the at-home, process and outcome approaches to examine issues involved in internationalization of the curriculum. As such, this study investigates campus-based teaching and learning activities and methods that promote and support

international or intercultural understanding. The study examines those activities from the perspectives of both on-going process and learning outcomes, by focusing on what faculty and students do and believe regarding teaching and learning in an internationalized context.

Methodology and Data Collection

The venue of this study was at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) where the authors of this paper work. Its focus on regional development is reflected in its newly-crafted vision statement, which states “BCIT is integral to the economic, social and environmental prosperity of British Columbia.” Its educational philosophy is illustrated in its mission: “to serve the success of learners and employers by providing high quality technical and professional education and training that supports our graduates as practitioners and as citizens, and by advancing the state-of-practice.” Although internationalization strategy was approved in principle by the Board of Governors in 2004, BCIT has, so far, no formalized internationalization policy at an institutional level.

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches of inquiry. Two surveys targeted teaching faculty and full-time students. The questionnaires were constructed on the basis of literature review of strategies, challenges and learning outcomes with respect to internationalizing the curriculum as well as existing surveys (Bond, Qian, Huang, 2003).

The instructor survey included questions regarding teaching beliefs related to internationalization, current teaching practices and strategies, whether they felt outcomes that reflect international or intercultural understanding were achieved by their students, their use of teaching methods that would facilitate student achievement of those outcomes, and challenges they had encountered in terms of internationalization. The student survey included questions on perceptions on teaching activities related to internationalization, perceptions on their level of international or intercultural understanding as a result of taking the program, and perceptions on helpful teaching methods which facilitate this international or intercultural understanding. The question items showed a good internal consistency for the constructs being investigated. Some questions in the two surveys were parallel to each other for comparative purposes.

Both of the surveys were conducted online in the fall, 2008 at BCIT. A total of 313 instructors and 328 full-time students responded to the survey campaigns, with a response rate of 17.7% and 14.9% respectively. The target populations were well represented by the student and faculty respondents by several demographic parameters.

More than 50 follow-up faculty interviews and 10 follow-up student interviews were conducted in the spring of 2009. The interview questions were designed to probe further on the research and survey questions.

Results

Data from this study show that the efforts to internationalize the curriculum were occurring mainly through individual faculty initiative. Efforts varied, as well as the scope. Seventy-six per cent (76%) of the respondents indicated that they encouraged students with experiences in another culture to contribute their knowledge and skills to assignments, projects and class discussions (Table 1). We asked instructors to rate teaching strategies that were recommended from literature (Knight, 2000), such as the use of projects or assignments that challenged students' own cultural biases or assumptions; case studies or role plays with an international or intercultural dimension; international study tours for students; partnerships or initiatives with a foreign institution. Not all these strategies were found to be helpful teaching practices (Table 2). In fact, very few instructors are involved in international partnerships or initiatives, and there are few and limited opportunities for student mobility. However, most instructors interviewed did use project assignments (in teams) and case studies as part of their teaching practice, whether or not there was an international dimension.

Generally, instructors responded positively to internationalizing the curriculum: 54.9% to 63.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the positive statements on internationalizing the curriculum. However, actually incorporating an international or intercultural dimension into the content did not appear to be a standard practice (Table 3). Comments to open-ended questions show that a considerable proportion of faculty members felt that their content area was technical and did not include international issues, or that the students had to learn Canadian standards in the discipline, or were limited in what they could include in the curriculum by regulatory agencies.

Consequently, internationalization of the curriculum was not found to be a priority for all instructors. It appears that while instructors agreed in principle with internationalizing the curriculum, workload and lack of time and resources prevented them from practicing it. (Table 4).

Faculty evidently understand the importance of their role in internationalizing the curriculum as almost 60 per cent of the respondents confirmed that faculty should play a more important role in it. This is supported by the literature and may mean that an increased profile or understanding of internationalization would make faculty more receptive to it. The survey results suggested that some instructors are not sold on the idea of internationalizing the curriculum – or internationalization in general – and that may pose a challenge at the institutional level, which could be addressed by a positive campaign on internationalization and faculty's crucial role in it.

The challenges respondents identified for internationalizing the curriculum were more resource-related rather than discipline-related (Table 4). Over half of the respondents indicated that there was not enough time or resources; 49.1% of the respondents reported that they didn't think it could be easily implemented in their discipline. Interview results also showed that instructors were pressed for time and/or might not feel comfortable teaching content with which they were unfamiliar or lack expertise.

In terms of learning outcomes that reflect content with an international dimension, results from both the instructor and student surveys suggest that affective outcomes that emphasize *intercultural* competence (Nilsson, 2000) (such as open-mindedness and curiosity toward other countries and cultures, biases and attitudes, tolerance, tact and sensitivity to others, etc.) were easier to achieve than the cognitive outcomes that stress *international* competence (such as practices and applications in other countries and cultures, self-assessment of one's own knowledge and skills on global concerns, interconnections between local and global issues, etc.) (Table 5).

A total of 50 faculty members and 10 students who had participated in the survey were interviewed individually.

For the most part, faculty who were interviewed supported internationalizing the curriculum. Even those, whose discipline was more technical in nature, believed that teaching skills that made their students more interculturally and internationally competent (as defined by Nilsson, 2000) were a valuable approach because it would make their students more competitive in the job market.

In terms of the teaching strategies, teamwork was found to be pervasively used at BCIT. As one student pointed out, BCIT stands for “being cramped into teams”. Most instructors (with the exception of those who have large classes and some of the part-time studies courses) indicated that they used teams as a teaching and learning practice. Teams designed to reflect the cultural diversity of the classroom can be a highly effective strategy for learning to work with multiple perspectives. Other teaching strategies that help BCIT students apply knowledge were case studies, team presentations, reviewing current issues and relating them to the discipline in group or class discussions, field trips, and cooperative learning (think pair share, jigsaw, and panels). Some instructors brought the world into their classrooms by using technologies such as Elluminate Live, Skype and wikis.

Instructors identified the following knowledge, skills and abilities which they felt students would acquire as a result of internationalization:

- Cultural awareness
- Open mindedness
- Environmental awareness (in terms of assessing a situation)
- Critical thinking (e.g., analyzing economic impact of world events on BC, Canada, and vice versa)
- Global awareness
- Understanding and encouraging multiple perspectives in the workplace
- Good communication skills in a multicultural workplace
- Working in diverse teams
- Negotiating in a Canadian and non-Canadian context, resolving conflicts effectively, self awareness (knowing one’s own perspectives and prejudices).

While most instructors in the interviews felt that internationalization was essential in today’s world, they acknowledged some important challenges they face. The challenge most frequently stated was that of workload

(lack of time, no release time, too much content already, etc.), which was reflected in the quantitative survey as well. Other challenges were language proficiency (this is a particular problem in most part time studies courses, in which there is a large body of international students), plagiarism, use of technology, management support, buy-in from instructors, and learning styles and attitudes. Also, some instructors had been involved in other faculty development initiatives over the years and felt that there was no reward or appreciation, so they were reticent about putting a lot of time and energy into internationalizing their curriculum when there might be little or no reward or institutional support.

Almost without exception, instructors would like to work internationally, whether it is short term or long term. Instructors felt it would enrich their curriculum, their teaching, and the learning experience of their students.

The students who were interviewed identified some of the same challenges: language requirements for the program and student workload. They described their understanding of the importance of internationalization: if an internationalized curriculum would make them more competitive in the job market and workplace, they were receptive.

Discussion

The initial findings of the study provide the following implications. First, there have been tangible impacts of cultural diversity among students on internationalization on the BCIT campus. The results of both the qualitative and quantitative study indicate that faculty respond to the needs of the diverse student population through their teaching strategies. Even though not all the instructors surveyed consider cultural diversity as “a general resource and potential enrichment” (Otten, 2000, p. 19), the study does indicate that many instructors do make an effort to capitalize on the cultural diversity of their students.

Second, it may be a while before BCIT has an institution-wide implementation for internationalizing the curriculum. This study shows that in an institution like BCIT where there is no major initiative of curriculum internationalization in place, an international or intercultural dimension of teaching and learning is mainly evident

as an informal response to cultural diversity among students, or through an individual instructor's own initiative. Certain teaching beliefs, limited availability of resources and perceived disciplinary boundaries have constituted greater challenges for internationalizing course content than efforts to address cultural diversity among students.

Third, faced with all these challenges, the task of internationalizing the curriculum is indeed daunting.

Recommended strategies for curriculum internationalization (Knight, 2000) will require strong collaborative efforts among faculty and a lasting commitment from leadership at the institute and the program levels. Most instructors who were interviewed considered it as essential and a smart move from an institutional point of view, and were open to learning how to internationalize their curriculum (with a minimal increase in an already heavy workload). In this context, the institution's teaching and learning centre will need to play a central role in providing guidance and consultation for faculty to internationalize their courses, and recommending teaching strategies that will facilitate experiential intercultural learning for students.

Fourth, there may be greater challenges to internationalization in an institution that is committed to regional or local development (such as community colleges or technical institutes) than one that serves a broader community (such as universities). The study shows some instructors were concerned about the relevance of internationalization to their commitment to regional stakeholders. Though these are valid concerns, we should also keep in mind that Canada is one of the most export trade dependent national in the world: at least one in three Canadian jobs is trade-related and there are 2,800 registered exporters in BC alone. Given that, BC, and Canada as a whole, is susceptible to the impact of global economic or geopolitical events. Those concerns from the study should be addressed through a concrete internationalization strategy and implementation plan that relates to a bigger social and economic context.

Based on those findings, we recommend that BCIT broaden our students' understanding of the interconnectedness between the local and the global by promoting an interdisciplinary approach to our curriculum and an international view at the disciplinary level. It is also important to include intercultural learning outcomes and teaching strategies

in our curriculum, which would promote open mindedness, tolerance, and working effectively with multiple perspectives.

Significance of the Study

Although this study is situated in one institution, it has revealed much of the reality of internationalizing curriculum in other institutions with a similar mandate. Internationalization of the curriculum should be transformative in nature (Green & Olson, 2008; Paige & Mestenhauser, 1999). A transformational approach intends to change faculty and students in “fundamental ways” in how they “think about the world and their place in it” (Bond, 2003, p. 8). It is not easy to do, but the benefits make it well worthwhile. The good news from this study is that there is enormous interest from those surveyed and interviewed to engage their students in international and intercultural learning, and to help them obtain employment in a multicultural social and economic context. The study also shows a number of challenges in this transformative process.

It is our hope that this study will help post-secondary educators make informed decisions in internationalizing the curriculum and in enhancing teaching and learning in a multicultural environment. Academically, this study will add another piece to the limited amount of literature on internationalization of the curriculum in the non-university sector of higher education.

Table 1: Instructors’ Perceptions of Current Practices

Question Items	n	“Strongly agree” / “Agree”	Mean	SD	Missing data
Q3b:I encourage students who have experiences in another culture to contribute their knowledge and skills to discussions, projects, team work, or assignments.	308	76.0%	3.97	0.91	1.6%
Q2e:My department values international or intercultural experience and competence.	261	62.9%	3.63	1.03	16.6%
Q2d:My program values international or intercultural experience and competence.	271	61.3%	3.62	1.06	13.4%
Q3a:I make every effort, where appropriate, to incorporate knowledge and practices from other cultures into my courses.	309	60.2%	3.58	1.14	1.3%
Q2h:My students have gained a broadened worldview from being in my class.	286	56.3%	3.53	1.08	8.6%
Q3c:I design course content (lectures, labs, projects, assignments, and assessments/evaluations) that encourages both domestic and international students to think beyond North American borders.	305	45.9%	3.33	1.16	2.6%
Q2g:Orientating the content towards international practices and applications is part of my teaching practices.	297	42.7%	3.18	1.19	5.1%
Q3f:I have found it a challenge to integrate students with other cultural backgrounds in learning experiences.	304	41.8%	3.11	1.13	2.9%
Q2c:Internationalization at the curriculum level is strongly supported by my school.	224	39.3%	3.21	1.00	28.4%
Q2a:I am aware that BCIT has an internationalization policy, which includes internationalizing the curriculum.	227	37.5%	3.00	1.17	27.5%
Q2b:Internationalization at the curriculum level is strongly supported by BCIT.	213	34.8%	3.11	1.00	31.9%
Q2f:There is enough institutional support or encouragement to incorporate an international or intercultural dimension to my current teaching practices.	240	33.7%	2.89	1.18	23.3%
Q3g:I sometimes feel frustrated when my students are from other cultural backgrounds and have different expectations and learning styles.	308	30.5%	2.77	1.22	1.6%
Q3d:I have collaborated with faculty/instructors from other countries in order to incorporate an international or intercultural dimension to my teaching practices.	300	20.0%	2.46	1.17	4.2%
Q3e:I have invited people from other countries/cultures to be guests in my class(es) to enhance students’ understanding of practices and applications of the subject matter in other cultures.	301	15.9%	2.34	1.10	3.8%

Notes:

1. The data are sorted out by the descending order of the percentage of "agree" or "strongly agree".
2. Four factors were obtained from factor analysis of the question items: Perceived Institutional Support (in yellow), Individual Efforts (in orange), Collaboration (Q3d & e), and Challenge (Q3f & g). The Chronbach’s Alpha values for these four factors ranged from 0.65 to 0.84.
3. Missing data include non-responses and responses of "no idea". The percentages above 10% are bolded. They are all found to be question items for Perceived Institutional Support.

Table 2: Perceptions on Helpful Teaching Methods

Question Items	n	"Very helpful"/ "Fairly helpful"	Mean	SD	Missing data
Q10b:Use international or intercultural case studies	248	41.6%	2.98	1.48	20.8%
Q10a:Assign projects or assignments that challenge a student's own cultural biases or assumptions	245	40.0%	2.96	1.49	21.7%
Q10e: Develop program-level partnerships or initiatives with international institutions	220	40.4%	2.87	1.57	29.7%
Q10d:Organize an international or intercultural study tour for my students	214	25.7%	2.38	1.52	31.6%
Q10c: Role plays in a mock-up international or intercultural setting	221	26.2%	2.35	1.44	29.4%

Note: Missing data include non-responses and responses of "no idea". The high percentage of missing data suggests a low level of perceived helpfulness.

Table 3: Perceived Teaching Beliefs

Question Items	n	"Strongly agree"/ "Agree"	Mean	SD
Q4a:It is important to know the previous international or cross-cultural experiences of my students (both domestic and international students).	308	73.7%	3.78	0.89
Q4d:Including an international or intercultural dimension into my teaching enriches my courses.	303	63.4%	3.73	1.05
Q4b:It is important to use the cultural diversity of my students in my teaching practices.	309	63.4%	3.65	1.00
Q4g:Faculty/instructors should play a more important role in internationalization at the curriculum level at BCIT.	298	58.7%	3.69	0.98
Q4c:It is important to include an international dimension to the content of my courses.	306	54.9%	3.49	1.13
Q4f:I would like to get more support from professionals to internationalize my courses and teaching approaches.	304	43.7%	3.35	1.05
Q4e:I find it hard to incorporate an international or intercultural dimension into my current teaching practices.	303	37.3%	3.02	1.13

Table 4: Perceived Challenges in Internationalizing the Curriculum

Question Items	n	"Strongly agree"/ "Agree"	Mean	SD
Q13b:It is not my priority for now	297	56.9%	3.52	1.21
Q13a:I don't have enough time do this	288	53.5%	3.52	1.18
Q13g: I don't have sufficient resources available	283	50.9%	3.48	1.13
Q13d: I don't think it can be easily implemented in my field of study	295	49.1%	3.25	1.38
Q13e: I don't see it necessary for the course(s) I teach	299	43.8%	3.15	1.46
Q13c:I don't have adequate knowledge or skills	292	43.1%	3.12	1.16
Q13h: I don't think my discipline relates much to other cultures or societies	301	26.6%	2.61	1.32
Q13f: I don't want to make changes in what I have been doing for my course(s)	295	10.8%	2.32	1.02

Note: Factor analysis shows that Questions Q13a,c,g (highlighted in orange) were resource-related challenges and Questions Q13d,e,h (highlighted in yellow) were discipline-related challenges. The Chronbach's alpha values for these two factors were 0.68 and 0.87 respectively.

Table 5: Perceptions on Learning Outcomes: Comparisons between Students and Faculty

Question Items	Student Survey			Instructor Survey		
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD
Q4l: Become more capable of handling challenging situations	319	3.98	0.93	280	3.88	0.80
Q4c: Practice and apply what I have learned in a Canadian context	309	3.7	0.89	295	4.13	0.91
Q4i: Identify my own biases and attitudes	314	3.53	0.94	264	3.44	0.99
Q4k: Become more tolerant, tactful, and sensitive to others	320	3.53	1.01	274	3.81	0.88
Q4j: Adapt to others' standards of behaviour	315	3.52	0.97	272	3.5	0.86
Q4h: Become more open-minded and curious about other countries and cultures	314	3.47	1.06	275	3.67	0.95
Q4m: Become more psychologically prepared for the situations that I might encounter in a different cultural setting	314	3.46	1.04	275	3.6	0.94
Q4e: Assess my own knowledge and skills to think about and act on global concerns	310	3.39	1.00	264	3.33	1.08
Q4f: Analyze global issues from multiple perspectives	307	3.38	1.01	261	3.03	1.13
Q4g: Capture the interconnections between local and global issues	299	3.3	1.00	266	3.24	1.08
Q4a: Adjust my use of English as appropriate to the situations in international or intercultural business and social settings	307	3.29	0.97	255	3.2	1.04
Q4d: Practice and apply what I have learned in other countries and cultures	300	3.04	0.96	267	2.94	1.08
Q4b: Enrich my knowledge of world geography	315	2.85	1.14	232	2.35	1.13

Note:

1. The data are arranged in the descending order of the mean in the Student Survey.
2. Factor analysis shows that Questions Q4b-g (highlighted in yellow) were loaded on one factor (International Competence or cognitive outcomes) and Questions a, h-m (highlighted in orange) were loaded on the other factor (Intercultural Competence or affective outcomes). The Chronbach's alpha values were 0.87 for both factors.

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