



Internationalisation of the Curriculum in the Common Core

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Based on interviews with 13 Common Core teachers as well as the Director of the Common Core, this briefing discusses how the Common Core Curriculum integrates the essence of internationalisation in its curriculum and specific courses.

Introduction

To examine how internationalisation has been integrated into the curriculum at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), the Common Core Curriculum (CCC) may be a good place to start. The CCC is designed to help students develop a broader perspective; navigate between their culture and the culture of others; become responsible citizens in local, regional and global communities; and cultivate intellectual and communication skills¹. These goals echo well HKU's overall educational aims of nurturing graduates with intercultural understanding and global citizenship.

With these ambitious goals in mind, it is illuminating to consider how the CCC has been designed and implemented to realise such goals. Based on informal interviews with 13 Common Core teachers as well as the Director of the Common Core, this briefing provides an overview of how the CCC integrates internationalisation in its curriculum and illustrates through specific course examples how the theme is embedded in course contents, learning outcomes, pedagogies, delivery, and assessment. It is clear from an analysis of the 13 HKU case examples that internationalising the curriculum involves far more than simply adding examples and alternative perspectives into course contents.



It means incorporating international and intercultural dimensions into every aspect of the curriculum in order to help students make sense of the interrelationships among various perspectives, understand local-global interactions, develop intercultural competence, and gradually become responsible and ethical global citizens.

A Naturally Unfolding Story

Given the way in which Common Core courses are designed, reviewed and evaluated, it is perhaps not surprising that CCC course topics are of a broad nature and draw their contexts and contents from around the world. The four areas of inquiry (Aols) at the heart of the CCC, namely Global Issues, Scientific and Technological Literacy, Humanities, and China: Culture, State and Society, clearly reflect a focus on broad global issues rather than narrowly defined, local issues.

In the Global Issues Aol, for example, all courses focus on issues and perspectives drawn from two or more countries or regions. For the Humanities Aol, there is no national boundary circumscribing most topics, such as history, arts or film. The issues discussed in the Scientific and Technological Literacy Aol are typically the challenges and opportunities faced by mankind rather than by any particular group of people. A classic example would be climate change. Even for the China Aol, elements of Chinese government, society and culture are situated in an evolving global environment. Internationalisation in the CCC, therefore, does not involve a procedure of 'integrating' additional perspectives or examples; instead, it simply operates within a landscape that is of a broad, complex and global nature.

Multiple Perspectives and Viewpoints

“If I can get students excited about things and really experiencing things, and understanding the problem from an emotional point of view, or scientific or analytical point of view, that's a good thing.”

One approach found in all interviews with Common Core teachers in response to internationalising the curriculum is to expose students to multiple

perspectives and viewpoints associated with the issue under discussion. Some of these viewpoints compete with one another while some belong to emerging and non-dominant paradigms (See Box 1).

Providing students with multiple perspectives and encouraging them to critically analyse these perspectives is also one of the key teaching strategies advocated in the literature. According to Zimitatⁱⁱ, internationalising curricula ‘requires changes in pedagogy to encourage students to develop critical skills to understand forces shaping their discipline and challenge accepted viewpoints’. It is therefore not so much exposure to multiple perspectives that is a feature of an internationalised curriculum, as the cultivation of critical thinking skills that enable students to reflect on and challenge established wisdom.

BOX 1 Examples of equipping students with multiple perspectives

- On one course in the Global Issues AoI, the teacher encourages students to read news from different media sources so they can get a sense of how different media report the same issue.
- On another course in the Global Issues AoI, the teacher asks students to critically analyse various factors that can explain poverty and economic development using a number of sources, including scholarly evidence, cases, and examples.
- On one course in the Scientific and Technological Literacy AoI, the teacher presents students with two articles showing competing ideas with regard to the causes of global warming. Students need to carefully examine the arguments articulated in each article and form their own opinions.

Local-global Interactions

“ I think it’s interesting particularly in Hong Kong to get students to be familiar with common issues around the world. It is not just only to know people are different. It’s important to know despite all the differences, there are some things that are common to it. ... I think you want to have more conversation by saying what is in common. I think globalisation is not only about diversity, it is also about commonality. ”

A majority of the Common Core courses that were discussed in our interviews emphasise students’ development of an awareness of local-global interactions. Such an awareness involves understanding the impact that incidents that occur in one country have on other countries, as well as understanding the implications of actions taken in one local community for the global environment.

In our interviews, several Common Core teachers observed that connecting the local to the global can be challenging for students, and that most students need guidance to make sense of the connections. A number of teaching strategies are found to be effective for providing such guidance, and some of these are discussed below with examples. Indeed, a teacher of a single course may effectively adopt a combination of these strategies (See Box 2).

Most Common Core teachers we interviewed observed that it was particularly valuable for students to develop an awareness and knowledge of local-global interactions. The importance of such connections has also been highlighted in the literatureⁱⁱⁱ. It has been stated that intercultural competence is not about whether students know about other countries; rather, it is the extent to which they understand their own cultures and values, informed by their knowledge of and exposure to the outside world^{iv}.

BOX 2 Approaches to connecting the local with the global

a. Navigation across micro- and macro levels:

A number of courses start from global-level challenges, such as sustainable development, and prompt students to think about a series of manageable, local, and small actions in their daily lives that could contribute to making a positive difference in the world. Alternatively, some courses begin with familiar examples in daily lives and then discuss how these local phenomena affect and are affected by the global environment.

b. Scenario-based approach:

A number of courses employ scenario-based assessment. One typical example in a course on climate change is using a simulation of a United Nations Climate Summit, during which a number of students are cast in the roles of representatives from one nation. Each group of students needs to present the solution that favours the nation they are representing and try to lobby other ‘nations’ to support them.

c. Comparative approach – what is special about Hong Kong?

A number of courses require students to compare and contrast some other countries or cities with Hong Kong on a specific topic. Using a relatively more familiar place such as Hong Kong as the anchor for the comparison study helps students navigate between the local situation and the situation in other countries. Such comparison also provides students with opportunities to appreciate the unique features of Hong Kong.

Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Engagement

“ I hope there is something that will play to each of the student’s strengths. There is debate, a social science kind of thing; a lab report of science project that helps science students. We also got things like designing posters ... So students bring in their experience and their perspectives to the course. I very much encourage peer assistance so that they can rely on each other and appreciate others’ strength. They work together and all benefit. ”

Intercultural engagement is said to be at the heart of internationalised education because it helps students develop critical engagement, self-reflection, internal dialogue, and sensitivity towards the interaction and communication between themselves and others^{v,vi}.

The Common Core teachers we interviewed were very much aware of the cultural differences among their students. It is worth mentioning that these cultural differences do not all derive from differences in nationality or place of birth. In many cases, the most notable differences between students spring from the disciplinary backgrounds that students who enroll on Common Core courses come from. A number of Common Core teachers turn this type of diversity into an asset to create intercultural and interdisciplinary engagement (See Box 3). The overall strategy for creating intercultural engagement is to appreciate how other cultures and values can shape one’s thoughts, language and behaviours. Another strategy is to create a safe space where different voices are solicited, and treated equally with respect^{vii}.

BOX 3 Examples of creating intercultural and interdisciplinary engagement

a. Personal sharing and reflections: A course related to death and dying encourages students to explore and reflect on this conventionally ‘undiscussable’ topic from a range of cultural, religious, business, and professional perspectives. Students with personal perspectives or values can share their views and are treated with respect. Students are also encouraged to relate the matter to their respective disciplines.

b. Experiments or creative exercises: A course in the Scientific and Technological Literacy AoI employs a Black Box Assignment, which requires students to find out what is inside a box without opening or touching the box. Students from different disciplines work together to design and carry out experiments. Science students and non-science students bring different approaches and expertise to solve problems. Methods from any disciplines are deemed appropriate for deriving the ‘right’ answer as long as students follow scientific principles.

International Students as Learning Resources

“ ...It’d better focus on feelings. What is interesting is how they feel. Students reflect on cross-culture (scenarios) but this needs to be based on enough trust among one another. Teacher can help students reflect on their personal attitude. ”

Regarding cultural diversity as an advantage and using international students’ experiences and perspectives as precious learning resources is recommended by the literature as another promising move towards internationalisation of the curriculum. A common example is when teachers of international business invite students from various cultural backgrounds to devise cases based on their own experiences, which are subsequently used as case studies for discussion and analysis^{viii}.

This approach is evident in several Common Core courses. In one course related to history, students are given the opportunity to ‘make history’ by carrying out a project about their own life and the past. The student project results are presented through a video clip and shared with other students. Another tool in the course that uses students as learning resources is one which requires students to make a time capsule, recording their opinions about the course and sharing their experience with students in future cohorts. Both methods make use of students’ voices and opinions as valuable teaching and learning resources.

Flexible Assessment Designs

“ If using different kinds of assessment activities, students will be able to get feedback immediately and use it in other courses to build their skills rather than actual knowledge. Transferring those skills into their discipline or elsewhere help them develop into educated people, so I try to think more in terms of projects: to work with students to have a physical outcome (website, video, podcast, research paper), to do something concrete and display what they learn. ”

Most Common Core teachers we interviewed allow a high level of flexibility in some of their assessment components. For project-based or essay-type assessment tasks, students are often granted a degree of autonomy in choosing a topic or an area in which they would like to launch an investigation. A number of Common Core teachers especially encourage students to choose a topic that is relevant and meaningful to their own profession, culture or discipline. In these courses, students are encouraged to consider the impact of globalisation on their future profession and form their essay or discussion topic around that. To keep students on track while they are exploring various possibilities, this type of assessment task usually gives students plenty of

opportunities to get feedback from the teacher, sometimes through submitting a proposal or outline of the topic.

We found a wide range of assessment forms in Common Core courses, as well as a great deal of flexibility in assessment design, which allows students from various backgrounds to play to their strengths and excel in at least some of them. Presentations, groupwork, and in-class participation are generally the most common assessment forms in Common Core courses, while various other forms, such as blog contributions, photo-based assessment and fieldwork participation are also quite common^{ix}. The availability of e-learning tools also contributes to the flexibility of assessments. Some courses deploy online platforms or administer quizzes on Moodle so that students can respond outside of class time.

Taking Stock

In this small scale study, we have started to identify some of the ways in which internationalisation is integrated into the CCC (See Box 4). The convergence of the set of pedagogical considerations voiced by teachers across disciplines points to a number of effective approaches to developing in students a tacit understanding of intercultural awareness and global citizenship.

BOX 4	What makes an internationalised Common Core Curriculum at HKU?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended learning outcomes that show the competences needed for students to become professionals and responsible citizens in multicultural contexts
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics and contents that are important and relevant to a wider community
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple perspectives, frameworks, controversial issues, competing values, and dominant and emerging views
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local-global interactions and connections
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural and interdisciplinary engagement (e.g., intercultural or interdisciplinary groupwork)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students as learning resources (e.g., student-generated cases; student-led projects)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible assessment methods (e.g., flexibility in choosing topics; a variety of assessment components; online platforms)

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- ix. For a fuller discussion of assessment in the CCC, please refer to the wise assessment resources <http://www.cetl.hku.hk/teaching-learning-cop/assessment-in-the-common-core-curriculum/>

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