

*The Challenge of Curriculum Design in Transnational Classroom:  
Put Theory into a Practice*

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Abstract

This paper aims to review existing activities in the internationalisation of the curriculum at one division of a university in Melbourne, Australia. It begins by looking at the concept of internationalisation in general then refines this to consideration of its transnational dimension. This entails treatment of the challenges, issues, and opportunities facing students undertaking transnational programs leading to degrees at the university informed by the author's reflection and professional practice in the field. This includes synthesis of the results of end of semester surveys administered to 3 cohorts of students each 40 during 2011 to 2012 specifically focused on changes to a third year undergraduate eCommerce unit. The paper's findings address significant policy, behavioural and curricular issues, which are of relevance to other universities engaged in transnational education.

## ***Introduction***

Internationalisation is considered imperative in preparing graduates for participation in an increasingly globalised society. At a more focused educational level it involves the creation of an “open, tolerant and cosmopolitan university experience” (Kalantzis & Cope 2000, p.31) and on a higher, social plane, the development of “the cultural bridges and understanding necessary for world peace” (Larkins 2008, p.25). At the educational level, the agenda extends over issues of international, national, institutional and personal significance based on reciprocal relationships and a “flow of knowledge and cultures across national boundaries” (Slethaug 2007, p.5). To properly address this agenda, Knight (2003) re-defines the term internationalisation in Higher Education as the integration of international, intercultural, or global dimensions into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.

Knight (2004) argues that internationalisation is fundamentally influencing the world of higher education. Despite Australia having about 7% of the world’s international student body (OECD 2010), the education sector is facing increasing challenges due to the state of the global economy, which may subsequently impact on international students as a revenue stream in the future. The current challenge for Australian universities is therefore, to embrace internationalisation in the face of adversity. This entails finding ways of protecting the viability of current revenue-focused approaches by balancing them with those that better address the educational and other needs of the students concerned.

## ***Methodology***

Following an in-depth review of the relevant literatures (internationalisation of the curriculum; teaching and curriculum design in the transnational classroom), a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was adopted. The research was conducted over a two-year period including semester 1, 2011, summer term 2011 and semester 2, 2012. Quantitatively this involved statistical analysis of the performance of three 30-40 strong student cohorts, taking the same final year of a business unit in successive years. The unit is a third year unit for students with majors in eCommerce or Business Analysis enrolled in the University’s ‘2+2 CAP’ (Collaborative Articulation Program). It is also available as an elective for local students taking accounting or management courses. Data were collected on assignments and examinations and on contributions to tutorials and online discussion threads. In the latter, marks were awarded for student contributions and their responses to the comments of others. The data under both headings (assignments/examinations and tutorials/discussion threads) were aggregated by year and simple distribution analysis was conducted. No further quantitative analysis was undertaken at this point because of concerns that any resultant findings might be skewed by differences between the three cohorts.

The questionnaire was designed to collect two types of qualitative feedback. The first was that relating explicitly to the specific changes that had been made to the unit. The second, was more implicit in nature and concerned reflection and ‘reading-between-the-lines’ analysis of the implications of the student responses for the success or otherwise of the internationalisation initiative. Participation in the survey was both voluntary and anonymous.

The major focus was on the qualitative research dimension because anticipated differences in academic standards, in spoken and written English, and in motivation and life experience between cohorts were deemed to make this a more fruitful approach. Such differences would not have mattered had the study addressed the same group of students over the two year period. However, with different cohorts involved in each of the three semesters this was a factor. Feedback from these exercises contributed to efforts at improving unit design in the search for enhanced student experience of studying in transnational classroom.

Figure 1 below presents the curriculum design framework underlying both the research and practice reported here. The purpose of the research and the associated framework was to redesign the unit so as to obtain higher value in the teaching and learning process, including improved outcomes for students. The framework depicts all relevant stakeholders and the value creation process. The value creation process depicted is underpinned by mainstream research in the areas of global professionals and citizens (Bremer & van der Wende 1995; Knight 2004; Gibson, Rimmington & Landwehr-Brown 2008; Leask 2009), transnational education (Bolton & Nie, 2010; Vignoli, 2004) and internationalisation of the curriculum (Leask 2009). These matters are treated in detail in the following section.

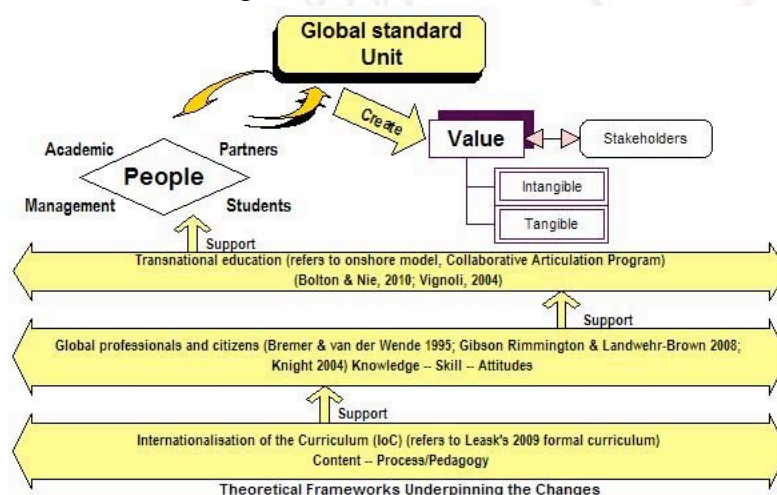


Figure 1 Outline and components of the value creation framework for internationalisation of the curriculum

### ***Internationalisation of the Curriculum***

Internationalisation can have multiple dimensions, which include academic mobility, commercial presence, cross-border delivery and consumption abroad (Salehi n.d.). Knight (2004) argues that the term 'Internationalisation of the Curriculum' means various things to different people, including:

- A series of international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers.
- International linkages, partnerships, and projects.
- International academic programs and research initiatives.
- The delivery of education to other countries through new types of arrangements such as branch campuses or franchises, using a variety of face-to-face and distance techniques.
- The inclusion of an international, intercultural, and/or global dimension into the curriculum and teaching learning process.

Absalom and Vadura (2006) note the presence of three trends in the conceptualisation of internationalisation:

- Internationalisation as *content*: For example, an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students and/or foreign students (Bremer & van der Wende 1995).
- Internationalisation as a *process/pedagogy*: For example, the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education (Knight 2004).
- *Societal aspects* of internationalisation: For example, a curriculum and intercultural dimension embracing content, teaching and learning processes and support services (Leask 2009).

None of these definitions actually prescribes a means of achieving effective internationalisation. However, Leask (2009) offers two curriculum models, formal and informal, pertaining to internationalisation. The formal curriculum involves set teaching agendas based on specific content, topics and requirements where students are periodically assessed using various methods. The informal curriculum includes optional extracurricular activities that are not part of the formal requirements of the programme of study (Leask 2009). Leask (2009) makes the important point that use of these two forms of curriculum together can encourage the necessary engagement between international and local students. In this paper the focus is on the formal curriculum in a transnational context.

### ***Transnational education***

Transnational education programs are an established and integral part of the internationalisation activity of many Australian universities. Leask (2004) argues that

'Transnational' equates to an 'offshore' program delivered by academics at the overseas venue. Dunn and Wallace (2006) describe two of the different transnational teaching models adopted by Australian universities as follows:

- *Full delivery model*: where the Australian universities provide all curriculum/notes and resources to overseas partnership universities, but where the teaching is basically delivered by the overseas university (Debowski 2003; National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) 2003; Castle & Kelly 2004). Swinburne's Sarawak program is an example of this model.
- *Block teaching model*: where programs are delivered by local academics, bolstered by periodic block teaching by Australian counterparts (Debowski 2003). The Swinburne Kaplan program in Singapore is an example of this model.

These models present various challenges and opportunities to those offering transnational higher education (TNHE) programs including the potential refinement, redefinition and alignment of value propositions for all stakeholders (Bolton & Nie 2010). An alternative is the *onshore transnational model* in which learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based" (UNESCO/CoE 2000).

This paper is based on experiences with an *onshore transnational model* at an Australian university. The focus is on onshore overseas students in what is known as the 2+2 CAP (Collaborative Articulation Program) program whereby students from partner universities in China study for two years at their home university and then come to Australia for a further two years to complete their degree. On completion of the program, the students receive degrees from both their original university and the university in Australia.

### ***The implications for teaching and curriculum design practice in the transnational classroom***

Curricula are prescriptive and general in nature, basically specifying the topics that must be understood and to what degree in order to achieve a particular grade or standard. The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (*The Australian Curriculum* 2011) define the purpose of a curriculum as designed to develop successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. This includes both the range of courses from which students choose their study subjects, teaching, learning and assessment materials and a specific learning program (Biggs & Tang 2007; Kelly 2009). Researchers, such as Biggs (2003), Brabrand and Andersen (2006) and Prideaux (2003) also argue that the curriculum should be inclusive and respond to graduate capabilities frameworks. In a transnational situation, curriculum design should consider student requirements on a truly transnational basis, applying both to students from home and from overseas.

## **The practice context**

The context in which this paper is set is that of a transnational, face-to-face undergraduate Business Analysis and eCommerce course taught mainly to international students (mostly Chinese students from partner institutions) along with a smattering of local students. In essence this was a program providing students with a globally-relevant education drawing widely on a diversity of mutually sustaining cultures and values.

## **The re-design process for the unit**

The research reported here is based on a three-year cycle of change to teaching and learning practices in the 2+2 CAP (Collaborative Articulation Program), business unit. It must be cautioned that in this case, the ‘transnational’ unit was comprised overwhelmingly of Chinese students from partner institutions, leavened with a smattering of local students.

Following what was in many ways an unsatisfactory experience with the first year of this unit, both in terms of student performance and student and staff satisfaction, considerable thought was given to finding ways to improve it. This largely entailed a search for accommodation between two elements essential for curriculum design: alignment and innovation:

- **Alignment:** Occurs when students understand “why” they are learning as well as acquiring specific knowledge. This is likely to enhance student motivation, but it requires having clear aims, objectives and outcomes for units, preferably based on the use of alignment models such as those of Biggs (2003) and Blumberg (2009). These models enable the linking of aims and objectives to content, activities and assessments, and the mapping of links between them leading to successful achievement of the overall learning objectives.
- **Innovation:** Whether in terms of attempts to improve student behaviour in class or enhance their motivation, innovation in content and in delivery mechanisms is important in achieving the best outcomes.

Apart from the specifics of teaching and learning approaches, a clear objective in the reforms was achievement of a genuine dimension of internationalisation to the program. The focus was on the formal aspect of Leask’s (2009) proposed curriculum for developing the international and intercultural perspectives of students as global participants. It also involved the use of a set teaching agendas based on specific content, topics and requirements where students were periodically assessed (Leask 2009). The focus was sufficiently inclusive to span all three of the trends in conceptualisation identified by Absalom and Vadura (2006).

## **Transnational curriculum design**

In a transnational situation, curriculum design must take account of students wants and needs for employment in a global/international environment. Gibson, Rimmington & Landwehr-Brown (2008) identify the key effects of globalisation as being increased interdependence, interconnectedness and cultural diversity. They draw on the literature to identify a set of key elements of global citizenship which include:

- Knowledge (e.g. understanding of diversity, peace and conflict, social justice, etc.)
- Skills (e.g. research and enquiry skills, communication skills, cooperation and conflict resolution skills, etc.) and
- Attitudes (e.g. appreciation of human dignity, empathy towards other cultures and viewpoints, commitment to sustainable development, etc.).

The design of the unit pays particular attention to vocational outcomes as key elements of global citizenship, with a cultural dimension additional to those emerging from the specific cultural backgrounds of students. There are two reasons for this. First, is that technological and business specialisations can have their own peculiar cultures. Elements of global citizenship can better equip learners to work in a global environment. Second, in the context of the unit -Deriving Business Value, it can reasonably be expected that an international element will arise e.g. in the case of organisational networks that span national boundaries, organisational culture influences, dealing with stakeholders of the networks from diverse backgrounds, global information systems management, social capital and business sustainability in dynamic global economy. Finally, deep learning behaviour is important for graduates who will work in complex global environments (Marton & Slijo 1976, 1984; Dahlgren 1984; Gibbs 1992; Ramsden 1992, cited by Rust 2002 and Biggs 1999). Consequently the author followed the advice of Gibbs (1992) and included the following characteristics in the re-design of the unit:

- Embedding student motivation to the extent that students want and need to know
- Learning activities
- Engagement with others
- Having a suitably constructed knowledge base, whereby content is taught in integrated wholes and knowledge is connected to other knowledge

## **Specific challenges addressed in the unit**

In attempting to enhance the international characteristics of this unit, the following issues needed to be addressed:

- Language: Most students' English level was not high, which made it difficult for them to grasp certain theoretical concepts and discuss these in class.

- Cultural background: Significant differences between western and eastern culture influenced the nature of materials chosen for class use, for example business cases.
- Learning practices: In China, teachers tell students what to do and the students follow. The practice is to memorise and not to ask questions. This proved problematic in an environment that was based on a Western model of teaching where research skills and independent learning were central to success.
- Decision making: Most Chinese students came from backgrounds where much of the decision-making had been undertaken by teachers and parents, and faced with choices in class often had difficulty in responding effectively.
- Work experience: Most Chinese students lacked work experience and were unfamiliar with even the broadest aspects of organisational behaviour and culture.
- Lack of online communication skills: Most of the Chinese students had come through a traditional education system which lacked a facility that allowed online interaction.

The overall change process is captured in Figure 2 below:

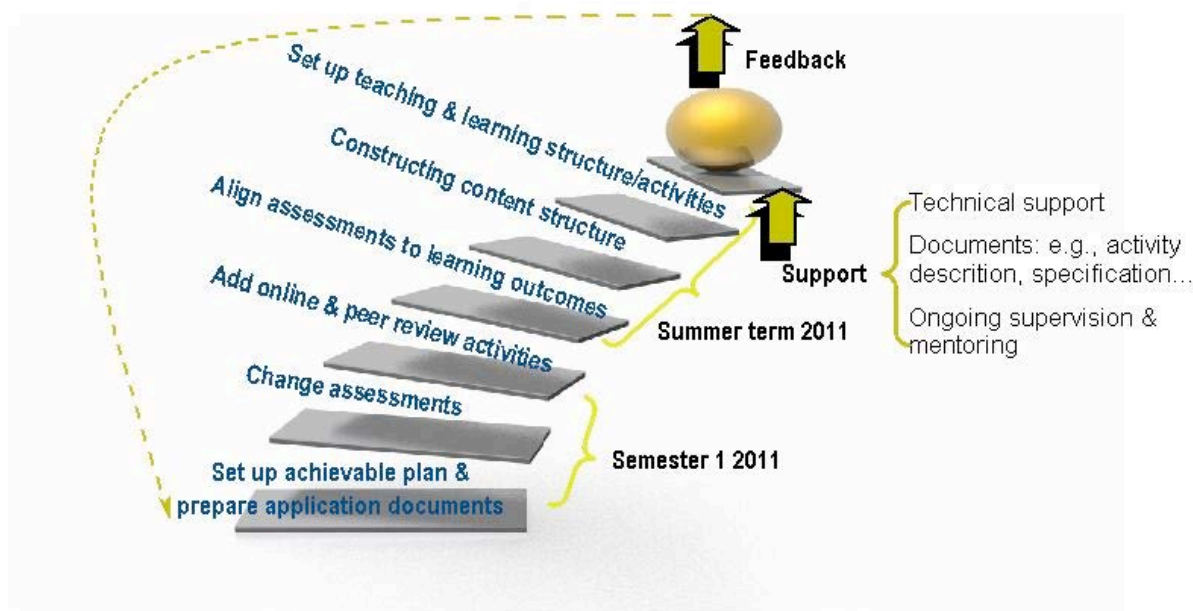


Figure 2 The change process for the unit

### Learning Objectives

The first step in the internationalisation of the unit curriculum should be to introduce an explicit internationalisation objective(s), which could be followed through with appropriate teaching/learning activities, support mechanisms and assessment tasks



(Leask 2009). The first revision of learning objectives in preparation for the second iteration of the unit did not include an international objective. It had been mistakenly assumed that all that was necessary was to amend unit content and delivery methods to achieve the internationalisation dimension. This oversight has since been recognised and the learning objectives for this annual unit have been expanded to include an internationalisation objective.

Although the changes to learning objectives might have appeared to be modest, they nonetheless served to clarify unit scope and extend it to the global environment. This automatically imbued the revised learning objectives with an international dimension that ensured that perspectives on global citizenship aligned with vocational outcomes for all students seeking to pursue a career in business, information systems or management within a global organisational environment.

### **Curriculum Content**

The changes to unit content have been substantial, with a complete rewriting of material from the first and second iterations. The six key topics covered included: concepts of value, value propositions, value networks, value from organisational design, value creation through IT/IS, and the measurement of organisational value and sustainability. The resulting changes linked these topics to the global level in three ways:

- *Overview of topics:* Including global trends, global networked economies, and global information systems management, the differences between national and international organisations, their business models and responses to issues of value creation, management and measurement. When discussing the topic of business models, we selected Google, Amazon, the Chinese online search company Baidu and the Australian online company, Forest Auction. The purpose was to help students understand the fundamental business needs and operating differences between national and international companies.
- *The cultural dimension:* By including both national and corporate business cultures, the new material covered issues of cultural understanding and conflict (Katz & Townsend 2000; Leidner & Kayworth 2006) while the use of case studies required students to relate cultural issues to value creation and management practices.
- *The social and community dimension:* Finally, we included coverage of the themes of corporate social responsibility and organisational and environmental sustainability.

For Chinese students in particular, the knowledge contained in this additional material was deemed especially important in regard to broadening both their international outlook and their understanding of the global business world.

### **Teaching and Learning Structures**

These changes to learning objectives, content and delivery mechanisms marked a further transition, one from the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning model to a blended model combining traditional teaching and learning approaches with use of advanced information and communication technologies. The main online activities included 1) Accessing and utilising online course material (lessons, learning objects, virtual lectures and assessments) via the Blackboard learning environment, 2) Participating in online discussion through Blackboard discussion threads, and 3) Completing quizzes online.

As participation in the unit occurred in both on and off-campus mode, students were required to take control of their own learning processes. While teaching staff were available to assist when required, the onus was on students to contact lecturers or tutors by email or via online discussion threads should a particular problem arise. It was expected that students would explore all the resources available online, and undertake the preparatory reading and exercises outlined in the unit learning materials. This latter activity was particularly important as there were no longer any formal lectures in this unit. While challenging to Chinese students, largely unfamiliar with online learning and self-study, this mode of delivery nonetheless helped them build-up their self-management and independent learning skills.

As the unit included many changes, it was considered essential to explain the new structure and its ramifications clearly at the outset of the semester. A weekly newsletter was circulated in advance to remind students of the prior preparation required and as a means of nurturing and sustaining their engagement with the unit.

### **Teaching and Learning Activities**

The changes to format, content and delivery methods called for consequent changes in levels of student participation and engagement, as follows:

**Personal reading and reflection:** Students were required to read the relevant textbook chapters in the Study Schedule, then answer a series of review questions and watch a related video before attending the class. They were then required to make a note of anything they did not understand for clarification and discussion during the face-to-face classes. They were also encouraged to undertake additional reading and research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topics under consideration. Finally, they were encouraged to maintain personal reflective study journals as a means of self-monitoring of progress in the unit.

**Attending Face-to-face classes:** Although there were no longer any traditional lectures in this unit, students were required to attend a 3 hour face-to-face session that was separated into several sections:

- Q&A: Where students raised questions about issues that they were unsure of, allowing other students and lecturers to discuss and answer the questions together.
- In-depth exploration of topics: With staff providing additional examples or cases to help explain key themes.
- Group discussion: Each week the class (divided into groups) discussed a business case provided in advance.

Online Discussion Threads: Learning to work in teams in a virtual community is one of the essential generic skills in the global environment. Participation in online activities was intended not only to help students become familiar with distance learning and working within a virtual team, but also to give them this life skill.

All these activities were designed to helping students build their ability to be self-directed and self-motivated learners.

### **Assessment**

Assessment for the unit took a variety of forms and comprised: a group assignment, combined with 2 short individual essays, 3 online quizzes and a final examination. The group assignment and essays embodied an internationalisation dimension, and students were required to take account of different cultures, markets, stakeholders, organisational structures and business networks in completing the work.

The group assignments were consciously designed to result in learning outcomes corresponding to the skills required for global citizenship (Gibson et al. 2008). This required collaboration within the group in the choice of an industry within which the group would write a proposal for a value-creating business operating in a cross-cultural, global market. This assignment was intended to encourage students to assess their own capabilities and potential for setting up a global business and had to:

- Include the performance of various tasks empowering individual group members to incorporate aspects of their own cultural background into the assignment process. Because in the unit, the great majority of students were from China, there was a requirement that they select at least two countries from which to run their proposed business. They had to compare and contrast the differences and set-up strategies most suited to the markets in the respective countries.
- Ensure that the set tasks are seen by the students as being relevant and important, reinforcing the link between theory and practice and the assignment itself.
- Involve continual and effective supervision of students to ensure that they were able to benefit and learn from working together.

In this latter context, the group assignments were predicated on recognition of the need for deep learning behaviour on the part of the students preparing for work in complex global environments.

Biggs and Tang (2007) emphasize the importance of taking account of student perceptions with regard to the relevance and importance of the set tasks. They argue that ‘what’ and ‘how’ students learn depends to a major extent on how they think they will be assessed. Similarly, Newstead (2002), indicates that assessment is one of the major determinants of how students approach their study. He argues that assessment is not just simply a means of determining whether students have acquired the knowledge and skills we are endeavouring to impart, but also play an important role in motivating students. Researchers, such as Biggs and Tang (2007), Rust et. al (2005), Blumberg (2009) and Nicolettou (2009) indicate that curriculum alignment is the foundation for designing suitable assessment tasks. Unfortunately, mistakes made during the curriculum design process can result in misalignment between the cognitive process dimension and learning objectives/outcomes, teaching/learning methods and activities and assessment task requirements (Blumberg 2009). Blumberg (2009) introduced a graphic tool which revised the Course Alignment Table based on Anderson et al.’s taxonomy, to determine if a course was aligned (objectives, outcomes, contents and assessment). Employed in Figure 3 this demonstrates an example of misalignment, because the first learning objective/outcome depicted has no assignment link to it. This method has been applied to the re-design of all activities and assessment tasks of the unit.

		The Cognitive Process Dimension (according to Anderson et. al. 2001)				
What level is each of the following?	Not Incl.	1. Remember (recognize, recall)	2. Understand (interpret, exemplify, summarize, infer, compare, explain)	3. Apply (execute, implement)	4. Analyze (differentiate, organize, attribute)	5. Evaluate (check, critique)
Objectives/outcomes		Describe the nature and purpose of a range of business systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain how organisations have adapted to operate in the digital economy.</li> <li>Understand the relationship between strategy, models and infrastructure.</li> </ul>		Outline the process of deriving business value in relation to a range of business systems.	Take a management view of information technology in relation to the derivation of business value.
Teaching/learning methods and activities		Lectures 6, 7, 8 and 9 introduced briefly on some business systems, such as ERP, DSS, CRM, BPR, SCM...	Tutorial activities: Case analysis on CRM and SCM	Self-study activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read learning material</li> <li>Prepare answers to self-assessment questions</li> </ul>		
Assessment task requirements	X	Task 1: Individual Assignment on value proposition (individual report 2000 + words; 20%)  Note: This report requires students to explain the concept of a business model and describe the main forms utilised in the context of eCommerce.	Task 2: Group Assignment on designing for value creation (group report 3000 + words; 30%)  Note: This report has two requirements. 1) Demonstrate your ability to analyse each of these models at a variety of levels, gradually increasing the depth of your understanding; 2) Outline the challenges of the modern competitive environment and the many ways business enterprises can respond to these challenges	Final Exam: Individual (50%)  Note: the requirements include: 1) Understand how each of the commonly used models enable enterprises to generate profitable outcomes using electronic commerce; 2) Describe the challenging roles of intermediaries and the nature and importance of the growth of strategic relationships and collaboration in eCommerce; 3) Extend your knowledge into the models of eFinance and		

Figure 3: An example of misalignment problem in the previous the unit design

### Support

It was understood from the start that both staff and students might require additional support to be able to successfully tackle the proposed internationalisation initiative. While Leask’s (2009) definition uses ‘support’ with respect to students in a more

generic sense, here the concern is with support directly related to the unit content, teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks; and in particular the (arguably more demanding) modifications. Therefore, the staff were prepared to offer reviews of student draft work around assessment tasks if requested, and had on-hand strategies for collaboration and conflict resolution within groups.

Marking criteria and the arrangements for the moderation of student work were also developed collaboratively by staff, to ensure that everyone was comfortable with how to assess and provide feedback. This process included familiarisation of all staff with the modified content.

### ***Evaluation of changes in light of student feedback***

All changes were introduced incrementally during the 2 years - 3 semesters. The improvement in the final results achieved by students can be seen quite clearly in Table 1, which compares student performance in assignments and the final examination between semester 1 and summer 2011. Apart from a quite dramatic improvement, the total of students failing the unit dropped 19 % (from 22 % to 3 %). The overall Grade Point Average (GPA) increased by 0.379.

Table 1 Comparison of Students' Overall Results between semester 1 2011 and summer 2011

Level Grade	Semester 1, 2011 (Total 32 Students)		Summer, 2011 (Total 35 Students)		Improvement
	Total Students	%	Total Students	%	
High Distinction	0	0	2	6	6%
Distinction	3	10	0	0	-10%
Credit	9	28	17	48	20%
Pass	13	40	15	43	2%
Fail	7	22	1	3	-19%
Overall GPA	1.250		1.629		0.379

Despite increasing the standards required to succeed in the assignments and final examination paper, results continued to improve. Table 2, which compared students' overall results between Summer 2011 and Semester 2 2012, shows that although there were no further increases in the incidences of Higher Distinction and Distinction passes, more students achieved credit level and none failed. The overall Grade Point Average (GPA) increased by 0.012.

Table 2 Comparison of Students' Overall Results between summer 2011 and semester 2 2012

Level Grade	Summer, 2011 (Total 35 Students)		Semester 2, 2012 (Total 39 Students)		Improvement (%)
	Total Students	%	Total Students	%	
High Distinction	2	6	0	0	6
Distinction	0	0	2	6	-6
Credit	17	48	21	54	6
Pass	15	43	16	41	-2
Fail	1	3	0	0	0
Overall GPA	1.629		1.641		0.012

In semester 1 2011, of the 32 students enrolled, 18 (56.1 %) participated in the end-of-unit survey. Following the summer study period of 2011, 32 students (of 35 enrolled) completed the end of term questionnaire, and Semester 2 2012, saw 35 students (89.5% of 39 enrolled) complete the end-of-semester questionnaire. In all three semesters, the students completed a 20 question questionnaire survey with sufficient open-ended questions to allow for additional comment and suggestions. For reasons of space, this feedback is reported as four key basic themes:

1. Aspects that students liked about the unit.

Survey responses indicated that there was much to like about the unit. This included its open and friendly environment, the global and international character of the content and the experience of working in teams, on cases drawn from the real world of business. Students welcomed the exposure to entirely new concepts such as intangibles and social capital and saw value in taking the unit, even as a complement to other units, for example management and IT units. As much of what they liked had in fact emerged from the changes made to the unit, it can be reasonably concluded that the changes were successful. This also matches with the improvements in students overall results.

2. Areas which students thought could be improved.

Students indicated that comparatively minor adjustments were required to improvement the unit. One common suggestion was that more time was needed to complete assignments and the final examination. Another had to do with levels of student involvement, for example, the need for increased participation in discussion threads and more equitable involvement in group work. Perhaps most interesting, was a comment to the effect that greater diversity in the student body would have made for a more interesting study experience. This was interesting both because of the largely homogeneous nature of the student body and the widely perceived value of diverse student cohorts to the transnational education process.

3. How students compared the teaching approach (informal and interactive) to that of formal lectures?

Survey respondents provided overwhelming support for the new approach to content delivery, reporting only minor reservations related to time pressures and language difficulties. Students indicated that they found the unit interesting and stimulating and most enjoyed the opportunities for discussion and presentation of findings, including the opportunity to improve their written and spoken English. The author was especially pleased to find that students cited the area of critical thinking as one where they had gained skills as a result of taking the unit, given that this is not a characteristic widely associated with Chinese students. In China, the traditional teacher-dominated, passive learning techniques are prevalent in learning institutions (Wang, 2006). Again, the research reported here reinforced indications from the wider literature that in China, teachers will tell students what to read, what is important, how to find resources and what examples to follow. Students will quite slavishly obey and then memorise the content. They are not encouraged to ask questions and tend to lack both the knowledge of how to study independently or adopt necessary research skills to do so. The experience of this research project has been that Chinese students in particular, regularly ask questions such as “which book(s) should I read”, “what I should do for my assignment”, “do you have examples”.... so we often found that these students are lacking critical thinking skills.

4. What could be done in the future to help increase the level of student motivation for learning?

The responses from students relating to this theme was again, overwhelmingly positive, with the most common suggestions being to continue the practices adopted during semester 2 2012. A number of students suggested that more essays be set and model answers to questions provided, which was not altogether unexpected in a largely Chinese cohort, as in China, the teaching and learning process tends to be more heavily orientated towards what in the West might be regarded as ‘spoon feeding’. Other suggestions included holding debates in class and the arrangement of class visits to businesses.

Overall the responses indicated that the amended unit was well designed and was providing sound learning practices and opportunities.

The broader context for the teaching and learning experiences reported here was that of a second-tier, Australian university where the quality of teaching and learning in courses designed for market relevance were major selling points in the higher education marketplace. Accordingly, the search for constructive alignment and engagement with students who were highly motivated and open to knowledge and ideas that crossed boundaries and cultures, was something of an act of faith. The ideals of transnational education with students living and learning in at least two academic jurisdictions while acquiring knowledge and life skills is rarely pursued by formal subject-focused curricula underpinned by an entire infrastructure of course and unit operation and development. All this notwithstanding however, so far as the unit in Creating Business Value was concerned, there was considerable variance between

widely accepted and indeed, validated theory and the practical learning outcomes obtained.

### **Conclusion**

The modifications made to this unit were driven by the desire to truly internationalise both the content and process pedagogy in a unit 'Deriving Business Value' that not only was new to the curriculum, but also was something completely different to the overwhelmingly Chinese student cohort. The aim was to combine the themes of value creation and globalisation in an international teaching and learning environment that provided a personal and experiential way of engaging with the curriculum.

There were gains from the reforms to the unit – both in a marginally enhanced level of student-staff interaction and an overall improvement in the grades achieved. One remains convinced of the fundamental importance of alignment, active learning and student motivation, while acknowledging the need for more attention to be paid to cultural, international and transnational issues when designing curricula. In seeking to identify the different factors that make up these cultural, international and transnational dimensions, questions need to be asked not only about student motivation both as regards participation in academic life, but also the reasons for course selection and indeed, for moving abroad for this purpose. Otherwise, the implication is that there will be few real winners in such international educational enterprises. Host universities are unlikely to achieve significant gains, other than in terms of increased fee income, while overseas students are likely to acquire only a superficial level of education. This draws us back to figure 1 outlined at the beginning of this paper and to the message that when engaging in curriculum design, it is necessary to consider all stakeholders, and consider the value that can be offered to all parties involved?



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