

The Value of Teaching in the International Environment

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When an academic institution makes the decision to ‘internationalise’ there are three ways in which this can occur. One is to internationalise the curriculum, another is to internationalise the classroom, and the third is to internationalise the teaching staff. Usually the institution or university chooses to focus on one of these or to foster all over a set period of time. The benefits are that the recruitment of international students brings much needed revenue into the university, and that students have exposure to international teachers and their expertise and experience, and that they engage in sharing their learning with a network of students outside their own culture and country.

In October 2012 I had the great pleasure of teaching at the Ljubljana International Business School (IBS), which is a small private tertiary institution. IBS has bravely adopted all three of these dimensions of internationalisation. This requires strong leadership and management, courage and innovation, increased student support, and the capacity to be flexible in the teaching and learning environment.

Let me explain the three dimensions of internationalisation in more detail.

1. Internationalise the curriculum

Many courses are developed to meet the local market and regulatory environment, for example, accreditation and registration of accountants, lawyers, health professionals and teachers. When the course includes international case studies and examples, and international studies and subjects, students graduate with knowledge, attributes and skills that make them employable across the world and in the increasing number of multi-national companies that operate in their own country. The move beyond the insular understandings of their own culture and language, and their own history and practice enables students who study an international curriculum to become global citizens.

IBS does just that. The curriculum focus replicates the name of the institution – International Business School.

The subject I taught was Cross Cultural Communication and Negotiation. The course was designed to provide students with the knowledge, skills and strategies to be an effective communicator in the global business environment. Students learned how to conceptualise communication, culture, conflict, problem-solving, negotiation and interdependence. They examined theory and case studies including the communication barriers to negotiation in China, contract development in Aceh Indonesia, the complex history of the Panama Canal negotiations, the world development of Bata Shoes, and the cultural characteristics of negotiation of Slovenia’s entry into the European Union. Through the subject, students developed their own personal profile for communicating with foreigners and negotiating across cultures. Interestingly, students were providing their own comparative case studies through reflection and discourse on Slovenian business communication practices.

2. Internationalise the classroom

Any international business school is attractive to students outside the local country, because it sends a signal that international students are welcome and the learning

environment is focussed on international outcomes. Indeed, my IBS class included students from Slovenia, Russia, Macedonia and Indonesia. This mix of students added authentic case study examples to every topic. The small group discussions provided a 'live' learning experience for students from all cultures and countries. There was instant understanding of the communication needs of international students. In addition to having a cohort of students from diverse countries, the student profile also included diversity in age and workplace experience. This mix of students added necessary vitality to all discussion, questions and problem-solving. In our global learning environment where the internet provides data and communication from across the world, it is critical to have a classroom experience that replicates the new learning environment.

3. Internationalise the teaching staff

Students gain in their knowledge and development when they meet professors, lecturers and tutors from other countries. They develop adaptability and flexibility as they learn to listen to different accents and lecturing styles (maybe even another language such as English). They develop a portfolio of examples and case studies from across Europe and across the world.

I am an Australian who has taught in Hong Kong, Indonesia, the USA, Singapore, New Zealand, Vietnam and of course Australia. I have conducted research in how international students learn, and I have experience in cross cultural communication and negotiation as it affects business in Asia in particular. I have developed teaching strategies to ensure deep understanding and acquisition of knowledge by students in the international classroom. Some of these strategies are to prepare and provide pre-delivery information and readings, encourage group discussion of cases and problems, use powerpoint slides to reinforce verbal communication, give sufficient time for tasks, link theory and ideas to the local environment, provide daily exercises in critical analysis of readings, and build a lecturer/student relationship based on the shared value of education.

IBS has shown great innovation in developing a profile of international teaching staff. Through passionate and strong grant applications to the EU, IBS has brought staff from Australia, Canada, Italy and Germany to support local professors and teachers and deepen the learning environment and experience of students.

Conclusion

My experience teaching at IBS was extremely positive. The goals and objectives of the institution are very clear. The values of the students are very clear. They are motivated and contributed well in the classroom. I know their English language improved and I know they learned a great deal about the critical effect of cross cultural communication and negotiation. Their final assessment showed how they benefitted from the international experience.

I strongly recommend IBS to prospective students and professors.