Competing rationales for and discourses of internationalisation: Implications for academic staff development

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Abstract: Internationalisation is a much debated and interpreted concept in higher education institutions in Australia. Universities have a clear responsibility to prepare graduates with international perspectives, who can be active and critical participants in world society. However, economic rationales for internationalisation are also important and internationalisation is seen by many Australian universities as critical to success in an increasingly globalised society in which there are economic imperatives to sell educational products and services in the world marketplace. These different rationales for internationalisation are reflected in multiple discourses, all of which contribute to the construction of internationalisation. This paper explores internationalisation at an Australian university through discourse analysis of a corpus of texts, identifies conflicting and competing discourses and discusses some of the implications of these for academic staff development.

Keywords: internationalisation; higher education; discourse analysis; academic staff development

Introduction
Internationalisation in the higher education sector is a much debated and diversely interpreted concept. It has been described as a process, specifically ‘the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution’ (Knight, 1994). It has also been described as being focussed on ‘making higher education (more) responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalisation of societies, economy and labour markets’ (van der Wende, 1997, p. 19). In Australia in 1998 Stuart Hamilton, of the Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee, defined internationalisation as ‘the complex of processes that gives universities an international dimension… relevant to all facets of university life, including scholarship, teaching, research and institutional management’ (Hamilton, 1998, p. 1) – a definition with many and varied possible interpretations. Knight (1997) appears to have been correct when she stated that ‘it is clear that internationalisation means different things to different people, and as a result there is a great diversity of interpretations attributed to the concept’ (p5). Knight (1997) also maintains that it is essential that institutions are clear about their rationale and motivations for internationalising, as this will determine the most appropriate approach to, and blend of, strategies for implementation and achievement of internationalisation objectives. It was against this background that I embarked on a study of internationalisation and internationalisation of the curriculum at my own university – a study designed to inform my professional practice as an academic developer with a university-wide brief in relation to the internationalisation of teaching and learning.
‘Snapshots’ of internationalisation

The concept of internationalisation, and one of its aspects, internationalisation of the curriculum, has been constructed over a number of years at the University of South Australia (UniSA). In this study I borrowed from both Foucault (1972; 1981) and Fairclough (1992) in my approach to exploring the historical and social construction of internationalisation of the curriculum at UniSA.

Knight (1997) describes internationalisation of the curriculum as a program strategy, one of many that are used by universities as they strive to internationalise. At UniSA internationalisation of the curriculum is largely defined by one of seven Graduate Qualities, Graduate Quality #7, which states that a graduate of the University will demonstrate international perspectives as a professional and a citizen (Leask, 2001). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which internationalisation and Graduate Quality #7 have been constructed in and by the discourse of the institution a corpus of texts was selected for analysis in this study. All texts in the corpus discussed internationalisation of the curriculum and Graduate Quality #7 within the institutional context. They were written, from 1996-2000, by different people for different audiences and purposes and represent ‘a multiplicity of discursive elements’ (Foucault, 1981). They included two reports on internationalisation of the curriculum written by academic staff, two documents written by professional development and student services staff for academic staff and students concerning internationalisation of the curriculum and a planning document focussed on the achievement of internationalisation goals written by management for the University community. They provided snapshots over time, from different perspectives, of the construction and representation of internationalisation of the curriculum at the University. In The History of Sexuality Foucault (1981) examines the development of discourses about sexuality using ‘genealogy’ as a methodology, as a ‘lens’ through which he reads the discourses and reveals power/knowledge networks (Carabine, 2001, p.268). Fairclough (2001) links the development of a knowledge-based economy with the increasing importance of discourses as producers, circulators and appliers of new knowledges (p231). His methodology for investigating the knowledges produced by discourses and the ways in which, as diverse representations of social life, discourses position social actors in different ways, offered me the opportunity to explore the construction of internationalisation at UniSA from a semiotic perspective – the way in which we ‘make meaning’ in relation to internationalisation and how that positions different people within and beyond the institution.

Methodology

The methodology used involved selection of a corpus of documents for analysis and critical discourse analysis using a method derived from the work of Fairclough (1992). Discourse is a form of social practice, a mode of action, which is socially and historically situated as well as being socially shaped and socially shaping (Fairclough, 1995, Ch 6). Critical discourse analysis systematically explores the relationships between discursive practices, events and texts and their wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes. The corpus was selected to represent the construction of internationalisation through discursive strategies (ways in which language is used by different ‘actors’ on the internationalisation ‘stage’) over a period of seven years - a snapshot of different perspectives defining and constituting it over a short but critical period of time. These practices construct and position different subjects of the discourse of internationalisation in different ways and give them different ‘roles’ and levels of power and authority.

The methodology included macro-level analysis of discursive practices; macro and micro level analysis of texts; macro description and analysis of the social practice (of which the discourse is a part) and micro analysis of the relationship between texts, discursive practices and social practices (and the relationship of these to ideologies and hegemonies associated with internationalisation of the curriculum at UniSA). Textual and linguistic description and analysis were useful in revealing and exploring the assumptions,
values and positions embedded within the discourse of internationalisation and the social practice of which it is a part; how these have developed and changed over time; and how they position the University and its community members in relation to internationalisation.

**Discourses of internationalisation**

Three complementary and competing discourses of internationalisation at the University of South Australia emerged from the data analysis – academic, economic and socio-cultural. The discourses are not independent and the relationships between them are complex. The discourses complement each other in that when taken together they create a holistic picture of internationalisation at UniSA as multi-faceted; driven by and driving economic, academic and socio-cultural agendas within the University, all of which are important components of internationalisation at UniSA. No single one of them ‘tells the whole story’ or ‘paints the whole picture’. The discourses position academic staff and students (and groups within these larger groups) quite differently – giving them different roles and responsibilities. The discourses also compete with each other ‘ideologically’; the decisions that people make about how they talk about internationalisation, the discourse that they select as the most appropriate, indicating their ideological positioning. The overall balance of discourses reflects what participants in and observers of the discourses perceive as the ideological positioning of the institution in relation to internationalisation and is likely to be seen as a reflection of its core values. The analysis shows some movement in ideological positioning over time and some contrasting and conflicting views of internationalisation and those involved in it.

International students, for example, are positioned differently in different texts - as powerful agents and drivers of internationalisation in some and products and indicators of internationalisation in others – and these positions reflect different ideological foundations of internationalisation. Where international students are described as valuable resources for utilisation in the development of a cross-cultural, ‘state-of-the-art’ learning experience for all students they are seen as deserving of quality services and support. Domestic students on the other hand are constructed as primarily monolingual, insular and needing to utilise a wider range of resources to become more outward-looking and internationally and cross-culturally aware and able. They need internationalisation and they need international students to help them to achieve it. And while international students may be positioned as a resource for internationalisation, they are also described as needing to develop their own international perspectives. International and domestic students are both positioned as future global professionals but international students are positioned more powerfully as drivers of internationalisation of the curriculum. In some texts international students are described as primary measures of the success of internationalisation strategies and an important source of revenue and sustainability for the institution as a whole. In these texts domestic students are invisible in the internationalisation agenda, playing no part in the achievement of internationalisation goals.

Williams (1997) identifies some key positions in the discourse of access to higher education in the 1990’s and uses these to explore the different understandings of access within the higher education community. I reversed this process in relation to the discourse of internationalisation at UniSA, using the positioning of subjects in the internationalisation process (the subjects being international students, domestic students and academic staff) outlined above to identify five different but related positions within the discourse of internationalisation at UniSA. These five positions are: academic nationalist, academic socio-culturalist; pragmatic socio-culturalist; academic pragmatist; and pragmatic marketeer.

Academic nationalists construct internationalisation as being primarily concerned with academic matters such as the curriculum – knowledge generation and transfer – within an international environment in which the national origin of students determines to a large extent their capacity to contribute to internationalisation of the curriculum. International students are, by virtue of their different cultural
background (different from domestic students) able to be utilised as resources for internationalisation of the curriculum. In this position there is homogenization of international students (although they come from diverse cultural and national backgrounds) as a group with certain characteristics, of domestic students (although they may also come from diverse cultural and national backgrounds) as a group with different characteristics from the international student group. The main difference between academic nationalists and academic socio-culturalists is that academic socio-culturalists place less emphasis on the national or cultural background of students as an indicator of their capacity to contribute to and benefit from the internationalisation agenda. Academic socio-culturalists position all students, regardless of national or cultural background, as contributors to and beneficiaries of the internationalisation agenda – they will all need to develop international perspectives and will all be able to assist others to do this in some way. For academic socio-culturalists academic and socio-cultural issues relate closely to internationalisation and are to a large degree inseparable. This position homogenises the student population, moving away from the distinction made between international students and domestic students made by the academic nationalists. Pragmatic socio-culturalists construct internationalisation as a response to globalisation and in particular the globalisation of the economy and the workplace, a force that requires the development of socio-cultural skills for survival and prosperity everyday life and in the workplace. Academic pragmatists also recognize the importance of globalisation and economic factors for and on internationalisation, but place greater emphasis than any other group on the role of the academic in the internationalisation process. For this group the academic manages and controls internationalisation of the curriculum and of the teaching and learning experience in a planned and systematic way and in so doing is responsive to and cognizant of global economic forces and their local effect. Pragmatic marketeers construct internationalisation as being a response to economic forces, necessary for institutional survival in a competitive global educational environment and something that can be primarily measured in terms of the number of international students enrolled in programs. They construct other aspects of internationalisation as beneficial by-products of the recruitment of international students. These discourse positions are one aspect of wider institutional discourses and have elements in them that stem from the wider national and global context. They are not independent and may co-exist, so that in one text it would be possible to take more than one discourse position, speaking from, for example, a pragmatic marketeer position at one time and an academic pragmatist position, at another.

The range of discourses and discourse positions within the texts reflect the variety of perspectives on and rationales for internationalisation in higher education more generally even though the corpus represents a small selection of texts over time in one institution – a sample of what has been written about internationalisation by different people at different times for different purposes. What is both interesting and significant is that:

- economic and academic discourses of internationalisation are present as either primary or secondary discourses in all of the texts suggesting that the rationales on which these discourses are based are critical to internationalisation
- the economic discourse of internationalisation has been foregrounded in recent years while the socio-cultural discourse has receded into the background.

This dominance of some discourses over others in different texts may be attributable to the social situation Foucault (1972, p97-98) in which the texts occur, their ‘situational context’. The situational context of the texts within the corpus, and of any text related to internationalisation in higher education, includes the national higher education context as well as the local institutional context, which is itself influenced by the national context. Marginson and Considine (2000) discuss the national context in detail – a context which they argue has undergone major change in recent years resulting in a ‘new kind
of higher education institution' (p. 3), a new institutional context. Their case study of 17 universities in Australia explores the responses of different kinds of university across Australia to outside pressures and finds a new kind of enterprise culture developing. In the ‘Enterprise University’ both economic activities and academic activities are important but the primary focus of both is the development of institutional prestige. The academic and economic well-being of institutions is seen as being both a contributor to and a result of institutional prestige. The changing national and institutional contexts, comprising the situational context, are reflected in the corpus. Not only is each text shaped differently, each constructs internationalisation differently and is likely to be interpreted differently depending on its unique situational and verbal context. The construction and interpretation of internationalisation at UniSA thus changes over time, both responding and contributing to changes in these contexts – thus economic discourses of internationalisation strengthen as academic discourses weaken, even though both are present at all times. This change is consistent with Marginson and Considine’s concept of the development of the Enterprise University in which money is a key objective but the academic dimension is also vitally important (2000, p.5).

At a time when the economic pressure on institutions of higher education in Australia is intensifying and government seeks greater control of the higher education sector it is important to reflect on the power of discourse to construct both what we do and why we do it. The presence of different discourses of internationalisation is both confusing and challenging for academic staff who often find themselves caught between academic and economic rationales for internationalisation. Facing increasing numbers of international students in their classes and hearing this described as ‘internationalisation’ they are in danger of ignoring the academic and socio-cultural benefits of internationalisation – benefits that can only be realised if they understand their roles and acquit their responsibilities in relation to their achievement.

The growing dominance of the economic discourse over time suggests a hierarchy in which this, the dominant discourse, is viewed as the defining discourse, of the highest order, the one which influences and affects all others. This seems to be taken as ‘understood’, as a given, in later texts where it is presented as ‘common-sense’, signaling that this discourse and the ideologies embedded within it, have either become, or are well on the way to becoming, naturalized (Fairclough 1992, p.87). This signals a significant shift in the discursive constitution of internationalisation over time – one which threatens to redefine the role of institutions and the academics who work within them. For an economic discourse of internationalisation generates a consumerist view of education, students as a community of consumers and staff as engaged in the ‘business’ of serving the needs of the consumers. This is the ideological work of discourse (Fairclough 1992, p.134), creating constructions of reality, representations of international students (as different from domestic students), staff (as undertaking a particular type of work) and internationalisation (as being primarily concerned with international students and the staff who work with them).

**Implications for academic staff development**

Currently, in practical terms, any occurrence of the term ‘internationalisation’ can be interpreted in several ways (as primarily concerned with academic, economic or socio-cultural rationales and outcomes). This very broad meaning potential (Fairclough 1972, p186-189) of the term internationalisation may be reduced by the context but will not always be reducible to a common understanding. We cannot, for example, assume that when academics talk about internationalisation they are referring to academic matters related to internationalisation of the curriculum for academics are also influenced by economic rationales for internationalisation – by increasing numbers of international students in their classes and the need to deliver programs that will attract more of them in order to maintain viability. Meaning potential is also, typically, unstable (Fairclough 1992, p.186). This is likely to lead to confusion and irritation...
concerning the internationalisation agenda as individuals try to make sense of what internationalisation means for their professional practice; what they should be doing; how they should be prioritising; what exactly their role is as an academic in the complex and changing world of higher education.

Academic staff are also, however, independent, powerful and responsible interpreters of University policy, making informed and professional decisions about what and what not to include in their internationalised curriculum. However, the dominance of economic discourses of internationalisation over academic and socio-cultural discourses positions academic staff in a less powerful role – as respondents to rather than shapers of the internationalisation agenda. However, as members of a discourse community, individual academics do have the power to influence the agenda and to move the discourse of internationalisation back to a focus on the academic rather than the economic agenda. While individual and group subjectivities and roles are constituted through discourse, and ‘subjects within a discourse usually have less power to influence the nature of that discourse … they are not simply passive recipients’ (Davies, Williams, & Webb, 1997, p.18). Fairclough (1992) argues that we can initiate social change by consciously intervening in discourse practices – he terms this the ‘technologisation’ of discourse. It involves redesigning discourse practices and training people to use these new practices, thus bringing about ‘discursive change through conscious design’ (p.216). It is important, however, that academic staff are assisted to do this if their role as academics is not to be increasingly defined by the economic discourse of internationalisation - by increasing numbers of international students in their classes and the need to cater to their diverse needs as customers, rather than their needs as global students and citizens.

Academic staff development has an important role to play in intervening in and redefining discourse practices around internationalisation. Firstly, it needs to highlight the presence of multiple and competing discourses of internationalisation and the ideological and hegemonic struggles that are being played out within them. Secondly, it needs to build greater awareness and understanding of their role in the development of the academic discourse of internationalisation in higher education generally and more specifically within their own discipline. Thirdly, it needs to give individuals and groups the language they need to talk about academic perspectives on internationalisation with confidence and authority so that, at an institutional level, the ‘economic’ discourse of internationalisation cannot dominate.

If we do not do this at an institutional level across Australia the risk is that Australian higher education will increasingly be defined as having a narrow, dollar-driven approach to internationalisation rather than being primarily concerned with producing and disseminating international knowledge and preparing graduates for life in an increasingly global, interdependent world.

In summary, academic staff development needs to focus on the development of a shared view of internationalisation that is consistent with the fundamental importance of the academic work done in universities. It needs to focus on assisting academic staff to:

• understand and develop their own discipline-specific internationalisation goals related to learning outcomes for graduates
• appreciate the value of and active support for growth in diversity
• recognise the value of international students in cultural terms
• provide support for the development of international perspectives in all students
• consciously adopt a particular discourse position in relation to internationalisation.
Conclusion

Internationalisation in higher education is in danger of being dominated by economic rationales and discourses. Discourses reflect ideological positions and economic discourses of internationalisation construct the roles of academics and students quite differently from academic discourses of internationalisation. But while the choice of discourse and discourse positions is not necessarily a conscious one, the subjects of discourse positions are not, always passive and powerless. Through carefully planned and focussed academic staff development academic staff can be made more aware of the power of economic discourses of internationalisation and given the tools they need to change discourse practices in their own institutions - to reassert the academic discourse of internationalisation and reconstruct their own roles in the internationalisation agenda of their own institutions and of higher education in Australia more generally.

References


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