Moderation for Fair Assessment in TNE

Literature Review

PROJECT TEAM
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Moderation for Fair Assessment in Transnational Education

Introduction

This literature review informs the ALTC funded research project "Moderation for Fair Assessment in Transnational Learning and Teaching". The significance of assessment in determining the quality of student learning in higher education has been acknowledged by many (Race, 2004, p. 74; Ramsden, 2003, p. 177). While there exists a growing body of assessment research (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Boud & Falchikov, 2007; P. Knight, 1995; Ramsden, 2003), the process of moderation of assessment in higher education remains relatively unknown (Orr, 2007) . With transnational education research, moderation of assessment is covered more generally under research on quality assurance and details of the moderation process are lacking (Coleman, 2003; Stella & Gnanam, 2004; van Damme, 2001). TNE processes and practices are starkly under-represented in the literature on the internationalisation of higher education. This is confirmed by McBurnie and Ziguras (2007, p. 47) who indicate that the majority of the limited entries in the literature are "informal, anecdotal papers" that draw on the experiences of Australian transnational teaching staff. Future trends in transnational education include increased competition, stringent quality assurance and a rationalisation of the market "both by government regulation and choices of students"(McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007, p. 6).

To provide the context for this literature review, its initial sections scope out some characteristics of transnational education and how this activity has unfolded in Australian higher education. The review then outlines moderation-related perspectives on quality in assessment before discussing the role of communities of practice in assessment. The final section of the review covers the student voice in TNE assessment.

Locating Transnational Education

The term "transnational education" was popularized in the mid-1990s by the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) an alliance of businesses, educators, quality-assurance agencies,

governments, and intergovernmental organizations that offered certification of quality to educational institutions (McBurnie, 2000). In the late 1990s transnational education gained wider usage and was "adopted as the preferred term for internationally mobile programs" (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007, p. 22). Transnational Education or TNE is widely referred to as education "in which learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based" (UNESCO and Council of Europe 2001:1 cited in McBurnie and Ziguras 2007:22). Within the university sector in Australia and New Zealand the term "offshore programs" is generally used. Australian researchers also coined the term "borderless education" (Cunningham, et al., 1998; Cunningham, et al., 2000) which was taken by researchers in the UK (Middlehurst & Campbell, 2004). In the university sector in the UK instead of transnational education, terms used include "collaborative international provision" "franchised provision" and "distance learning" (Doorbar & Bateman, 2008). Documents issued by organisations outside the university sector like UNESCO, OECD and APQN do not use the term TNE and instead refer to "cross-border education" and this is supported by some researchers that note "the term cross border education may be more relevant to the present challenges facing the delivery of international education to students through programme and provider mobility"(J. Knight, 2005) .

It should be noted, however, that the term 'transnational education' does not enjoy universal usage, with different countries using a range of descriptors such as 'offshore programs', 'borderless education', 'collaborative international provision' and 'cross-border education'. However McBurnie and Ziguras (2007, p. 22) note that the term 'transnational' is gradually replacing "offshore" to refer to overseas activities in Australia and New Zealand.
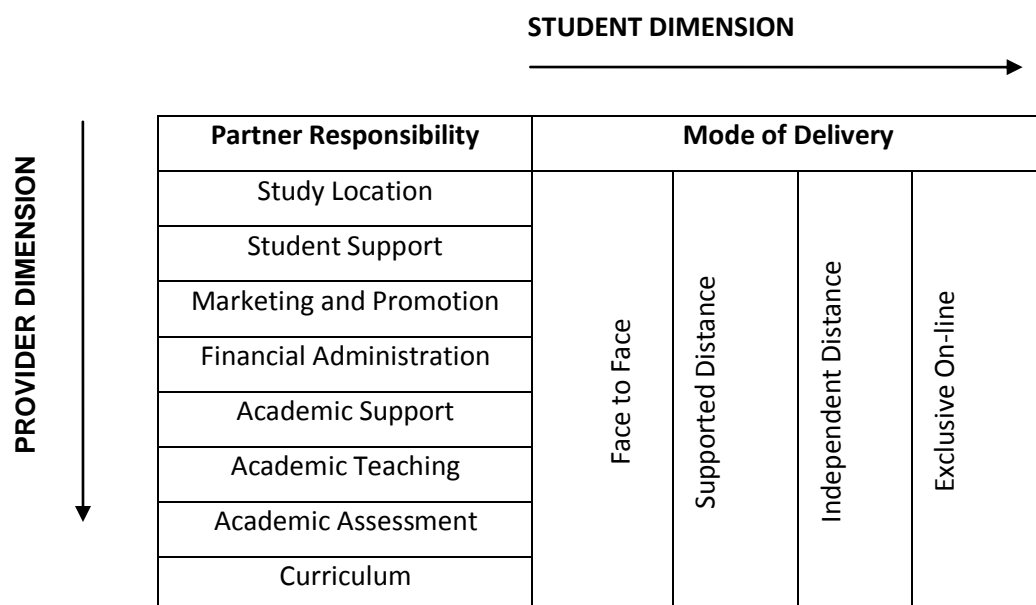
Types of Transnational Education

The transnational education experience is influenced by the variety of ways that TNE is conducted. Common expressions of this in the related literature are distance education, partner-supported delivery and branch campus (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007, p. 26), while others refer to types of offshore programs – twinning, distance learning, franchising, moderated programs, joint award, internet delivery and offshore campuses (Adams, 1998; Stella & Gnanam, 2004).

Knight (2005) has identified typology for cross border education along the dimension of programme mobility such as franchise, twinning etc and provider mobility such as branch campus, affiliation etc.

In a similar view forms of cross border education of student mobility and programme mobility is referred to by other researchers (Larsen, Momii, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2004).

A useful two dimensional model (Figure 1 below) classifies offshore provision with the student dimension having a continuum of mode of delivery ranging from exclusive online to face to face, and the provider dimension having a continuum of partner responsibility ranging from curriculum to study location (Davis, Olsen, & Bohm, 2000, p. 41). The two dimensional model of offshore provision is incorporated in a model of good practice in transnational education (Connelly, Garton, & Olsen, 2006) and attempts to resolve the confusion of classifying transnational education using different models. For example classifications of transnational education based on delivery modes (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007) focus on learning and teaching where as types of offshore programs focus on business models such as franchised, and responsibility for award such as twinning, moderated and joint award (Adams, 1998).

Figure 1   Two Dimensional Model of Offshore Provision

STUDENT DIMENSION

Partner Responsibility	Mode of Delivery			
Study Location	Face to Face	Supported Distance	Independent Distance	Exclusive On-line
Student Support				
Marketing and Promotion				
Financial Administration				
Academic Support				
Academic Teaching				
Academic Assessment				
Curriculum				

Source: Davis, Olsen et al. 2000, p.41

Despite some recognition of the two dimensional model, a recent international publication (APQN, 2006) identifies various forms of cross-border education including setting up of a branch campus, collaboration with a local partner where the provider country institution controls much of the programme design and delivery, collaboration with a local partner where programme design comes from the home institution but programme delivery is shared, validation by an overseas awarding

institution, and pure distance learning. This typology of cross border education is based on a mix of models including teaching and learning, business and responsibility of award.

Australian Universities and Transnational Education

A recent study (Banks, Kevat, Ziguras, Ciccarelli, & Clayton, 2010, p. 26) concluded that 'Australian higher education providers are now in a mature phase of TNE engagement'. Against a global backdrop of trade liberalisation, the Asian economic crisis, and a strengthening Australian dollar, transnational education saw rapid growth from the late 1990s until early in the new millennium. Total Australian offshore programs grew from 307 in 1996 to 1569 in 2003 but reduced to 1002 in 2007 (UA, 2007) with press reports of Australian universities withdrawing from offshore teaching operations "for lack of profitability and fear of reputational damage" (Armitage, 2007). Offshore programs of Australian Universities are concentrated geographically with more than 70 percent of programs in four countries i.e. Singapore, Malaysia, People's Republic of China (PRC) and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR). In Hong Kong, Australian institutions account for approximately 37 percent of registered programs while in Singapore this figure rises to 53 percent (Garrett & Verbik, 2004). While almost all Australian universities are involved in transnational education, of the 1092 offshore programs in 2004, almost half (42 per cent) were offered by just three Australian universities – University of Southern Queensland, Charles Sturt University, and Curtin University of Technology.

McBurnie and Ziguras (2007, p. 31) caution "to many critics, the rapid growth of income-generating transnational programs looks like an unseemly gold rush threatening to undermine the public service orientation that should be paramount to higher education institutions". This is reminiscent of perceptions of Australian higher education's initial forays into recruiting students for onshore places in the Full Fee Paying Overseas Student Program (FFPOS) in the late 1980s where the sector was perceived by some overseas stakeholders as being "inhuman, incompetent and financially gouging" (Laurie, 1992).

Earlier literature in transnational education reflects optimism of the opportunities offered by transnational education and the ability to maintain quality (Adams, 1998; McBurnie, 2000). However later literature is more critical about the lack of quality assurance in transnational education with the view that "many internationalisation policies and practices have been developed without much concern for quality" (van Damme, 2001, p. 436) and that "existing quality assurance systems may underestimate the potential site of variation in offshore programs" (Coleman, 2003, p. 357).

The definition of offshore programs adopted by Australian universities' includes distance education programs "only when there is a formal agreement with an overseas institution/organisation to participate in some way in their delivery"(UA, 2007) and is therefore narrower than definition of transnational education. The definition of transnational education used in Australian Transnational Quality Strategy also excludes distance education and has been criticised by some researchers as "putting Australia out of step with the world and creating loopholes" (Connelly, et al., 2006, p. 10). The need to encompass distance education, including online delivery in the definition of "transnational education" in Australia is also being raised by universities along with the need to have more precise definitions for core terms such as comparability and equivalence in the Australian TNE context (DEST, 2006; IEAA, 2006, p. 9)

Quality Assurance in Transnational Education

As McBurnie (2008, p. 193) notes "Due to geographical (and perhaps organizational) distance from the provider institution, transnational education (TNE) programs are inherently more prone than their domestic counterparts to disconnection and negligence". At the global level, the key organizations involved in quality assurance of transnational education are UNESCO and the OECD who have collaborated to create guidelines for member countries engaging in transnational education (OECD, 2005). Regional organization APQN or Asia Pacific Quality Network has created a toolkit in collaboration with UNESCO to regulate quality of TNE (APQN, 2006). Recognising this global approach , McBurnie and Ziguras (2007, p. 121) note "In practice, quality assurance frameworks around the globe are becoming increasingly similar. Transnational education is a subset of this larger trend of convergence."

 The rapid expansion and recent retraction of transnational education by Australian universities is in line with an increasing concern about quality assurance in the industry and in government. During 2006, Australian Education International (AEI) commissioned the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) to conduct a project which had as one of its outcomes the proposal of future directions and actions to further enhance good practice in Australian TNE. One of the key messages was the strongly held desire of the industry for "improved research on agreed priority aspects of transnational activity - particularly those where little or no research has yet been undertaken - but including on more familiar aspects where practice could be better informed by improved research providing more effective review or validation" (IEAA, 2006, p. 11).

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was formally established by the Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in March 2000 as an independent, not-for-profit national agency to promote, audit, and report on quality assurance in Australian higher education. In Australia, existing legislation the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 and associated legislation is the legal framework governing the responsibility of education institutions towards overseas students. ESOS and its related National Code protect overseas students coming to Australia on student visas (Woodhouse & Stella, 2008) but it does not apply to offshore programs. Quality assurance for offshore programs has been regulated mainly by codes of practice. Australian Universities have committed to and adopted the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee's (AVCC) *Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Education to International Students by Australian Universities* (AVCC, 1998) and more recently an expanded *Code of Practice and Guidelines for Provision of Education to International Students* (AVCC, 2005). In addition higher education institutions in Australia have been subject to the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* (MCEETYA, 2000) that refer to the expectation of "equivalent" standards for Australian universities operating offshore under its own name and "comparable" standards for Australian universities operating offshore through another organisation. In the current *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (MCEETYA, 2007)* there is mention of "consistent standards" regardless of whether the students are located in Australia or offshore. Furthermore 'equivalence' with regards to teaching and learning is referred to in the protocol for awarding self-accrediting authority to higher education institutions other than universities and 'comparability' with regards to learning outcomes where a higher education course is delivered by a non-self accrediting institution. There distinction between comparability and equivalence for offshore operations in the earlier protocols (MCEETYA 2000) has been removed. There is no particular clarity in official documents about the terms 'comparability' and 'equivalence'.

In AUQA's audit report of 2002 (Martin, 2003, p. 26) the need to strengthen Quality Assurance for offshore programs is raised with key issues such as lack of external review procedures, improving consistency of standards, assessment and curriculum. In a recent AUQA report (Carroll & Woodhouse, 2006, p. 81) the assessment of student learning has been identified as "a key aspect of academic quality assurance" with variables to be considered such as marking and "whether assessment is moderated, and how this is done". Enhancing moderation is also demanded by the Commonwealth Government in its report on learning, teaching and scholarship that identified a need to develop a culture of moderation to ensure consistent academic standards (DEST, 2002).

Moderation of Assessment in TNE

The principle promoted to Australian universities to ensure quality and sustainability in the economically significant TNE market is one of 'equivalence' or 'comparability' between onshore and offshore provision (Connelly, et al., 2006; DEST, 2005). Australian universities are encouraged to develop consistent processes for transnational learning and teaching. According to IEAA (2006), moderation of assessment is a key practice underpinning assessment equivalence. The literature provides generalised advice on assessment in transnational education programs such as the use of marking guides by offshore staff (Castle & Kelly, 2004) but studies on how assessment and moderation activities are being conducted are lacking.

The need for preparing teaching staff for teaching overseas has been raised by a number of researchers (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Dunn & Wallace, 2006; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). TNE sites are often 'remote outposts' when it comes to practices and processes associated with learning and teaching (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007, pp. 47-59). As a result, variability in expectations, decision-making and the meeting of different academic and host country cultures can affect both the interpretation and the implementation of whatever guidelines exist (Coleman, 2003; Wimshurst, Wortley, Bates, & Allard, 2006). It is important for all approaches to be grounded in universal principles of good educational practice There is little evidence at present about the degree to which this is the case. In fact, a cohesive statement of desirable approaches, other than the insistence of equivalency / comparability between educational practices in onshore and offshore programs (which essentially relies on what might be happening in particular onshore programs), is presently conspicuous by its absence.

The need for research and evaluation in the transnational arena is demonstrated by the small number of exemplars of best practice in moderation of assessment in the Australian Universities Quality Agency's (AUQA) Good Practice Database. This is true for moderation of assessment in general, and of moderation of assessment in transnational contexts in particular. University assessment practice in moderation is considered by some to be far behind assessment practice in moderation in the school sector (Bloxham, 2008; Murphy, 2006). Based on assessment in the school sector, Harlen (1994) conceptualises moderation as processes and activities that occur before assessment (i.e. quality assurance), as well as those that occur after assessment (i.e. quality control) (p. 6). The view of moderation of assessment as a process of both quality assurance and quality control requires it to encompass all stages from the planning and operationalisation of assessment

design and marking through to the post hoc review of judgements made about students' results or grades.

The poststructuralist view of assessment sees it as "co-constructed in communities of practice and standards are socially constructed, relative, provisional and contested" (Orr, 2007). Communities of practice are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). The term "community of judgement" (Roberts, 1997) is used in a research study on moderation of assessment to refer to engagement of teachers in making judgements that benefit from interaction with colleagues.

Shared knowledge is considered to be central to any community of practice (Kortelainen & Rasinkangas, 2007; Price, 2005; Wenger, 2000). In addition to shared knowledge development of communities of practice is considered to have the aspects of a 'sense of joint enterprise' and opportunities for interaction to build trust and relationships (Wenger, 2000). A low level of one-to-one interaction between members has been identified as a major reason for the failure of communities of practice (Probst & Borzillo, 2008).

Development of a community of practice in transnational programs ideally requires the input of all staff involved in the teaching team, both onshore and offshore. In particular, the expertise, local knowledge and student engagement capabilities of partner organisation staff are invaluable for developing successful transnational programs (Dunn & Wallace, 2005; Leask, 2004; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Vinen & Selvarajah, 2008). Achieving a shared set of principles and understandings, and through that, fair assessment processes within and across programs, is a complex task that requires ongoing dialogue and collaboration between all members of the teaching team(Dunn & Wallace, 2008). This type of dialogic interaction also serves as a capacity building academic development activity for all staff, which has been identified as good practice in TNE and quality regimes (Connelly, et al., 2006; Dunn & Wallace, 2006; Leask, Hicks, Kohler, & King, 2005). Scarino et al. (2006) emphasise the importance of language and culture in the construction of meaning and the consequent inadequacy of assuming a direct 'translation' or easy communication of assessment procedures and ideals in the transnational setting.

The impact of culture in the moderation of assessment in the TNE context has a number of dimensions. Transnational teaching and professional teams conduct assessment work across national and organisational cultural boundaries. There are very few studies on the impact of culture on

transnational education partnerships and the research available is based on small studies (Eldridge & Cranston, 2009; Helms, 2008; Walton & Guarisco, 2007).

In transnational partnerships with Chinese institutions "cultural issues often arise in the very beginning of the process, in the negotiating stage" (Helms, 2008, p. 18). A recent study (Eldridge & Cranston, 2009) on Australian transnational educational programs in Thailand, identified the complications created by national cultural differences in terms of pedagogy, assessment procedures, and social aspects. Using Hofstede's dimensions (Hofstede, 2001) of culture, the study found Australia individualistic and low power distance culture which has an emphasis on performance and is indicative of high masculinity reflected in a different approach to assessment as compared to the Thai offshore staff who belong to a culture with a large power distance and collectivism. Illustrative of the different approach to assessment, managers from Australian "mentioned the pressure exerted by students and partner institutions to consider factors that they would consider irrelevant" (Eldridge & Cranston, 2009, p. 72). The study further concluded that "national differences also necessitated special attention towards the communication and interaction between partners, and the role of procedures and regulations pertaining to partnerships"(2009, p. 76).

Whilst diversity is desirable, Adler (2002, p. 148) notes "diversity functions as an advantage only if the team recognizes when to leverage and when to minimize its diversity, and how creativity and agreement can be balanced". With a similar view of managing cultural diversity, Carr (2004, p. 47) notes "Although cultural diversity and identity are complex, they are not completely unpredictable, nor are they unmanageable". Supportive mutual relationships have been identified as a way to work through problems caused by cultural and language differences in transnational partnerships (Heffernan & Poole, 2005; Walton & Guarisco, 2007).

Fairness in Assessment

Gipps and Stobart (2009) highlight the complex issues surrounding fairness in assessment by stating "We will never achieve fair assessment, but we can make it fairer: The best defence against inequitable assessment is openness". Some researchers use the term 'fairness' interchangeably with 'equity' and relate it to 'moral justice'(Gipps & Stobart, 2009). Other researches relate 'fairness' to students' notions of 'validity' with assessments systems being 'fair' when they relate to authentic tasks, represent reasonable demands, encourage students to apply knowledge to realistic contexts, emphasise need to develop a range of skills, perceived to have long term benefits, reward genuine

effort, reward breath in learning, foster student independence by making expectations and criteria clear, provide adequate feedback, and accurately measure complex skills and qualities (Sambell, McDowell, & Brown, 1997). Recent research (Flint, 2007) found students take six considerations into account when making a fairness judgement about assessment and these are having a level playing field that includes having work being marked on its merits and having consistency of marking, receiving appropriate feedback, balance and variety in assessment tasks, relevance of assessment tasks, skilful teaching staff, and teaching staff displaying a caring attitude. Flint's (2007) work builds on earlier research and highlights the importance of teaching staff to deliver fair assessment to students.

Harlen (1994) views fairness in moderation of assessment to be served by improving the quality of the assessment process (before the assessment) and by improving consistency in marking (after the assessment). The table below compares the research on fairness in assessment.

Table 1   Comparison of Views on Fairness in Assessment

Student notion of assessment being fair (Sambell, et al., 1997)	Student considerations in fairness judgement (Flint, 2007)	Fairness through moderation of assessment (Harlen, 1994)
relate to authentic tasks		before the assessment
represent reasonable demands	*balance and variety in assessment tasks*	before the assessment
encourage students to apply knowledge to realistic contexts	*relevance of assessment tasks*	before the assessment
emphasise need to develop a range of skills		before the assessment
perceived to have long term benefits		before the assessment
reward genuine effort		before the assessment
reward breath in learning		before the assessment
foster student independence by making expectations and criteria clear		before the assessment
provide adequate feedback	*receiving appropriate feedback*	after the assessment
accurately measure complex skills and qualities		before the assessment,
	level playing field that includes having work being marked on its merits and having consistency of marking	after the assessment

	skilful teaching staff	before the assessment & after the assessment
	teaching staff displaying a caring attitude	before the assessment & after the assessment

Table 1 indicates that a number of considerations of ensuring fairness in assessment are linked to processes that occur before assessment.

Student Voice in TNE

Much of the existing literature is focused on teaching and learning issues of international students including pedagogy (Hoare, 2006, p. 123; Watkins & Biggs, 2001) with the characterization of Asian students as less self-directed learners who defer to the authority of the teacher (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007, p. 67) , the need to acknowledge different learning styles of international students (Valiente, 2008), and viewing plagiarism as a cultural construct(Leask, 2006b) . Despite the growing number of offshore students, the voice of the student "is conspicuously missing from the research literature" (Chapman & Pyvis, 2005, p. 40). Some small studies focus on different perspectives of offshore students such as reasons for choosing transnational education (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007), expectations in TNE (Leask, 2006a), experiences in TNE programmes (Bell, Smith, & Vrazalic, 2008; Chapman & Pyvis, 2005, 2006; Hoare, 2006; Miliszewska, 2008; Pyvis & Chapman, 2004), and culture shock in a TNE classroom (Pyvis & Chapman, 2004, 2005). The literature on offshore students "is scant by comparison with the literature on international students studying in Australia" (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007, p. 238). A single study was found on offshore and onshore student perspectives that dealt with assessment in a general way asking students to rate the quality of assessment (Cox, Logan, & Cobbin, 2002). A recent study on transnational students (Miliszewska & Sztendur, 2010) found that slow feedback on assessment is a major problem for student satisfaction. Research on transnational students' perspective on moderation of assessment is a major gap in the literature.

Conclusion

This ALTC research project responds to the gap in the literature on moderation of assessment through the lens of transnational higher education. The review of related literature is an initial and important step in contextualising TNE, particularly in terms of Australia's engagement, collating moderation-related information in TNE, and guiding the project in a strategic and focused way.

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