Reflective piece

Internationalization at Home (IaH) in Living-learning contexts

Kooi Cheng Lee	Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning, National University of Singapore	cdtleekc@nus.edu.sg
Swee Kit Alan Soong	Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning, National University of Singapore	cdtsska@nus.edu.sg
Andi Sudjana Putra	Faculty of Engineering National University of Singapore	engpas@nus.edu.sg

Abstract

Internationalisation has been associated with the cultivation of global competencies. However, there have also been contentions about inclusivity, accessibility and mobility, and that it may privilege some. This reflective piece attempts to respond to these tensions through a description of, and reflection on, the effectiveness of two Internationalisation at Home (IaH) initiatives. It focuses on informal curricula in living-learning contexts where literature and concrete examples are scanty. Drawing on the learning points, it shares thoughts about the need for critical mass, whole university experience, and intentionality.

Introduction

The idea of internationalisation has been associated with global citizenry, 21ˢᵗ century competencies, intercultural understanding, and experiential learning for concrete programme implementation (Arkoudis, Baik, Marginson & Cassidy, 2012). In recent decades, in preparing graduates for a globalized workplace, many universities have included aspects of internationalisation in their vision, strategic goals, curricular and co-academic spaces. Examples are: foreign language programmes, student exchange programmes, overseas internship opportunities, and/or collaborations exposing students to a learning environment that facilitates engagement with regional or global issues.

Knight (2003:2) defines internationalisation broadly as an educational process, as well as a product that has integration of an "international, intercultural or global dimension". Initiatives utilizing this definition have been well-regarded for the aspiration and purposes of expanding student learning experience, enabling student mobility, broadening student perspectives, as well as strengthening collaboration between institutions. However, Robson and Wihlborg (2019) caution about the unevenness in how different institutions respond to internationalisation. They and others also allude to the commodification of internationalisation by institutions and respective countries in addition to issues of inclusivity, accessibility and mobility – especially in less privileged regions and contexts. du Preez (2018) further notes the need to understand the concept of internationalisation in tandem with decolonisation. While the former intends to promote global relations, the latter attempts to "redress injustices and inequalities done to the colonised" (2018: 26). du Preez further argues these two ideas need not be at odds but can instead be mutually constructive.

This suggests that there are more fundamental implications beyond simply the learning experience and quality of education. If the cultivation of global citizenry through internationalisation is a strategic goal, our first question is this: What do institutions do with students who do not participate in internationalisation programmes, whether by own volition or due to constraints?

Our second question concerns indicators of effectiveness of internationalisation initiatives, taking into consideration local identities and cultures. What are the measures that go beyond the usual reporting of numbers, such as: students who go abroad, international students on campus, and curricula or courses with a focus on globalisation? As aptly queried by Green (2013), a deeper understanding of the impact of internationalisation initiatives should consider assessments that would inform us about students' learning and whether they have developed global competencies and in recognition of their own contexts.

Our reflective piece focuses on one form of internationalisation, namely Internationalisation at Home (IaH). Beelen and Jones define IaH as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (2015:69). In fact, many activities in an informal living-learning context have been purposefully created for informal dialogic experience (Jansen, 2017; le Grange, 2016 as cited in du Preez, 2018). This reflection, with a focus on initiatives of informal curricula in living-learning contexts where literature has been scanty, attempts to address this gap. We present two case studies that demonstrate Beelen and Jones' (2015) four criteria in their definition, as follows:

1. Purposeful integration,
2. International and intercultural dimensions,
3. Informal curriculum, and
4. Domestic learning environment.

In presenting our case studies and in our attempt in reflecting on their impact, we also take further reference from Shattle's (2008) three levels of engagement in global citizenry, namely: awareness, participation, and responsibility. This is further discussed in the following section.

Internationalisation at Home (IaH) initiatives in living-learning context

At our institution, students residing on campus are from diverse backgrounds. Although a high percentage of residents are local (or domestic) and of one ethnic group, at most residences, there is nonetheless a sizeable number of international students as well as local students from other ethnic backgrounds. This constitutes one aspect of diversity. Besides this, other major contributors to diversity in resident communities include disciplines, prior educational experiences, and engagement in co-curricular activities. As such, on-campus residences seem a naturally good place to cultivate active global citizenry especially in enhancing students' interpersonal and intercultural competencies.

Adapting Shattle's (2008) three levels of engagement in global citizenry activities (implemented at two living-learning contexts at our university) comprise three key objectives and hence three associated phases of implementation (see Figure 1. Learning objectives and implementation phases), as follows:

a) Awareness: basic appreciation of community values, intercultural, interpersonal and personal competencies through activities aimed at bringing about awareness.
b) Participation: assimilation of competencies and values via active participation with others through semi-structured programmes and activities.
c) Responsibility: internalization of competencies and values through sustained engagement as facilitators, leaders, or mentors of programmes and activities.

awareness + appreciation

active participation + assimilation
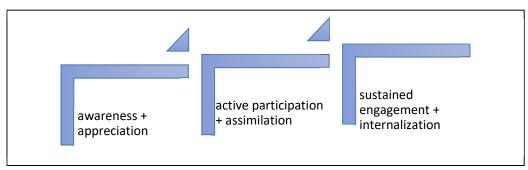
sustained engagement + internalization

Figure 1: Learning objectives and implementation phases (Source: The Authors)

Interestingly, these levels of engagement align with Beelen and Jones' (2015) four criteria of internationalisation - purposeful integration, international and intercultural dimensions, informal curriculum, and domestic learning environment. In other words, at each stage of implementation, as

illustrated in Figure 1, there should be incorporation of Beelen and Jones' criteria. The extent of the integration are reflected in the two initiatives we share in this reflective piece.

Based on the above, in the following section, we describe and reflect on two IaH initiatives implemented at two separate residences at our university.

Frugality & Sustainable Living Initiatives in a Living and Learning Community (LLC)

At one of the residences, the vision is to empower and inspire residents, comprising a mix of local and international students, to create a familial, inclusive and vibrant community to: build self-confidence; to see, seek and seize opportunities; and transform into socially responsible global citizens.

This vision is realised through various strategic programmes including Frugality & Sustainable Living (F&S) (Prince George's Park House, n.d.). Frugality has been demonstrated to enhance the value of being global (Basu, Baneerji & Sweeny, 2013). Frugality conveys the concept of lower costs, ease of use, limited features, and low impact on the environment (Weyrauch & Herstatt, 2017). Furthermore, frugality drives innovation (Basu *et al*, 2013), which helps students develop transferable 21st century competencies (Tan, Choo, Kang & Liem, 2017) comprising creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, socio-emotional, and lifelong learning aptitudes.

As we have a critical mass of a diverse students, the F&S initiative has been positioned as an IaH programme. Here, we illustrate the operationalisation of the F&S drawing on Beelen and Jones' four aspects of IaH (2015), namely purposeful integration, international and intercultural dimensions, informal curriculum and domestic learning environment. Further, the implementation model in Figure 1 is used as a reference to design the engagement in F&S. Across the stages, students reflect on their learning and share it with other students in the residence.

In Stage 1, awareness and appreciation are created through experiential learning trips, both local and overseas for an equal mix of local and international students. Students who go on the trips experience direct engagement and immersion with the target community. As such, these trips provide a means for contextualization to the target communities to enhance students' tolerance of ambiguity, empathy, and motivation (Stanlick & Hammond, 2016). Since the establishment of the hall in 2017, there have been three overseas trips to Chennai (India) in January 2018, Bengkala (Indonesia) in February 2019, and Hlegu (Myanmar) in September 2019. The inaugural trip to Chennai was attended by 8 students to a school for children with autism, a school for children with blindness, a self-sufficient village and a start-up social enterprise that helps those communities. The second trip to Bengkala was attended by 15 students to a village with a population of around 3,000 people, 40 of whom live with hearing-impairment; and an additional 40 of whom live with other physical disabilities. The third trip to Hlegu was attended by 16 students to an orphanage that houses around 40 children and is managed by a family.

Students who completed these projects presented and shared their works with their peers in the residential hall through formal platforms such as mini-symposiums as well as informal conversations. Through such reflections and sharing, we begin to observe the multiplier-effect where other students

in the residential hall also acquired awareness and appreciation. One example is how students who went to Bengkala shared their experience of the accommodative culture of the village, where villagers generally know how to do sign language and that schools are integrated (i.e. no special schools for children with physical impairment), making villagers with physical impairment feel welcome. This sharing has inspired residents to be inclusive in organising residential activities, for example by accommodating various dietary requirements of participants.

As awareness and appreciation have multiplied and reached critical mass, Stage 2 was brought about – namely active participation and assimilation (Figure 1). Students, including those who do not go on the trips, contribute directly to the target communities through their ideas. Furthermore, they can apply their newly acquired knowledge in the local community with settings similar to those of the target community, hence creating a new project. One example is how the sharing of students who went to Hlegu has inspired other students to create a programme to help the children in the orphanage to practice their oral communication in English to secure better employment.

The activities conducted with the target communities can inspire students in the hall to engage local communities and transfer their learning in the similar context. This brings about Stage 3, namely sustained engagement and internalisation. For instance, inspired by the engagement with the overseas school for children with blindness, students in the hall have engaged a local society for the visually handicapped and held a year-long engagement programme, which includes a donation drive and theatre performance. In another example, teaching English to children in the overseas orphanage has inspired students to plan for online teaching. This plan had been in place even before travel restrictions took place due to Covid-19. Hence students could carry on with the activity rather smoothly during the Covid-19 pandemic when there are travel restrictions.

This strategy is in line with the one recommended by Beelen and Jones (2015), in that while the context and delivery of IaH need to be considered from organizational and academic viewpoints, the ultimate beneficiaries are all students including those who do not have the mobility experience, making it a whole residence experience.

The above description illustrates how the F&S initiative aims to achieve IaH through purposefully designed informal curriculum programmes that has been aligned with the vision of the hall. In this context, the domestic learning environment is situated within and beyond the hall, in Singapore. For the multiplier effect to be aligned with the hall's vision, the residential staff-team supports residents who are keen to embark on new projects by carefully guiding them designing their programmes, including recommending potential local partners for collaboration. An example of such a collaboration is with the Singapore Children's Society where students volunteered to design and conduct regular fun educational activities targeted at children of ages 3 and 6 who are not registered at kindergartens or childcare centres (Mahendran, 2020). These activities serve as supplementary activities to the existing programmes which the Society conducts (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Students volunteering at the Singapore Children's Society (Source: Authors).

Referring to Shattle's framework (2008), F&S has likely achieved awareness, responsibility, participation and cross-cultural empathy; evidenced from how local engagement has been established and motivated by the overseas activities. There is a lack of evidence that the programme has achieved the level of integration and internalisation, hence we do not make such a claim.

International Night/Cultural Week

At another residential hall where there is a good base of international students as well as local students, in terms of the local-international ratio, there has been concerted effort seen through activities and initiatives aimed at appreciation of different cultures. One residence-wide activity that over the years has become a 'staple' is its International Night.

When the event was first mooted in the mid-2010s, it was for residents of a particular country to showcase and share their culture. At that time, international students formed the largest percentage of the residents. In Academic Year 2016/2017, with an expansion of diverse profiles of international students, the event was re-positioned as International Night to include most if not all the nationalities represented at the residential hall. Since then, it has had representations from an average of eight to ten countries, including those in Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia.

This student-led event aims to celebrate diversity, embrace differences, in addition to introducing different cultures through performances, games, and foods. The underlying intentions are: intercultural enrichment through exposure and informal interaction; integration of a residential community with individuals from different backgrounds through socialisation in a fun and engaging environment; and sustained internalisation through a common significant experience.

Conducted usually in the first semester of the academic year, the event has had a secondary role of orientation and bonding. Different national/cultural groups set up booths in a communal hall, similar to the concept of a country fair. The fair would be open for two to two and half hours. Typically, each booth is crewed by a group of students who would have foods representing their respective countries or ethnicities, accompanied by an introduction of these foods. Some booths would additionally have

traditional games. Another part of the event programme is staged performances which could comprise songs, dances, skits, and video presentations.

In reflecting on the effectiveness of these events, statistics show that since Academic Year 2016/2017, in relation to participation, the event has attracted more than 60% of the community with an additional 10% to 15% who were actively involved in attending to the booths or doing performances. Despite logistics and administrative challenges in the running of the event, residents' feedback on the experience and their learning has been encouraging. Three key common comments are: that first, the foods, games, performances, and interactions have broadened intercultural appreciation in a fun and memorable way; second, the event has formed a common experience and a talking point that most of the community could relate to; and third, the event has facilitated an informal dialogic experience that, for some, has sustained beyond the event. For those who introduced their respective cultures to participants, they reflected that the experience had been an even more enriching and meaningful one.

Noteworthy is that despite the current Covid-19 pandemic that has severely restricted mobility, this initiative still continues. In a creative manner, IaH is brought to an e-platform. And with the online platform, it has opened up a plethora of potentials. Instead of a 2.5-hour event, it became a four-day cultural week with Instagram stories, infographics, trivia, Telegram polls, quizzes, and games, as well as pre-packed food samples from different cultures distributed to residents (in compliance with the University's safe management and food safety measures). Figure 3 illustrates some infographics designed for the event.

Figure 3. Examples of infographics for cultural week (Source: Authors).

Conveyed via social media platforms over a period of four days, such infotainment-type outreach material seemed to have resonated with the residents. Each trivia, teaser, game, and activity took only seconds or the longest one to two minutes to complete. Many engaged with the activities, some became talking points, and some were inspired to find out more. With learning points from this first online cultural week, plans have been discussed for the next one to invite and engage international students who have returned to their respective countries to participate online as contributors. This would extend and expand the residents' experience beyond the current diversity represented in the residential hall.

In the case of International Night/Culture Week, it has demonstrated Beelen and Jones' (2015) four criteria, namely purposeful integration, international and intercultural dimensions, informal curriculum, and domestic learning environment. On Shattle's (2008) three levels of engagement, this IaH event has demonstrated the first two levels of Shattle's framework and indicators of the university community dimension and perhaps beyond. However, it may not have reached the level of integration and internalization. Despite this, the event has been sustained for more than five years, as well as in a challenging situation such as the current pandemic.

Final thoughts

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic and racial unrest in many parts of the world, we contend that IaH has an even more significant role in contributing to internationalisation at higher education. For a sustainable IaH and a meaningful experience that will bring about deeper reflection and learning, we feel that the following three elements are important for success.

First is a critical mass. There should be a substantial number of students comprising different dimensions of diversity for an IaH programme to work, which in our context, could take reference from the larger university context. For example, critical mass at our residential setting could be established based on gender ratio, discipline, or the background of the university's undergraduate population. How diversity is defined and how programmes surface aspects of such diversity are contextualised, which has an influence on the success of such programmes.

Second is that IaH should be a whole university, or in our case, whole residence experience. It should go beyond one or two co-curricular activities, or a few academic programmes that focus on internationalisation. We acknowledge that this is not an easy endeavour, but it is one that will contribute to sustainability and internalisation. While our examples might seem relevant to only two living-learning contexts, they have nonetheless illustrated in practice how IaH could potentially be implemented in the rest of residences and university.

Third is intentionality, as underscored by Beelen and Jones' (2015) purposeful integration. In addition to the design of the intervention, indicators of effectiveness should be thought through. Statistics and informal feedback gathered from the residents are at best straw poll indications. These should be complemented by more insightful observations, especially in surfacing the extent to which IaH or internationalisation in general might have impacted on the students' beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

We contend that internationalisation as a strategic endeavour to cultivate students for global competencies can be done within a local environment, with the broadening of the definition to include peoples, cultures, and ethnicities of the local context. In addition, IaH could potentially address issues of inclusivity, mobility and accessibility, and would not privilege those who have over those who have not. Our contribution to this conversation are two work-in-progress examples that we trust have exemplified IaH.

References

Arkoudis, S., Baik, C., Marginson, S., & Cassidy, E. 2012. *Internationalising the student experience in Australian tertiary education: Developing criteria and indicators*. Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.

Basu, R.R., Banerjee, P.M., & Sweeny, E.G. 2013. Frugal innovation: core competencies to address global sustainability. *Journal of Management for Global Sustainability*. 1(2): 63–82.

Beelen, J. & Jones, E. 2015. Redefining Internationalization at Home. In Curaj, A., Matei, L., Pricopie, R., Salmi, J. & Scott, P. (eds.). *The European Higher Education Area*. 59-72. Cham: Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_5.

du Preez, P. 2018. On decolonisation and internationalisation of university curricula: What can we learn from Rosi Braidotti?. *Journal of Education: Periodical of the South African Education Research Association*. 74: 19-31. DOI: 10.17159/2520-9868/i74a02.

Green, F.M. 2013. Rethinking the bottom line for internationalization: What are students learning? *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Available: Available: http://chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/rethinking-the-bottom-line-for-internationalization-what-are-students-learning/31979. Accessed 30 August 2020.

Jansen, J. 2017. *As by fire: The end of the South African university*. Cape Town, RSA: Tafelberg.

Knight, J. 2003. Updated internationalization definition. *International Higher Education*. 33: 2-3.

le Grange, L. 2016. Decolonising the university curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education.* 30(2), 1-12.

Mahendran, Y.T. 2020. *Play-based Volunteering - PHolunteers give back*. Available: http://nus.edu.sg/osa/stories/details/Index/play-based-volunteering. Accessed 12 November 2020.

Prince George's Park House (n.d.). Available: http://nus.edu.sg/osa/pgphouse/about-us/overview. Accessed 15 October 2020.

Robson, S. & Wihlborg, M. 2019. Internationalisation of higher education: Impacts, challenges and future possibilities. *European Educational Research Journal*. 18(2): 127-134.

Shattle, H. 2008. *The practices of global citizenship*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

137

Stanlick, S.E. & Hammond, T.C. 2016. Service-learning and undergraduates: Exploring connections between ambiguity tolerance, empathy, and motivation in an overseas service trip. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*. 4(1): 273-289.

Tan, J.P.L., Choo, S.S., Kang, T. & Liem, G.A.D. 2017. Educating for twenty-first century competencies and future-ready learners: research perspectives from Singapore. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*. 37(4): 425-436.

Weyrauch, T. & Herstatt, C. 2017. What is frugal innovation? Three defining criteria. *Journal of Frugal Innovation*. 2(1): 1-17. DOI: 10.1186/s40669-016-0005-y.