

Malaysia's Knowledge Economy: The Practice of Collaborative Pedagogy to Realize National Goals

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Abstract: The nature of pedagogy and the collaboration between international parties in subject design ameliorates some of the more negative characteristics of globalized education. I argue that the nature of globalization is to be found in the small and ongoing practices that constitute collaboration between differing parties. In this way, what globalization means is in fact constantly a negotiated contingent and is never settled. My argument is that reductive critiques of internationalization are far too simplistic. The example of EME 150 and the uptake through the Malaysian educational system of some of its components is an example not of 'imposition' or 'imperialism' but rather of a more negotiated and collaborative pedagogy that points to some of the benefits of cooperation, collaboration and by inference of globalization.

Introduction

Jan Aart Scholte argues that globalization is characterized by the 'transcendence of boundaries' (Scholte, 1997). The discourse of globalization and internationalization is now a critical driver of global educational reform (Guehenno, 1999; Plattner, 1999; Sites, 2000; Walby, 2000). From marketization in Australian Universities through to reform in Malaysian Teaching Institutes, the forces of global competition, as well as the need to become competitive in an increasingly competitive and aggressive international economy are forces for change. On the one hand, educational reform needs to maintain national priorities as argued by Mansell and When (1988). On the other hand, the process of global competition and competitiveness necessitate a radical restructuring of priorities to entail the continued effectiveness of national goals. Malaysia's Knowledge Based Economy Master Plan outlines the basic issue:

'The dictates of the environment characterised largely by technological advancements, greater market integration and globalisation, heightened competition as well as the increasing creation and use of knowledge, necessitate a paradigm shift and that Malaysia reengineers herself to meet these challenges (ISIS, 2002).'

The emergence of knowledge economies based on the structural requirement of the knowledge societies means that the structural role of education in such an environment is shifting. No longer content with an educational system where elite knowledge was the privilege of a minority and many were consigned to work in a Fordist industrial economy, post-industrial work requires a far broader range of skills and abilities. The ongoing need for life long learning and ability to communicate and adapt to rapid change is putting pressure on curriculum pedagogy and the structure of schooling (Cogburn 1998). Keeping formal educational institutions relevant to the educational needs of citizens in a globalized world is of course a significant driver for educational reform.

Critics such as Bowers (2003) from a more conservative position and Giroux (2003) from a more radical position argue that globalization in education is in some measure aimed at creating

consumers for a global capitalist order. The argument is that, essentially the process of globalization is about marketization. The standardization of education to meet the growing and ever expanding needs of a global market is for these thinkers among the major characteristics of globalization. In this way, the relationship of globalization to education is a relationship of commodification and homogenization. Students in a globalized education system are enacted as consumers and the process of inculcating consumer consciousness into them reacculturate them to the needs of a global capitalist order. Giroux argues that the 'learner' is 'simply a consumer of information' within the demands of educational globalization (Giroux 2000).

CA Bowers (2003) argues in a similar vein concerning the politics and economics of globalization from a conservative position. This enables him to go a step further with relation to pedagogy. Bowers also argues that economic and cultural imperialism animate globalization; however he also contends that forms of progressive social constructivist pedagogy rather than ways to counter and ameliorate aspects of globalization are in fact examples of its worst face. In other words, Bowers argument is that constructivist pedagogy such as the social constructivism of Vygotsky, Dewey and Freire are the Trojan Horse of Western imperialism (Bowers 2003; Bowers 2005; Sher and Flinders 2006).

Bowers (2003) position is that social constructive pedagogy is in fact an extension of western values and in this sense undercuts non-western societies by subjecting them to an English curriculum and mode of instruction that devalues and inhibits students from maintaining and living their local cultures. According to Bowers, students learn in English in a system designed by Westerners and as a result intergenerational local knowledge is lost. In this way, the very fact of teaching in English in constructivist pedagogy is an act of imperialism. He believes communities lose their traditions and sense of community in a globalized world and that progressive social constructivist pedagogy is a corollary to this process (Bowers 2001).

Both Bowers from the right and Giroux from the left provide us with interesting critiques of globalization and its relationship to pedagogy (Neiman 1990). From the Left Giroux and those like him decry the spread of capitalist rationality and homogenisation that occurs in schooling because of market forces. The radical left critics however see the solution in radical democratic terms as the overcoming of capitalism.(Giroux 1988, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 2003). Bowers and others on the Right also decry the cultural impact of globalization but tend to see the alternative as an uncritical acceptance and celebration of traditional cultures and pedagogical practices. It is my contention that both strains of thought provide practitioners with little room to move beyond either radical overhaul or conservative restoration. Both discourses are limited in their applicability to the Malaysian context.

Globalization and pedagogy provides a terrain for flexibility and adaptability within a context where cultural dignity remains viable and alive. The case I am discussing belies a simple characterization of Australian and Malaysian educational interactions as acts of imperialism. In other words the argument that globalization is simply imperialism under another guise fails to take into account the complex and ongoing changes that occur in society and in some ways sets up an over simplified dichotomy between capitalism and traditional culture. In the Malaysian example, beginning at the top, the commitment of the Malaysian government to globalisation

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and international competitiveness is not simply submissiveness or resignation. Rather it is an aggressive and empowering commitment to ensuring national dignity in a competitive and tough world. This aggressive commitment is articulated in the Ninth Malaysian Plan. According to the Plan, 'there is a need to strengthen the overall mindset, culture, values and social institutions to be more in step with the country's economic development'(2006).

The nature of the relationship between globalization and pedagogy is in other words constantly open to negotiation and dialectical change. To understand the dialectics of globalization in the local Malaysian context requires much more sophisticated theory than either Right wing or hard Left wing critics' offer. The trajectory of engagement with globalisation is a complex and nuanced one. Yet this complexity belies any easy characterization of it as simply imperialism or exploitation. Further more we must also understand the Malaysian push to internationalise and globalize education within the context of ethnic and religious diversity and within the specific historical milieu Malaysia finds itself. 'The issue of the respective development of diverse ethnicities in the Malaysian context is also critical to the success, or otherwise, of globalization in education (Ghee, 1995).

The Project

How then does this translate to pedagogical practice? An excellent example of this application of dialectical change to pedagogy lies in the work done by Deakin University with three Malaysian Teachers Institutes (University, 2006b). The following discussion shall now describe one example of collaborative engagement. One project that is part of this reform is the work between Deakin University and the Malaysian Ministry of Education. In collaboration with Deakin University, three Malaysian Teaching institutes have been involved in a program to establish and run a degree for Malaysian trainee teachers that would help advance the standards of Malaysian teacher training. Deakin, alongside another Australian University and two UK Universities, were selected for this important program.

This is an example of global partners in education delivering a primary education degree in Malaysia. It is in short a practical example of the application of the principles of the Ninth Malaysian Plan where 'greater emphasis will be given to developing a strong foundation in Mathematics, Science and the English language as well as to instil good ethics and discipline among school children'(2006). This is also within a framework that instils and develops 'creativity as well as analytical and problem-solving skills' in students. The Ninth Plan specifically outlines the necessity and objective of 'the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics in English' (2006). The collaboration between Deakin and the Ministry of Education is a practical formulation of the objectives of the Ninth Malaysian Plan. The essential structure and duration of the course outlined in the Accreditation document is as follows. The courses taught in the degree comprise 32 credit points. Each course takes four years of full time study to complete. Units in the course are taught in either English or Bahasa Melayu. According to the Accreditation document, 'the courses will comprise the following broad areas:

Units to be taught in Bahasa Melayu (Malaysian language):

- A set of Core Studies to be designed and taught by Teacher Education Colleges (TEC) staff – equivalent of 4 credit points of study

- A six unit sequence of Co-curricular Management Studies – delivered and assessed by Malaysian Colleges in Years 1, 2, 3 and worth zero credit points in the courses.

Units to be taught in English language:

- A six unit (subject) Education Studies Major
- A six unit (subject) Major in either Mathematics or Science
- A two unit (subject) Minor in either Mathematics or Science (depending upon the Major)
- A three unit (subject) sequence of Curriculum Studies in the Major (i.e. Maths or Science)
- A two unit (subject) sequence of Curriculum Studies in the Minor (i.e. Maths or Science)
- A four unit (subject) sequence of study in Health and Physical Education (HPE) studies, inclusive of Malaysian Co-curriculum Management Studies
- One compulsory unit (subject) of study in Arts Education – The Arts in Education
- One compulsory unit (subject) of study in Teaching Maths and Science in English
- 28 weeks of Professional Experience, including 3 credit points of Internship (University, 2006a).'

The aims and objectives of the course and teacher readiness, agreed to in the Accreditation document between Deakin and the Ministry of Education asserted that '[g]raduates will be 'teacher ready' and able to enter their profession with:

- The competencies expected of beginning teachers by the education profession;
- The communication and interpersonal skills required to be facilitative teachers;
- A grounding in subject discipline knowledge underpinning the key learning areas of the school curriculum;
- An understanding of the curriculum content and processes appropriate for their teaching;
- An understanding of theories of learning, including their derivation and current status, and an understanding of the implications relevant to teaching practice informed by these theories;
- A capacity for analytical and critical thinking expressed by an ability to engage with contemporary educational issues both generally and in particular areas of specialisation;
- An understanding of the major role information and communication technologies play in the educative process;
- An awareness of the socio-political role of education in society, an understanding of the impact of economic and ideological change on the practice of educators, and an appreciation of the cultural imperatives expressed through educational institutions and teaching practices;
- An ability to work professionally and productively with teachers, other school based professionals and parents;
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- The ability to construct learning experiences that will enable all learners to achieve the highest possible learning outcomes;
- Extensive levels of subject knowledge and pedagogical competence;
- The capacity to be flexible, adaptable and futures oriented;
- An appreciation of and commitment to social justice through development of a clear understanding of the social origins of disadvantage (University, 2006a).'

Collaboration

The real proof about the nature of the educational reform makes the actual process of engagement between teachers from Deakin University and the Malaysian teaching staffs belies any easy characterization of the process as imperialistic. The model for collaborative development and delivery of the program is found in the Accreditation document agreed to by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and Deakin University:

'The courses represent a collaboration between professional partner institutions, and will be taught on location in Malaysia at three Teacher Education Colleges (TECs). The purpose of the collaboration is to advance teacher education in Malaysia, and specifically to support the partner TECs in conducting a four year degree program accredited by Deakin University, which will be taught by TEC staff who receive course materials, training, advice and support from Deakin's Faculty of Education staff.

The overall structure of the courses has been negotiated with representatives of the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The courses have been designed to meet Deakin University requirements for primary education (major and minor discipline sequences, curriculum studies, education studies and practicum) and to meet requirements for registration of graduates for teachers in Malaysia (all of the Deakin requirements plus a set of core Malaysian studies). Neither course will provide graduates with the basis for registration as teachers in Victoria (University 2006a).'

My involvement in the project outlined above was as Unit Chair of one of the subjects taught in the Education Studies Major sequence. From the outset, the approach of the staff engaged with EME 150 which was part of the Education Studies Major outlined above involved collaborative cooperation. EME 150 was introduced to the Program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan (PISMP) group in the second semester of their first year Bachelor of Education programme. It was one of six education units offered as part of the thirty-two unit course described above (Campbell and Chin 2007). The subject, EME 150 was designed around a vigorous commitment to scaffolded instruction and deep learning which in large measure was drawn from constructivist theory. We drew on the significant research conducted in Malaysian schools and Universities with regards to the application of constructivist pedagogy (Abdul Razak Hussain, 2001; Campbell, 2006; Chan, 2004; Ismail, 2005; Kaur, 2001; Lee and Tan, 2004; Neo, 2002; Wong, 2003; Yap, 2004; Yen, Bakar, Roslan, Luan, and Rahman, 2005).

Not knowing exactly what to expect we at Deakin entered our first discussions with the Malaysian colleagues with a sense that what was important was not to act as if we were the recipients of wisdom and our colleagues somehow empty vessels waiting to be filled. In other words, we were well aware of the Freirian requirement that we not treat our colleagues as simply empty containers (Freire, 1972a; 1972b; 1974). We needed to fully engage with the practice of critical pedagogy and socially constructivist pedagogy by evidencing these values in our initial collaboration and course negotiation. The problem we faced was how to design a subject that took seriously the need to counter the negative and pejorative impact that globalization and internationalization can have on local cultures.

How do we ameliorate or contend with the way that internationalisation and globalisation can construct and frame relationships in oppressive ways and make border crossing a pedagogy of empowerment rather than one of imposition? In pedagogical terms, how do we design pedagogy that is empowering and inclusive and not simply a Trojan horse for imposed values? The feedback from staff involved in the collaborative work was positive and points to the genuinely positive way in which this example of globalization was framed. In evaluating our work in EME 150, we focused on several areas. We asked our Malaysian colleagues about their experience and how they saw the collaboration between the Deakin staff and the Malaysian staff. In feedback on this issue, we found that the Malaysian staff felt that because by participating in EME 150 they:

- 'Learnt more about educators system as compared to the Malaysian system which is more exam orientated';
- 'Sharpen my skills in education and helped me to understand my students better';
- 'Knowledge and more confidence';
- 'Improve understanding and knowledge of the topic';
- 'Opportunity to lecture in English, in preparing for the lectures I have also gained much knowledge from my own reading';
- 'Gained more knowledge in conducting my class, more readings have a chance to teach in English, instruction and share ideas with Deakin lecturers' (Campbell, 2006).

We also asked our Malaysian colleagues to describe their experience of working in a cross-cultural project globalized project. Their responses:

- 'Interesting and totally new experience it improved my style and performance';
- 'Good in the sense we could exchange ideas see the different work style and take the good points into our examination system';
- 'Exchange ideas and opinions, thoughts from different perspectives';
- 'Great opportunity to share knowledge and ideas and opinions' (Campbell, 2007);

On the surface, the feedback above appears to contradict the arguments of critics such as Bowers (2003) on the Right, or others such as Carnoy (1977) from the Left who seem to frame globalization as a unilinear discourse of imposition and exploitation. The collaborative and engaged work done among Deakin staff and the staff of the Malaysian Institutes point to a need for a much deeper analysis of the relationship between globalization pedagogical practice and the specifics of the Malaysian cultural situation. Demonstration of some of the characteristics of the

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Deakin work with Malaysian teaching Institutes challenges the assumption that all globalization implies inequality, imposition and coercion. Such reductive theory fails to account for teacher agency and the relative autonomy of practices by respective parties, which can embody quite democratic and respectful approaches to working together. In short, while not underestimating the power of the Western imaginary, to use Castoriadis' provocative term, I think the power of teachers and academics to interrogate and engage with relationships in a positive and empowering way is often overlooked; in theory that simply sees all globalization by definition, imperialistic and iniquitous. The actual praxis that occurs in collaboration between the West and non-western entities is much more nuanced and fluid than many may think.

English and socially constructivist pedagogy

The practices of traditional pedagogy and so-called rote learning characterize Malaysian schooling and teaching. Yen et. al.(2005) argue that 'a great number of Malaysian students are actually passive learners and spoon-fed learners, who rely heavily on rote learning'. This perception is widespread and popularly held. Jonathan Kent of the BBC World service writes, 'Malaysian schools and universities are long on rote learning and short on original thinking. They do not turn out the problem solvers and innovators' that a dynamic economy needs' (Kent , 2006). Following on from the analysis of the likes of Zairon Mustapha (Mustapha , 1998), Hussain Hassan (Hussin , 2006) and Zakaria and Iksan(Zakaria and Iksan, 2007), there is a common recognition that Malaysian traditional pedagogics have also been teacher centred(Mustapha , 2001). A critical component of the course we designed was to be taught in English. We needed to address the pedagogics and language issue as a whole to avoid falling into the trap of top down pedagogy as well as being caught in the problem of English language proficiency inhibiting learning. In other words, we sought to avoid what Brooks and Brooks(1993) outlined as the characteristic problems of traditional pedagogy such as the problem of top down instruction. We decided to ground the English in experiential learning. Feedback from the Malaysian teaching teams saw this as a major aspect of the course. According to the feedback:

- 'Students were able to work in groups , challenge certain students because they have to present in English so in a way they have to practice their English.'
- 'Students did put in effort to present and indirectly they need to read up and prepare for the task.'(Campbell, 2006).

The lecturers gave positive feedback (despite the difficulties) of teaching in English. They claimed:

- 'Opportunity to lecture in English, in preparing for the lectures, I have also gained much knowledge from my own reading.'
- 'Gained more knowledge in conducting my class, more readings have a chance to teach in English, instruction and share ideas with Deakin lecturers'(Campbell , 2006).

One of the perceived strengths of the subject was that it required many students to engage with the subject matter in English for the first time. This was a challenge for many of the staff. From an educational point of view we decided to also embed and enact English as a communicative

language [(CLT) (Deller, 1990; Mayo, 2000; Wesche, 2002)]. This approach has precedent, for example in Malaysian environmental education (Thang and Kumarasamy, 2006). Thus, the issues of English language facility, pedagogical theory and depth of learning in principle cohered in one strategy. The idea was that the actual tutorials would demonstrate the theories and different approaches to learning in creative ways, which would shift focus away from reading towards doing (Tozer, Anderson, and Armbruster, 1990). The driving idea was to engage the students in authentic learning of the subject matter. The general approach was to organise teaching activities, which would help demonstrate the theory taught.

In other words, we decided to use a combination of scaffolded instruction (English using learning tools such as PMI and Brainstorming, within a CLT English framework. The emphasis of the pedagogy was on scaffolds in the form of processing tools to aid their understanding and completion of the coursework tasks required of them. From the perspective we were working from this seemed to be the best way to pedagogically address the issue of teaching in English in a non-English speaking environment. Malaysian research into cooperative learning supports this approach (Salleh and Wan, 2000). Malaysian research into the effectiveness of social and cooperative strategies in language learning also tends to support the approach we have taken (Embi, Long, and Hamzah 2001; Zakaria and Iksan 2007). Feedback on the combination of social constructivist pedagogy and English as a communicative language approach stated that

- It 'reinforced theories and content, build confidence in communication skills there was fun they enjoyed themselves'.
- [The students were] 'able to master the topic and perform activities related to learning classroom experience'.
- 'Students need to work in groups, having their discussions and prepare the material together will enhance their co-operation and collaboration'.
- 'Students put in a lot of effort and participated well into co-operative learning as well as contextual and experimental learning'.
- 'Students were able to work in groups, challenge certain students because they have to present in English so in a way they have to practice their English' (Campbell, 2006).

Conclusion

Pedagogy and creativity in the context of globalisation require social constructivist pedagogy and English proficiency. In such a case, the relationships between western and local collaborators are important. It is necessary that proper and respectful collaborative values characterize how we work together. Equally important is getting the balance right between English proficiency and the pedagogies we use in the classroom. Situating English within the practical and collaborative activities that students engage in learning helps to give students real confidence and to generate deep learning in ways that rote and top down drilling of English content simply will not. This type of pedagogical approach when combined with a collaborative and engaged work relationship between Malaysian and Australian lecturers helped us to avoid the negative aspects of globalized education. We sought to avoid at the level of classroom pedagogy what we sought to avoid in collaboration between staff. We did not want what the students were learning to appear as a top down imposition where their abilities and experiences would be a deficit. The example of EME 150 and the uptake through the Malaysian educational system of some of its

approach has precedent, for example (Mustapha, 2006). Thus, the learning in principle cohered to demonstrate the theories and focus away from reading. The idea was to engage the approach was to organise

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From this, I think there are several recommendations that can be proposed from our experience in cross-cultural collaboration. Firstly, we need to ensure in all cross-cultural work that all the partners have time to understand and appreciate each other's point of view. Second in all cross-cultural collaboration, local content must be recognized and added to the program. Third, in cross-cultural work, respect and recognition between parties is central to success. These are not simply words but manifest in deeds such as proper consultation and time to engage. These simple recommendations make a world of difference to working together and would have an impact on both teachers and classroom results.

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