



Transnational Teaching Teams

*Professional development for quality
enhancement of learning and teaching*

Literature Review

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This literature review contributes to the OLT-funded research project, 'Transnational teaching teams: Professional development for quality enhancement of learning and teaching'. In the Australian context,

transnational education and training, also known as offshore or cross-border education and training, refers to the delivery and/or assessment of programs/courses by an accredited Australian provider in a country other than Australia, where delivery includes a face-to-face component. The education and/or training activity may lead to an Australian qualification or may be a non-award course, but in either case an accredited/approved/recognised Australian provider is associated with the education/training activity. As distinct from education and training provided in a purely distance mode, transnational education and training includes a physical presence of instructors offshore, either directly by the Australian provider, or indirectly through a formal agreement with a local institution/organisation (DEST, 2005: 6).

The literature review notes the earlier review from the ALTC-funded *Moderation for Fair Assessment in Transnational Education* (Sanderson & Mahmud, 2011), which provides a broad overview of types of transnational education and discusses quality-assurance issues. This report will not revisit that ground; instead, it focuses on professional development for transnational education, covering four themes:

- professional development for transnational education – an overview
- induction for host-country staff and preparation for home-country staff
- quality assurance and professional development
- transnational teaching teams and situated professional development.

Professional development for transnational education – an overview

The literature suggests that teaching in the transnational context is complex, involving diversity of individuals, cultures, roles, contexts, programs and modes of delivery (Dobos, 2011; Hicks & Jarrett, 2008; Sanderson & Mahmud, 2011; Stella & Bhushan, 2011). The number of transnational programs being offered by universities is growing rapidly (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009; Marginson & McBurnie, 2004), and this has resulted in a number of challenges for transnational academics and their students. These challenges are often related to differing cultural expectations, inequalities in power relations and the need to ensure quality standards across partner institutions (Hicks & Jarrett, 2008; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Pyvis, Chapman, O'Donoghue, Aspland & Cacciattolo, 2011). Nevertheless, according to O'Mahony (2014), there is little empirical

evidence regarding either the extent to which staff feel such challenges or about the practices they adopt to improve teaching and learning. Indeed, transnational programs have been much criticised as offering curriculum content, delivery and assessment methods that fail to adapt to the cultural context and socio-economic needs of the host country (Burnapp & Zhao, 2009; Woodfield & Middlehurst, 2009).

The expansion of transnational programs has highlighted the need for professional development as a key component of quality assurance in transnational education (see, for example, Australian Education International, 2006; Connelly, Gaton & Olsen, 2006; IEAA, 2008). Professional preparation of teaching staff is a key issue for quality transnational teaching (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Dunn & Wallace, 2004, 2006a; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003).

Yet Dunn and Wallace (2006a) conclude that many universities do not have effective programs to induct and develop academic teaching in transnational education; while Ziguras (2007) reports that professional-development programs to enhance transnational teaching are not commonplace in most universities. Dunn & Wallace (2008) report that the main form of preparation and support for transnational teachers has been through mentoring and informal professional development. Common issues and recommendations evident in the transnational literature underscore some of the professional-development needs of transnational teaching-team members. These include the need for transnational teachers to adhere to principles of equivalence and comparability in transnational offerings (DEST, 2005), develop cultural understanding and an intercultural stance and to develop and adapt curriculum offerings. There is also need for effective communication and dialogue amongst all involved in transnational programs, and for the development of context-sensitive quality measures (see, for example, Debowski, 2005; Dunn & Wallace, 2006a, 2008; Leask, Hicks, Kohler & King, 2005; Marginson & McBurnie, 2004; Pyvis, 2011).

Some publications offering advice on transnational teaching and learning are appearing that may be useful to both host and home staff (see, for example, Melano, Bell & Walker, 2014; RMIT, undated). Other literature focuses on home-country academics; for example, publications from the UK Higher Education Academy (Higher Education Academy, 2014; O'Mahony, 2014). These publications provide guidance and advice to home-university teachers and coordinators on how to overcome issues and problems, broaden perspectives and develop networks. O'Mahony (2014: 6), for example, seeks "to explore the current and prospective ways in which UK higher education providers can ensure an equitable student learning experience and teaching excellence in transnational arrangements".

The issue of professional development for both local- and home-university staff who form the teaching team is complicated by the differentiation in roles and responsibilities through the positioning of transnational partners. Local partners in transnational higher education have often been viewed as a form of international branch campus, an outpost of the parent institution on foreign soil (Edwards, Crosling & Lim, 2014) and, according to Coleman (2003), sometimes

known as a franchise campus or a joint-venture campus. At times transnational education has been considered an export/import commodity, as noted by Lim (2010), who, in discussing the challenges faced by private tertiary education providers in Malaysia and Singapore, refers to these as “importers of Australian degrees...coping with the varied and increasingly demanding requirements of different quality assurance goals, emphases and systems” (2010: 211).

The home university is generally positioned as the dominant partner. K. Smith (2010), in considering quality-assurance documentation from the US, Australia and the UK, concluded that awarding institutions were the drivers of quality assurance. Edwards et al. (2014) refer in particular to the situation in which power and authority are located at the home campus, which sets policy, ensures quality control and designs the curriculum, and where offshore academics are expected to accept a lesser role in the hierarchy. One of the issues in transnational education is the “often fairly rigidly conceptualised relationships of power between the exporter and importer institutions, not least between the ‘foreign’ teachers and ‘local’ students” (Djerasimovic, 2014: 204). Shams and Huisman (2012) report that staff of the host institution tend to feel inferior, and Dobos (2011: 27) quotes one tutor as saying, “We have a master-slave relationship, which is not good.” Such feelings can be exacerbated by a negative attitude in home-institution staff, who may consider cross-border commercial activities anathema and irreconcilable with the academic notion of free, publicly funded higher education (Coleman, 2003). Djerasimovic (2014: 207) points out that “host teachers, who might serve as mediators between foreign teachers and students, tend not be involved in creating the curriculum”, and that the “emphasis on on-shore or visiting teachers and exporter institutions again places responsibility and power on one actor, imagining the other (the students and host academics) as merely experiencing the effects of the former’s agency”.

Cross-border partnerships that entail “the transposition of an entire curriculum and the related degree(s) from ‘home’ to ‘host’ institution, are a rather new phenomenon” (Waterval, Frambach, Driessen & Scherpbier, 2014: 1). The home-university position is reinforced in the field of transnational-education research, which so far has been carried out and published mainly by academics in provider countries (Australia and the UK), while the country under discussion in the research is usually a host country. There is little evidence of any collaborative authorship or activity between host and provider (O’Mahony, 2014). According to Greenwood, Alam & Kabir (2014: 357), “as the partnership matures, researchers can build on earlier work by their colleagues, and new research is more likely to be grounded in the realities of the developing country”. Edwards et al. (2014: 181-182) suggest that as partnerships develop, offshore institutions “can become more responsive to their local, offshore setting and start to develop their own identities” and that “the professional development of academic staff is enhanced as staff exercise more academic freedom by input into curricula development and taking on leadership responsibilities. It may be the case that professional-development activities may begin to mature from induction programs into situated professional-development programs grounded in theory, as reported, for example, by Keevers et al. “

Induction for host-country staff and preparation for home-country staff

There is a range of literature on professional development for academic staff working in transnational programs (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Hicks & Jarrett, 2008; Leask, 2004; Leask, 2009). The literature has emphasised preparation of home-country academics for teaching overseas, where Australian and New Zealand academics travel to teach 'offshore', directing 'local' tutors in teaching a curriculum developed and quality-assured by the 'host' university (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Dunn & Wallace, 2006b; Feast & Bretag, 2005; Leask, 2004). These are sometimes termed fly-in-fly-out academics. Studies report that home-institution staff are not uniformly familiar with, or confident or experienced in, working with international colleagues and students (Waterval et al., 2014). A number of researchers (see, for example, Chapman & Pyvis, 2006; Coleman, 2003; Seah & Edwards, 2006; L. Smith, 2009) recommend preparatory courses to stimulate reflection and discussion, supported by a mentoring system for experienced and novice home staff. The Good Practice in Offshore Delivery report (IEAA, 2008) recommends that Australian teachers understand the context of transnational education and the dominant teaching methods and learning styles of the transnational context.

Induction programs for host and home country staff are considered important in developing skills and content knowledge (Heffernan & Poole, 2004; Lim, 2010; Shams & Huisman, 2012; L. Smith, 2009), and serve the purposes of "assisting local academic staff in developing the required understanding and skills to both teach appropriately and guide students in studying an Australian university course" (Soontiens & Pedigo, 2013: 45). In the past, induction programs for host-country staff were, in part, predicated on the assumption that most teachers at the host institution lacked the required knowledge, pedagogy and experience to teach as required (Coleman, 2003). Support and peer-to-peer mentoring to help faculty transition from their original teaching philosophy to the one required for the new curriculum is suggested by Dobos (2011), while Shams & Huisman (2012) propose that home-university staff visit the host institution and act as role models to strengthen 'host' teachers' competence.

An example of an induction program developed by an 'offshore provider' university is given by Soontiens & Pedigo (2013: 46), in which "the primary aim was to provide a number of interactive staff development sessions, clarify information, expose staff of the various locations to the 'whole of [home university]' presence and equip them to repeat the program at their local campus, effectively along the lines of the 'train the trainer' principle". Interestingly, the program was seen to have unintended benefits, in that "the interaction and engagement of the participants on the main campus, as peers in a residential forum not only validated their association but impacted positively on the working culture between the main campus and the different transnational education locations. The newly found identity and belonging of participants has transformed them into [home-university] agents on their respective campuses who continue to facilitate interactions" (Soontiens & Pedigo, 2013: 51). While the

program appears to have supported the development of collegiality within the teaching team, a loss of the host-university academics' autonomy in becoming home-university agents suggests the desirability of a more balanced two-way influence.

Quality assurance and professional development

Some of the difficulties in delivering quality-assured programs offshore are noted by K. Smith (2010). There is a tension between requirements for equivalence or comparability and the need to contextualise curricula for the local context (AEI, 2006; AUQA, 2009; Keevers et al., 2014; Mahmud & Sanderson, 2011). There is a need for context-sensitive quality measures (Marginson & McBurnie, 2004; Pyvis, 2011; Stella & Bhushan, 2011) and curriculum adaptation (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). Pyvis (2011) argues the need for collaboratively developed measures of quality.

It is feasible that professional development and quality assurance might go hand-in-hand. In 2010 an ALTC project report, *Enhancing frameworks for assuring the quality of learning and teaching in University offshore education programs*, offered a set of *Principles to Assist in Quality Assurance* aimed at assuring the quality of learning and teaching in transnational programs and informing the design of professional-development programs for offshore education (O'Donaghue, Chapman, Pyvis, Aspland & Melville, 2010). In 2013, key issues in quality assurance of transnational higher education were developed through *tropEd* – a higher-education network in international health (Zwanikken, Peterhans, Dardis & Scherpbier, 2013). They developed a quality system created through participatory learning for all members, which was enhanced by involving and learning from the students. The writers suggest that this participatory learning process was a true collaboration, as opposed to national education sovereignty, and that quality assurance within the network became fully integrated into the functioning and learning of the network.

An example of involving the transnational teaching team in quality-assurance processes, as equal partners in developing standards and calibrating assessment through situated professional-practice development using PAL, is documented in an article written collaboratively by scholars from both partner institutions (Keevers et al: 2014).

Transnational teaching teams and situated professional development

There has been a recent shift in the literature from preparation/induction programs through sharing towards collegial teaching-team approaches for curriculum development and professional development. For example, in their survey of transnational programs across the UK, Keay, May & O'Mahony, 2014 argue that the characteristics of communities of practice, that is, joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire (see Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002), provide a theoretical framework for creating effective transnational

education partnerships. They argue that the ongoing reciprocal transactions between home- and host-campus staff as well as students will inevitably shape the partnership and its success or failure, and that developing collaborative relationships and partnerships can thus be a key way to improve quality in transnational education contexts. Djerasimovic (2014) also offers a conception in which both parties in the transnational partnership occupy power positions that are not necessarily hierarchical. Vinen and Selvarajah (2008) give an example of mutual engagement in which a course advisory committee was established comprising teaching staff from both institutions to evaluate the design and preparation of course materials and review changes in delivery.

Yet the relationship between partner institution teachers is inherently unequal (Dobos, 2011; Dunn & Wallace, 2006a; Mahmud & Sanderson, 2011; Pyvis, 2011; Seah & Edwards, 2006; K. Smith, 2009; L. Smith, 2009) and power relations and inequalities may constrain a teaching-team approach. Crosling (2011) observed that even when official policy required meaningful dialogue between equals, offshore campus staff tended to be passive and take a subordinate role to home-campus academics. Sharing ideas and support is recommended, for example, by Ziguras (2007: 21-22), who urges that providers “develop systems that support and enhance the informal support and sharing of information between teaching staff”, and O’Mahony (2014: 8), who recommends “the embedding of opportunities to share good practice within and between home and offshore institutions”.

Sharing, however, may not be enough to engender success. The “frequently used term ‘partnership’ implies a degree of equality but often hides a power hierarchy constructed by both sides” (Djerasimovic, 2014: 207). Kalantzis and Cope (2000) argue that the complexity of education in an international environment requires that educators address the question of different cultures of learning and teaching, seek new and diverse paths of learning and cross-fertilise teaching and learning strategies. Equalising the involvement of host and home academics in curriculum decisions is recommended by a number of researchers and commentators, who note that successful transnational projects involve all members of the teaching team (Dunn & Wallace, 2006a; Leask, 2004; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). The Dunn & Wallace study (2006a) noted the importance of valuing the skills and approaches of host-country teachers: “The expertise of local tutors and relationships with partner organizations were seen to be important and as yet largely untapped sources of learning about transnational teaching in particular countries, both for Australian academics and their institutions...and while some academics use a range of teaching approaches, they are not confident that they are appropriately adapted for their transnational students” (2006a: 368).

In their *Working Model for Developing a Fair Academic Trade*, Greenwood et al. (2014) propose that the key elements for cross-national projects include building shared knowledge, negotiating learning goals, forming learning communities, developing conceptual and epistemological frameworks relevant to the developing country and building educators' capacity in the developing country. One of the guiding principles in the professional-development

framework for academic staff teaching offshore proposed by Leask et al. (2005) also includes the involvement of all members of the teaching team in professional development.

As noted above, the term 'partnership' implies a degree of equality that often hides a power hierarchy (Djerasimovic, 2014). Djerasimovic offers a preferable conception in which both parties in the transnational partnership occupy power positions that are not necessarily hierarchical. In transnational education successful teaching collaborations "involve drawing on the expertise of all of those involved, with the aim of producing both localised and internationally relevant subjects and programs" (Melano et al., 2014: 2).

Keevers et al. (2014) report on a program that sought to equalise the relationship through a transnational teaching-team approach, and argue for professional development based in practice at the teaching-team level. In this work 'transnational teaching team' is "an inclusive term used to refer to subject coordinators, lecturers, tutors, demonstrators and assessors, that is all those teaching and assessing in the subject across all sites" (2014: 234). The professional-development program was "practice-based and collaboratively designed to ensure it is specific and sensitive to the daily work context of a transnational team, thus enhancing dialogic interaction, negotiation and relations amongst teaching team members" (2014: 233). This situated professional-development approach is supported by earlier work of Knight, Tait & Yorke (2006), Brew & Boud (1996) and Boud & Brew (2013) who advocate a holistic approach to professional development for teachers. Brew (2010) argues that academic development should be grounded in the daily demands of academic work. Knight, Tait & Yorke (2006: 320) propose a view of professional development as "the development of capabilities that occurs as the consequences of situated social practices". The philosophical base is in the communities of practice advocated by Wenger et al. (2002) in which shared knowledge and joint enterprise build collegial relationships in an environment of trust.

Practice-sharing is seen to greatly improve teaching strategies (Knight, Tait & Yorke, 2006), and the experience of transnational teaching affords opportunities for professional learning. Indeed, Smith (2013) and Hamza (2010) argue that the very experience of transnational teaching has the potential to promote transformational learning for staff. However the kind of experience a teacher will have relates to motivation as much as experience, and teachers may need support in the practice of reflexivity (Teekens, 2003). Hoare (2013) points out that while the transnational teaching experience is a rich source of learning and that transnational educators are prepared to engage in self-reflection, the "unsupported on-the-job culture learning can be confusing and stressful" (2013: 570), and that universities need to facilitate the development of the required skills. Future research into professional-development policy and practice in transnational education might therefore usefully seek to ascertain (a) the processes that might be required to build effective situated learning through the teaching-team experience and (b) whether the creation of situated professional development can ameliorate the problem reported by a number of commentators (see, for example, Heffernan & Poole, 2004; Olcott, 2009;

Shanahan & McParlane, 2005; Sidhu, 2009) in which partnerships deteriorate when home-institution staff do not endorse the importance of the transnational partnership.

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