

## **Equal Local**

**Future-proofing RMIT's global reach by promoting equivalence in onshore and offshore learning**

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**Strategic objectives addressed:**

This project addresses the following strategic objectives:

- Transforming the student experience
- Examining standards and expectations around our offerings so that quality is evidenced across all locations and disciplines

**Internal order number: 360348**

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# 1 Executive summary

Transnational teaching is a growing field and there is an increasing need for Australian academics to grapple with the complexities of maintaining quality educational outcomes regardless of location of delivery. The Equal Local LTIF project contributes to the continuous improvement of equivalence and comparability of courses offered transnationally through RMIT partnerships and RMIT Vietnam. The aims of this project were to:

- adapt and apply the 'Equivalence and Comparability Model' developed by Palaskas and Gopal from the College of Business to a Design and Social Context (DSC) context
- address pressing issues of equivalence and adaptability between onshore and offshore programs in two large DSC history and theory courses
- produce professional development materials to help on/offshore teaching staff design and implement adaptable curriculum materials
- collect data from staff and students to inform and enhance new curriculum design
- work collaboratively with on/offshore staff to design and deliver new curriculum materials
- develop two case studies

Taking a team-based approach, staff from Melbourne, Singapore, Vietnam and Hong Kong worked collaboratively to develop and pilot new adaptable curriculum materials for two large Design and Social Context (DSC) history/theory courses. The knowledge and experience acquired from a review of the literature the curriculum development process was then used to develop the following key project outcomes:

1. Guiding principles for course adaptability
2. An adaptable curriculum design framework
3. An adaptable curriculum design implementation process
4. Two case studies that have applied the, principles, framework and implementation process

The project outcomes utilise graphic diagrams to communicate the complex factors impacting on transnational education. They provide a user-friendly set of professional development resources for on/offshore course teams to support future development of adaptable curriculum materials. The two detailed case studies provide examples of how the principles, framework and process can be applied in specific contexts. The project outcomes will be made available on the RMIT website in 2013 for further piloting to ensure their transferability across a range of educational contexts.

## 2 Outcomes

### University wide Outcomes

- Guiding Principles for Course Adaptability
- An Adaptable Curriculum Design Framework
- An Adaptable Curriculum Implementation Process
- An Adaptable Curriculum Context Map
- Two Case Studies
- Three Dissemination Presentations
- An LTIF Project Report
- A collaborative scholarly paper - currently being written and will be submitted to the following journal: *The Journal of Studies in International Education*
- A conference presentation has been prepared and will be submitted to Australian International Education Conference <http://www.aiec.idp.com/home.aspx>

### Discipline Specific Outcomes

- **School of Art.** A series of online learning activities developed in collaboration with EduTAG, 4 online lecturettes and a revised adaptable delivery model for all locations
- **School of Media & Communication.** A series of adaptable learning activities, a revised delivery model for all locations, a series of online lecturettes.

## 3 Project outcomes and impacts

The following section describes the project, its aims, the design and the impact of project outcomes.

### 3.1 Project Description and Aims

In this project specialised research was conducted on transnational education and contemporary modes of curriculum delivery. The research was used to design an adaptable curriculum framework and implementation process for use in diverse geo-cultural locations and cohorts. The framework and implementation process was developed, applied and evaluated using the following two core history and theory courses:

- *Art History and Theory 1* (School of Art, Hong Kong Art School and RMIT Vietnam).
- *Communication and Social Relations* (School of Media and Communication, Singapore Institute of Management and RMIT Vietnam).

The project focused on addressing the inherent challenge of teaching history and theory curriculum in practice-based disciplines, and the issues facing transnational delivery.

The starting point was to look at work done on equivalence and comparability in the College of Business and to adapt that work into a context for humanities and creative disciplines. The project team interviewed staff and students about their learning and teaching experiences, and documented the process of designing and implementing new curriculum materials. The outcome was a series of professional development materials that can be applied in any context to develop adaptable curriculum materials. This was supported by two case studies from creative disciplines.

## 3.2 Project Background

There are an increasing number of programs based in RMIT Melbourne that are now being delivered in Singapore, Hong Kong and Vietnam. RMIT University has identified the need for quality and equivalence in delivering these programs (Palaskas and Gopal 2011; RMIT University 2011, p. 8). The focus of this project was two large history and theory courses that have multiple offerings and delivery modes in multiple locations. Both courses have large student cohorts and are core history and theory courses embedded within practice based undergraduate programs.

The two courses are:

### ***Art History and Theory 1 - School of Art***

*(Vietnam, Hong Kong, Melbourne)*

This is a first-year core course in the Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) degree in Melbourne and Hong Kong, which is also offered as a university elective in Melbourne and RMIT Vietnam.

### ***Communication and Social Relations - School of Media and Communication***

*(Vietnam, Singapore, Melbourne)*

This is a core course that is offered across a range of six undergraduate communication and design programs as well as as a University elective (in RMIT Melbourne). It is offered in programs in Melbourne, Singapore and Vietnam.

The reason these courses were chosen for the project was because they are offered across a range of geo-cultural contexts requiring localised and context specific delivery modes (face-to-face, online and blended). Both courses are large theory based courses in practice-based disciplinary programs. Furthermore, both courses have received lower than average course experience survey (CES) results over the past few years. Staff and student feedback also indicated that the needs of the various student cohorts were changing in regards to graduate expectations, hours and modes of delivery and prior learning experiences.

## 3.3 Project Design

The project was designed and implemented as follows:

### 3.3.1 Research and Development

Higher education institutes, both within Australia and internationally, utilise international development strategies to expand upon their business. Transnational education raises a suite of issues regarding the development and delivery of quality education programs catered for both global and local context. A robust equivalence framework is a core requirement in ensuring quality transnational learning and teaching development and delivery across multiple locations. An equivalence framework for transnational education must take into account both the compliance/regulatory frameworks across all locations, and curriculum design that incorporates both global and local content. Gopal and Palaskas (2010) put forward an equivalence and comparability model that outlines four guiding principles for achieving equivalence and comparability in a trans-national context, broadly defined as: (i) equivalence, (ii) comparability, (iii) contextualisation (a subset of comparability), (iv) customisation (a subset of comparability). The model provides a framework of elements, at a course level, that must be achieved to ensure equivalence and comparability standards are met, utilising a checklist of standards.

Development of an equivalence framework for local and international program/course delivery is critical in maintaining quality education outcomes for students in all locations. An equivalence framework is needed to: (i) meet needs of both onshore and offshore staff and students, (ii) meet contractual/ compliance obligations, (iii) to ensure quality teaching, (iv) to ensure equity. This project has approached the development of an equivalence framework from a curriculum design perspective. To inform this approach, the following areas of literature were reviewed:

- Transnational education
- Alternative modes of delivery and assessment
- Peer learning and assessment approaches
- Teaching theory courses in practice based disciplines
- Learning anywhere/anytime

### ***Transnational Education***

The literature on transnational education reveals that Australian academics are increasingly faced with the challenge of teaching offshore. Research shows that there is still more work needed to improve student satisfaction in offshore education (Shah, Roth & Sid Nair: 2010) and that the quality of teaching and learning offshore is uneven (McBurnie: 2008; Ewan: 2009). Moreover, the learning about transnational teaching and learning has been ad hoc and informal (Dunn & Wallace: 2005).

Dunn and Wallace (2005) believe that many of the issues raised around the quality of transnational programs can be improved by the development and support of “broader, more inclusive professional communities of practice” (p.3). Research shows that programs benefit from collaboration and connectivity between onshore/offshore students and staff which ensures meaningful local *and* global learning environments (Pannan et al.: 2005; Ziguras: 2007).

Furthermore the issues that face educators in any location relate to the educator’s ability to know the student cohort, and the local context, as well as be able to engage in contemporary curriculum design. Bird et al. (2003) believe that at the heart of any educational program is curriculum planning and review. With this in mind and taking the advice of Dunn and Wallace (2005) about starting collegial contact at the planning stage we approached our offshore colleagues to collaborate on a curriculum renewal process to design culturally responsive and adaptable curriculum materials at the course level.

### ***Alternative modes of delivery and assessment***

Traditional modes of delivery and assessment in theory-based tertiary courses generally rely on a lecture/tutorial delivery structure, and essay/exam based assessments (Leedham: 2009; Wigglesworth & Storch: 2009). Flexible assessment provides students’ with some degree of choice in how learning outcomes are demonstrated within a framework of comparative equivalence, and are most effective where there is clear articulation of learning outcomes in assessment criteria (O’Sullivan *et al.*: 2011; Irwin & Hepplestone: 2011). Creating and articulating criteria that is clearly mapped to learning outcomes is critical in increasing student engagement with flexible assessment and promoting deeper learning (Francis: 2008). By creating flexibility in choice of assessment, learning outcomes become more accessible and integrated in the learning experience, leading to greater ownership of the subject matter (Lantolf: 2008). Flexible assessment practices are the first step towards a student-centered pedagogy, and are critical for the localisation of the curriculum.

For students to engage with flexible assessment practices, a degree of empowerment, at both an individual and community level, is required. Strategies for implementing flexible assessment practices can include: (i) choice of assessment method, (ii) choice of assessment subject, (iii) choice of assessment criteria, (iv) choice of assessment result (Craddock *et al.*: 2009). Flexible assessment should be gradually introduced, and scaffolded to increase with year level, in tandem with self and peer assessment practices (Frances: 2008). Forms that alternative assessment can take include: (i) writing folios, (ii) persuasive writing on a topic, (iii) game-show style ideas pitches, (iv) critical anthologies, (v) seminar diaries, (vi) online publishing of written, audio and video material, (vii) group work and peer assessment (Leedham: 2009; O’Sullivan *et al.*: 2011). Integration of the elements of instruction and assessment in curriculum design creates a tangible connection between learning outcomes and subject matter, facilitating deeper learning processes at both an individual and group level (Lantolf & Poehner: 2008; Lantolf: 2009).

### **Peer Learning and Assessment Approaches**

Peer learning and assessment is a social process that requires students to engage with each other and the assessment process. Peer assessment encourages deeper engagement on the part of the student with the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and evaluating the evidence of achievement. Peer and self assessments create a reflexive learner who is able to identify issues and develop constructive solutions to address them (Vickerman: 2009). Scaffolded peer feedback and assessment processes build academic skills, writing skills, an understanding of broader information landscapes, and an engagement with independent learning (Cleland & Walton: 2012). Through the development of iterative cycles of assessment and feedback, a student's academic skills are built and developed; this formative approach to assessment leads to a deeper learning experience. Peer assessment is widely found to be beneficial to student engagement with the learning process, even in instances where students report feeling uneasy with the process of peer assessment, as on reflection, a majority of students can see the benefits of the assessment model to their learning process (Cleland & Walton: 2012).

Peer learning/assessment strategies are most beneficial for students when applied consistently over an extended period of time, such as a semester, leading to noted improvements in student work and engagement with the learning process (Gielen *et al.*: 2010). Cleland and Walton (2012) found that peer assessment promotes a positive learning environment, and is well received by a majority of students, even where they may experience a degree of discomfort during the process. For peer assessment to be effective in promoting deeper learning a significant amount of trust in both the self and peer as assessor is required (Van Gennip *et al.*: 2010). One of the risks of peer assessment is a tendency for students to either over or under mark their peers, which is an issue that can be overcome through guidance from the lecturer and assessment criteria. Peer assessment is not suitable for all students' learning styles; as such it is important to ensure that a suite of strategies are in place for engaging divergent learning styles. Successful integration of formative peer learning/assessment strategies hinges on students being provided with clear assessment criteria and a supportive tutorial environment (Vickerman: 2009).

### **Teaching theory courses in practice based disciplines**

Traditionally there has been a separation between the teaching of theory and practice in undergraduate creative disciplines. For example, the resistance to engage with theory is evident across all cohorts of fine arts and design students (Camino: 2010). In creative disciplines, there is a student perception of academic writing that tends towards distress and feelings of alienation from the creative process. Students in these fields often deeply identify as a "maker" and this can increase their resistance to engage with what they perceive as more "conventional" academic requirements, such as writing and theory (Tynan & New: 2009). The connections between making, theory, writing and reflection can be quite daunting for students and are often perceived as divorced activities (Apps & Mamchur: 2009). Students in creative disciplines often consider forms of assessment in theory courses, such as academic essays and exams, to be outmoded and unrelated to the realities of their practice. This is partly due to the different methods and processes used in non creative disciplines as well as the different types of teaching spaces used (Kill: 2006). Alternative and more flexible forms of assessment, which build upon the students' strengths as 'makers', are required for students to effectively engage with theory courses, and overcome this polarised perception.

Such perceptions are identified as a "translative gap", because overcoming them involves clear communication about learning outcomes and criteria, as well as identifying meaningful connections for students between theory and practice (Kill: 2006, p.309). (Prashanti we need a page number here as you have a direct quote see above) The use of multi-disciplinary strategies and flexible approaches to assessment allows such resistances to be harnessed and developed into productive and innovative outcomes. Apps and Mamchur (2009) propose that through identification of the elements that are the same across creative and writing processes, students are more deeply able to engage in the development of narratives that represent their work in the written form. This enables students to re-conceive writing as a creative process akin to their studio practice; this

allows them more continuity in their identification as makers (Tynan & New: 2009). Likewise, through the provision of flexible assessment options such as offering a choice between a journal and a traditional essay, the resistance towards writing typically expressed amongst students in creative disciplines was overcome (Camino: 2010).

Essays are often the default form of assessment in theory courses. While they have an advantage of demonstrating deep thinking, critical analysis, research and communication it is rarely used as a form after graduation (Leedham: 2009). Skills in independent learning, communication, critical thinking and research are seen as transferrable and could be assessed through more flexible methods: documentary videos or image/text-based books, presentations, wiki's, blogs, e-posters, seminar diaries and the such. Furthermore, matching assessment to industry-relevant activities is critical for enabling students to translate their study experience into real-world scenarios (Craddock & Mathias: 2009). Such activities could include: mock grant applications (particularly useful for fine art graduates), critical reviews, exhibition/curatorial proposals or design briefs. Greater integration between theory and practice, as well as the academic recognition of non-conventional forms of assessment and evidence of research in theory courses, is required if the disconnect between theory and practice is to be removed (Melles & Lockheart: 2012).

For example, utilising online technologies to deliver and assess Art History & Theory (AHT) courses has been a successful strategy at Monash University, where "an online multi-user environment that is designed around objects, artefacts, philosophies, personalities and critical discourse" was developed to aid the teaching of undergraduate AHT courses (Janet & Miles: 2009, p.52). It was found that this mode of AHT delivery is particularly suitable for visual thinkers, providing an alternate means of engaging with theoretical content that was well received amongst the undergraduate student cohort.

### ***Learning Anywhere/Anytime***

Over the last three decades, the role of technology in tertiary education has expanded rapidly, promoting flexible, collaborative, contextual and connected learning. Mobile technologies facilitate students' ability to learn anywhere/anytime, democratising the learning process and providing access to information. The ever-increasing ubiquity of mobile technologies has increased the options for flexibility and personalisation of learning anywhere/anytime resources for students (Squire: 2009). Sims (2008) puts forward a manifesto for the 21st century learner that recognises both the changes in student cohorts and shifts away from traditional delivery models. Sims proposes: (i) today's learners can learn anywhere, anytime, from anyone, (ii) the role of the teacher is one of participant in a connected environment, (iii) it is necessary to move beyond traditional conceptions of fixed curriculum to a model of connected learning, and (iv) course design should focus on strategies and performance indicators, allowing learners to integrate their personal attributes into and guiding their learning experience.

The increased use of online technologies is in part a response to students' desire for increased flexibility. In most courses, the online technologies operate as part of a blended learning model; incorporating face-to-face delivery and an online course components. Online learning experiences have the capacity to enhance the student learning experience and engagement with course materials. The successful integration of blended learning models is contingent on individual learning styles, and as such, flexibility in modes of access to learning materials is beneficial (Ogunleye: 2010). Selwyn (2011) found that students predominantly use online materials as a way to aid their progress through a course, rather than deepen their learning, or engage with other students in the online environment. Digital technologies provide flexible learning options for the student, enabling them to cater for their individual learning style.

### **3.3.2 Approach**

This project took a team-based approach to identifying the institutional, structural, and cultural limitations and opportunities between onshore/offshore programs, and the development of transnational curriculum materials. Knowledge was gathered by building relationships with offshore

staff, interviewing staff and students and familiarising ourselves with the literature in this field.

### ***Team-Based Approach***

The project team were keen, where possible, to set up good working relationships with offshore teaching staff. The following offshore staff were included as part of the project team:

Richard Streitmatter, Senior Lecturer, RMIT Vietnam  
 Don Gordon, Academic Services Manager, RMIT Vietnam  
 Terry Batt, Program Director BA (Fine Art), Hong Kong Art School  
 Tin Ming, Sessional lecturer, Hong Kong Art School  
 Browyn Clarke, Director of Programs, School of Media and Communication

A number of Skype sessions were held with staff in the various locations to initiate the project, and then to progress the work. Although there was no funding specifically available for staff to visit each location, circumstances allowed for this to occur. For example Kristen Sharp was overseas on other business so was able to meet with the staff in Vietnam and Hong Kong. Terry Johal has been regularly teaching in Singapore for a number of years and has already established good working relationships with teaching staff. Don Gordon was in Melbourne for other work and was able to meet up with Kristen Sharp and Angela Clarke to discuss the project.

It should be noted that these circumstantial meetings helped establish collegial relationships for this project. The fact that they were face-to-face was critical in gaining an understanding of the local context including culture, available technology, teaching spaces and student administrative processes. Our experience is that having at least one face-to-face meeting can progress collegial relationships and cultural understandings quickly and efficiently. These relationships are then easier to build upon through subsequent Skype meetings.

Outcomes from these collaborations include shared resources that have been developed onshore and offshore. For example Richard Streitmatter has produced two 10 minute lecturette in Vietnam and Kristen Sharp has produced two 10 minute lecturettes in Melbourne as part of a suite of lecturettes that will be available to students in all locations.

### ***Interviews/Focus Groups and/or Surveys***

Interviews/focus groups and/or surveys were conducted with staff and students in all locations, i.e., Vietnam, Hong Kong, Singapore and Melbourne. An RMIT ethics application was submitted and approved. The questions for students focused on their prior learning, attitudes to studying history and theory, opinions about meaningful assessment, willingness to form global connections with students studying the same course, life experience and future plans (see appendix A). The questions for staff focused on course relevance, appropriateness of learning activities and assessment tasks, level of student English language skills, the benefits and challenges of teaching history/theory in practice based disciplines and experiences teaching on/offshore courses (see appendix B). The transcripts were analysed and the following themes emerged:

Interviews/focus groups/surveys with staff and students revealed:

- A need for creating fixed and flexible curriculum content, learning activities and assessment to meet the need of diverse cohorts
- A preference for mixed-mode (blended) delivery and wanted to retain some element of face-to-face discussion
- A need for explicit teaching of skills in academic literacies and self-directed learning, and scaffolding this throughout the semester through closely aligned learning and assessment activities
- A desire for choice and variety in assessment eg: alternatives to the essay
- A need to reorganise the teaching schedule to accommodate the changing study patterns of contemporary learners

- A need to bridge the translative gap between theory and practice to contextualise learning and match student profile
- The need to support transdisciplinary learning environments to match student profiles.

### ***Understanding the Literature***

The following themes emerged from the literature:

- students in creative disciplines are resistant to writing because they experience feelings of distress, anxiety and alienation
- students in creative disciplines prefer flexibility and choice in assessment
- working in pairs helps student produce work with greater accuracy/deeper engagement and supports formative learning
- there is a need to integrate the process of writing and the process of making to engage students in creative disciplines and ally feelings of distress and anxiety about writing
- there is a need for student-led assessment
- there is a need to build on the strengths of creative thinkers/makers
- appropriate use of technologies work effectively in blended learning environments and democratise the learning/access to information process

The knowledge from interviews/focus groups/surveys and the literature was used in the design and delivery of adaptable curriculum materials in the two nominated courses. It was then synthesised and used to develop the professional development materials for transnational educators.

### **3.3.3 Adapting the Equivalence and Comparability Framework**

The project team looked closely at the work done in the College of Business on equivalence and comparability by Tom Palaskas and Sathiyavani Gopal. A meeting with Tom Palaskas in March 2012 was held to discuss the development of this work and the issues that arose. This meeting confirmed that when RMIT courses are offered transnationally there is a requirement that they be equivalent in the application of RMIT policies, procedures, guidelines and strategic directions. The work of Palaskas and Gopal also identified a need for courses to be comparable in terms of local factors and the student profile at each offering location. The Equivalence and Comparability Framework (appendix C) along with definitions, checklists, resources and transnational teaching guides and can be found on the RMIT website at:

<http://www.rmit.edu.au/bus/adg/equivalenceandcomparability>

The Equivalence and Comparability Framework was extremely useful and the checklists provided an excellent way to initiate conversations about renewing curriculum in offshore locations. In reviewing the framework however, the project team identified a need for user-friendly resources for course co-ordinators and teaching staff at the offering specific level of the curriculum design process. The team also identified a need for mapping the cyclical process of developing, implementing and reviewing curriculum.

### **3.3.4 Designing Curriculum Materials**

Using the knowledge gained from our literature review, a blended learning model was designed for both courses with consideration given to the experiences and skills of a technologically savvy and practice-based user cohort. Aspects of the online components in the Art History course were designed and developed in consultation with EduTAG (Jody Fenn, Darren Smith, Emily Glenn) and were then tested in Melbourne to evaluate its usability. The image librarian worked with RMIT Copyright and Digitisation services to ensure compliance for all images used in the online learning activity being developed. In the Communication and Social Relations course, there was a reduction in the number of physical lectures with a variety of online resources developed (including lecturettes) to achieve the same outcome as the lectures. Class plans detailing learning activities were published weekly. These were designed to compliment face-to-face classes. Alternative

assessment modes were developed and trialled. Details of the curriculum design can be found in section 3.5 Case Studies.

The newly developed teaching models were or will be implemented as follows:

- Art History and Theory 1 - Vietnam (March 2013), Melbourne (March 2013), Hong Kong (January 2014)
- Communication and Social Relations - Melbourne (March, July 2012), Singapore (July 2012, July 2013) Vietnam (Feb 2013).

### **3.4 Designing Professional Development Materials for Transnational Educators**

A key outcome of this project is a series of diagrams that synthesise the factors influencing the process of developing adaptable curriculum materials for transnational education. Data from CES surveys, interviews with staff, students and user-testing along with emerging themes from the literature on transnational education and contemporary learning informed the design of the professional development materials. These materials are intended for use by program and course co-ordinators to help catalyse and develop communities of practice amongst their on/offshore teaching staff.

The Equal Local team worked collaboratively with Shayna Quinn, a professional graphic designer, to develop the diagrams. They communicate complex ideas in a simple visual format.

#### **3.4.1 Guiding Principles for Course Equivalence and Adaptability**

Prior to designing the diagrams the project team developed the following statement and guiding principles for achieving course equivalence:

RMIT University requires that all offerings of a program including those at offshore locations provide students with equivalent learning experiences and educational outcomes. Graduates in all locations are expected to acquire equivalent knowledge, skills and application of knowledge and skills.

Equivalence is a measure of quality determined by maintaining defined AQF standards for Australian qualifications. It is achieved through compliance with RMIT governance and the design of an adaptable curriculum whereby course content is contextualised and customised to suit local factors and specific student profiles. Successful implementation of equivalence is reliant on appropriate professional development for staff on equivalence and curriculum design.

A course that is equivalent across all offerings:

1. Adapts curriculum and delivery to increase cultural, personal, professional and global relevance to students in particular offerings
2. Promotes effective learning by designing curriculum that accommodates trans-disciplinary student profiles
3. Designs content, learning activities and assessment tasks that link to local context and student's professional practice.

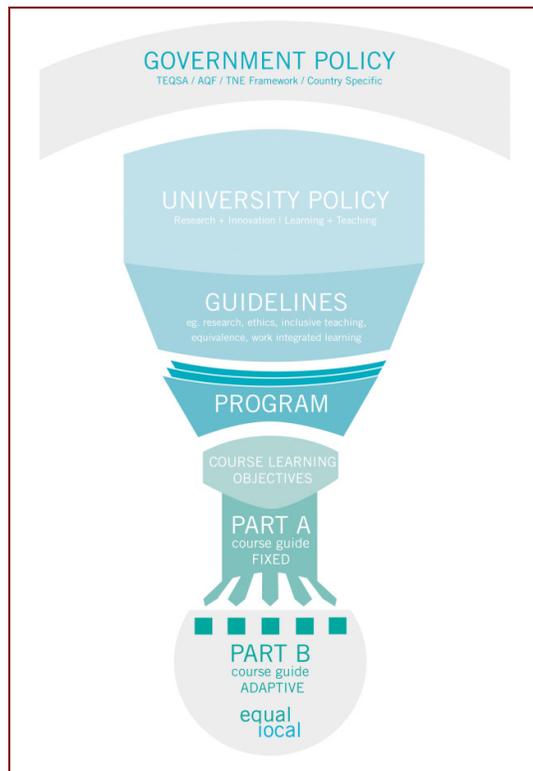
### 3.4.2 Context Map (Figure 1)

While Palaskas and Gopal's Equivalence and Comparability Framework was useful, there was another layer about the process of designing new curriculum materials that needed to be captured. The focus of the Palaskas and Gopal's Framework was weighted more heavily to issues of compliance. Although their model outlines the need for contextualisation and customisation, it was not designed as a guide for detailed curriculum review at the Part B course guide level but rather was designed as a guide for program and Part A course guide review. At RMIT a Part-A course guide includes a course description, learning outcomes and an overview of learning activities and modes of assessment which need to be consistent across all course offerings. A Part- B course guide introduces offering specific information such as teaching schedule, detailed assessment tasks and context specific learning resources.

*Equal Local* focused on curriculum design in terms of the Part B of the course guide to identify elements of the curriculum that needed to be either fixed or flexible. A meeting was held in August 2012 with Tom Palaskas and Sathiyavani Gopal to help locate the work of adaptable curriculum design within their work. The project advisor Cate Gribble from Deakin University, who is an expert in transnational equivalence, also attended this meeting to contribute to this round table discussion.

The outcome of this meeting was an agreement that the *Equal Local* work should be located within the 'comparability' section of the Palaskas/Gopal model and that it would provide further detail about how to design adaptable curriculum. The project team then met with Associate Professor Evelyn Fallshaw, Director International Academic Policies. This meeting confirmed the need for the development of a framework and implementation process at the Part B course guide level.

The diagram below (Figure 1) provides a context for where *Equal Local* adaptable curriculum design sits within the structures and hierarchies of the university systems and processes.



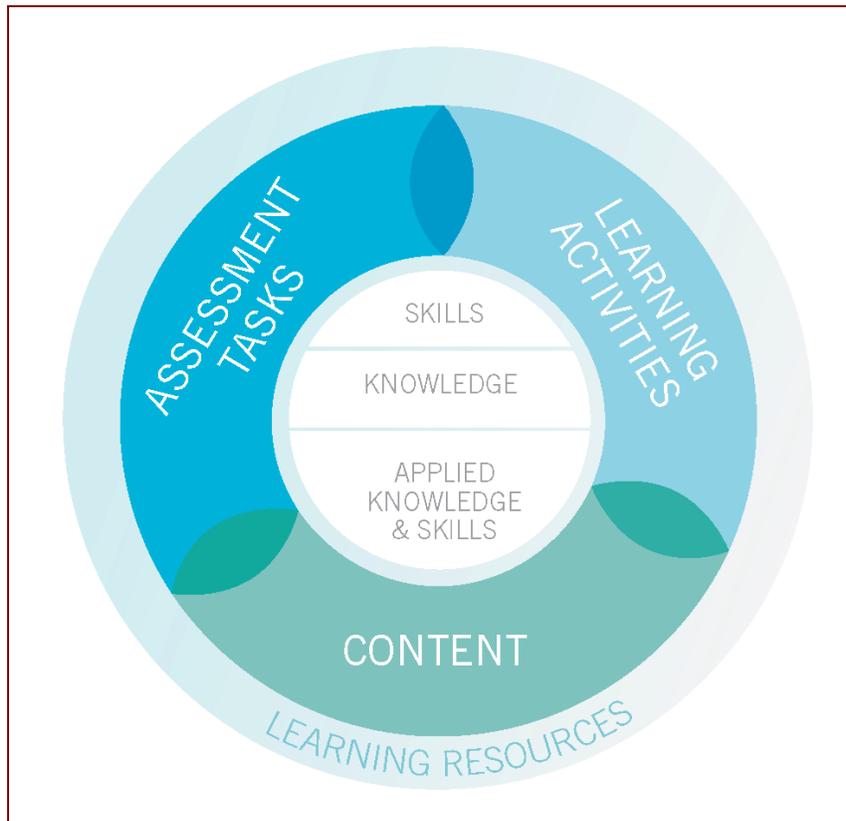
**Figure 1: Adaptable Curriculum Context Map**

This map aligns RMIT processes to the wider university context. The curved lines between each section indicate how the elements influence each other. The map traces the influences on courses from the level of government policy through to university policies and guidelines which in turn influence the development of programs. The multiple offerings of programs onshore and offshore are represented by the layering of the program sections. The map further illustrates the relationship between the program, the course learning outcomes and the part A and part B course guides.

The purpose of this context map is to provide staff in all locations with information as to where their offering of a course fits into their program and the larger university context. This is an important part of developing a team-based approach to curriculum design and provides a simple way of raising awareness amongst staff in all locations about the complexity of transnational education.

### 3.4.3 Adaptable Curriculum Design Framework (Figures 2 & 3)

The framework comprises two simple diagrams that illustrate adaptable contemporary curriculum design. Using the educational concepts of Biggs & Tang (2007), the first diagram (Figure 2) focuses on the interrelationship and alignment of learning outcomes (content), learning activities and assessment tasks. The leaf shaped intersection between each component of the diagram indicates the interrelated flow between all elements of the curriculum. The centre of the diagram references the Australian Quality Framework (AQF) by highlighting skills, knowledge and applied skills and knowledge as the underpinning standards to be achieved in course delivery. The framework is situated in a pool of 'learning resources' which indicates the importance of developing a variety of shared and equivalent learning resources that can be used in multiple educational contexts.

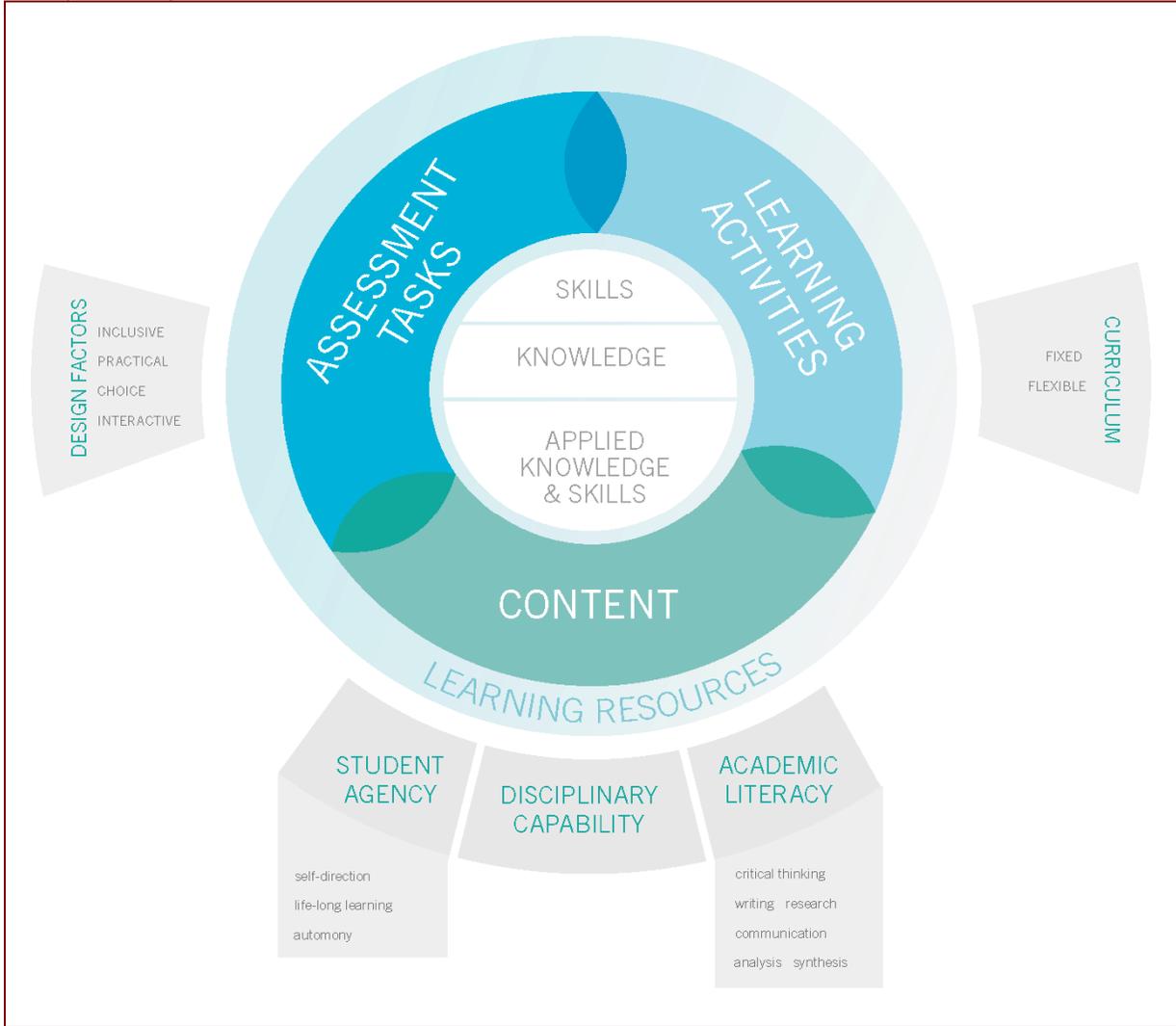


**Figure 2: Adaptable Curriculum Framework A**

The second diagram (Figure 3) builds upon the first and includes the influences that impact upon adaptable curriculum design based on project research. The left-hand side of the diagram includes

factors to consider when designing curriculum such as making learning activities and assessment tasks inclusive, practical, interactive and giving students a choice. The right-hand side of the diagram indicates the need for a curriculum that is both fixed and flexible. The bottom of the diagram shows how university graduates emerge with student agency (self-direction, life-long learning and autonomy), disciplinary capabilities and academic literacies such as critical thinking, writing, research analysis and synthesis skills. It provides a comprehensive list of elements to be considered in course review, staff professional development and reflection.

**Figure 3: Adaptable Curriculum Framework B**



### 3.4.4 Adaptable Curriculum Implementation Process (Figures 4, 5 & 6)

This implementation process is a series of three diagrams. The first diagram (Figure 4) illustrates a cyclical process for the development and review of on/offshore adaptable curriculum. For the process to be most effective, appropriate professional development and support for staff is required to understand cultural specificities and effective curriculum design. The curved lines between each section indicates the various stages and sequences in the process with each stage influencing the development of the next; however, co-ordinators and teaching staff may decide to begin the process at any one of the stages. Each stage is characterised by a key term (verb) so that course teams have a clear understanding of the specific action/activity involved.

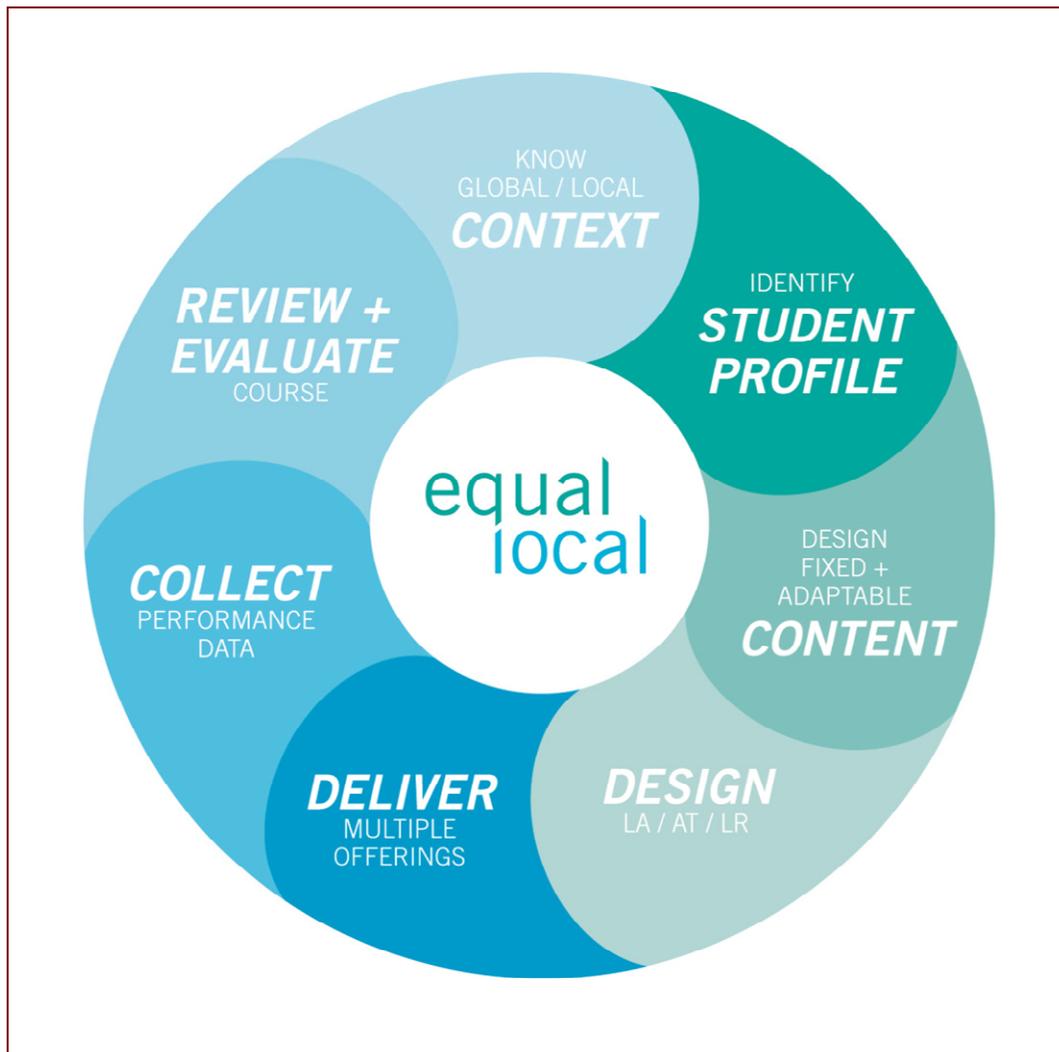


Figure 4: Adaptable Curriculum Implementation Process A

The stages comprise:

***Know Global/Local Context***

Identify and gather information about the specific cultural context (local) in which the course is offered as well as its relationships to other offerings and fields of knowledge (global). This may be achieved by discussions with local staff and program directors, student administration officers, and local students, to gain a general awareness of cultural sensibilities.

***Identify Student Profile***

Using previous CES, CEQ and/or country specific student survey data, identify the following factors in the cohort: age, gender mix, mode of study, disciplinary background, area of specialisation, prior experience and skills, and graduate expectations. Program directors and local staff can also be useful here.

***Design Fixed and Adaptable Content***

In consultation with all teaching staff (onshore and offshore), identify areas that are core knowledge and skills and as such required in the content across all offerings (fixed), as well as areas that can be adapted specifically for the student cohort and context (adaptable). Emphasis should be placed on providing local staff with autonomy to adapt the curriculum to suit the local context in the diversity of student cohorts.

***Design Learning Activities, Assessment Tasks, learning Resources***

Use the *Adaptable Curriculum Design Framework* to develop course content, and align learning activities, assessment and learning resources for the student cohort and context. Work collaboratively with all staff to develop cross offering learning materials e.g., online lectures and resources, and innovative approaches to teaching schedules and assessment. For example, in Art History, a series of short 10 minute lecturettes were developed by on and offshore staff to compliment face-to-face delivery. This means that students from across different offerings can access the same resources with flexibility of access and guided by their individual interests.

***Deliver Multiple Offerings***

Develop effective communication channels to ensure regular contact across all course teams during delivery. This allows for further minor refinements that can respond to changing student/staff/institutional needs that occur during semester delivery period.

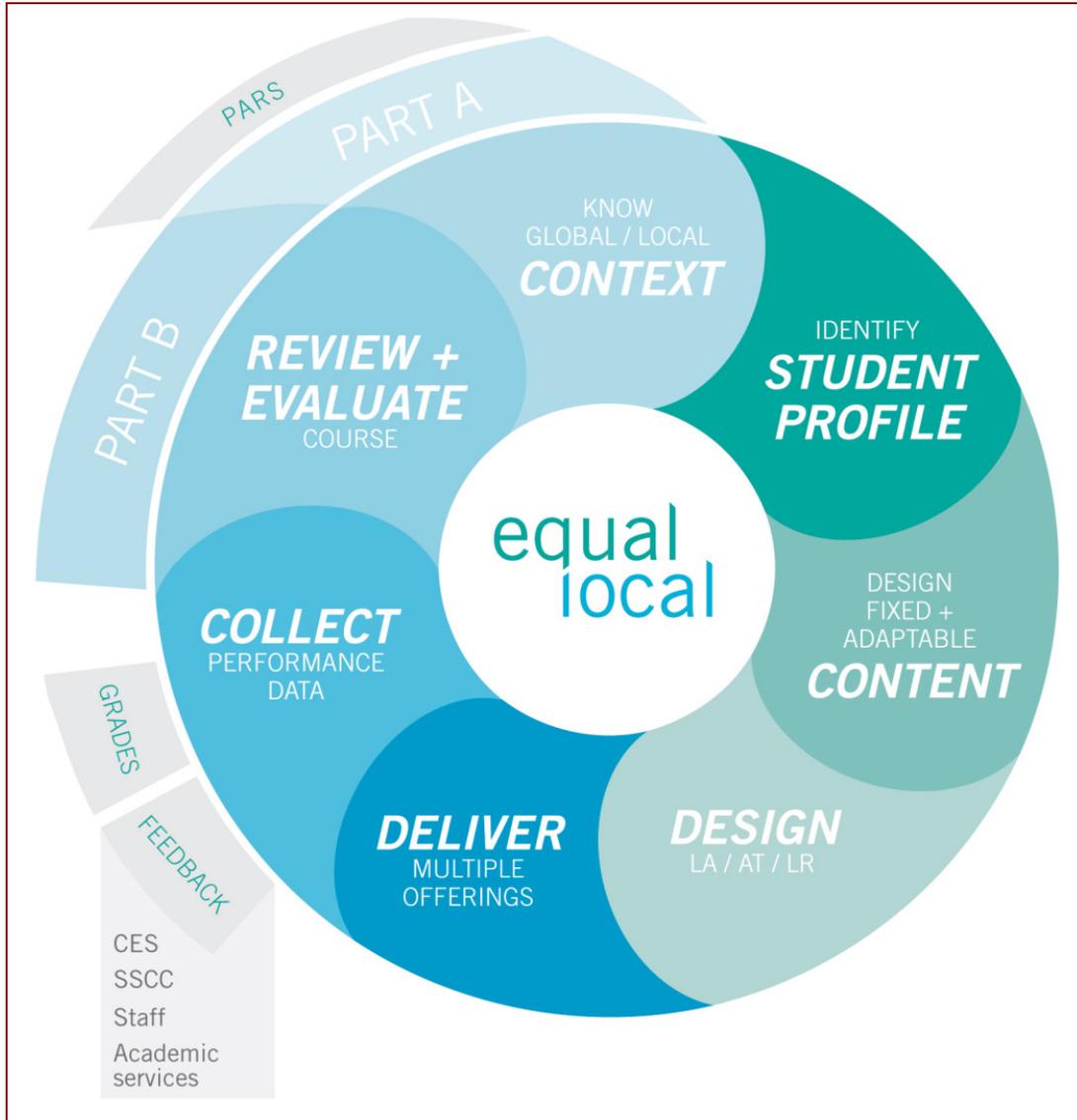
***Collect Performance Data***

Devise offering specific survey questions to refine curriculum and gauge student satisfaction. Collate data from CES and student/staff consultative committee (SSCC). Discuss any issues arising with teaching and administration staff.

***Review and Evaluate Course***

Work collaboratively with all teaching and administrative staff to identify the strengths and limitations of the curriculum design. This review contributes to the future development of Part B course guides and allows for changes to Part A course guides. This is an important step because it allows offshore staff to have a meaningful contribution to the development of the course.

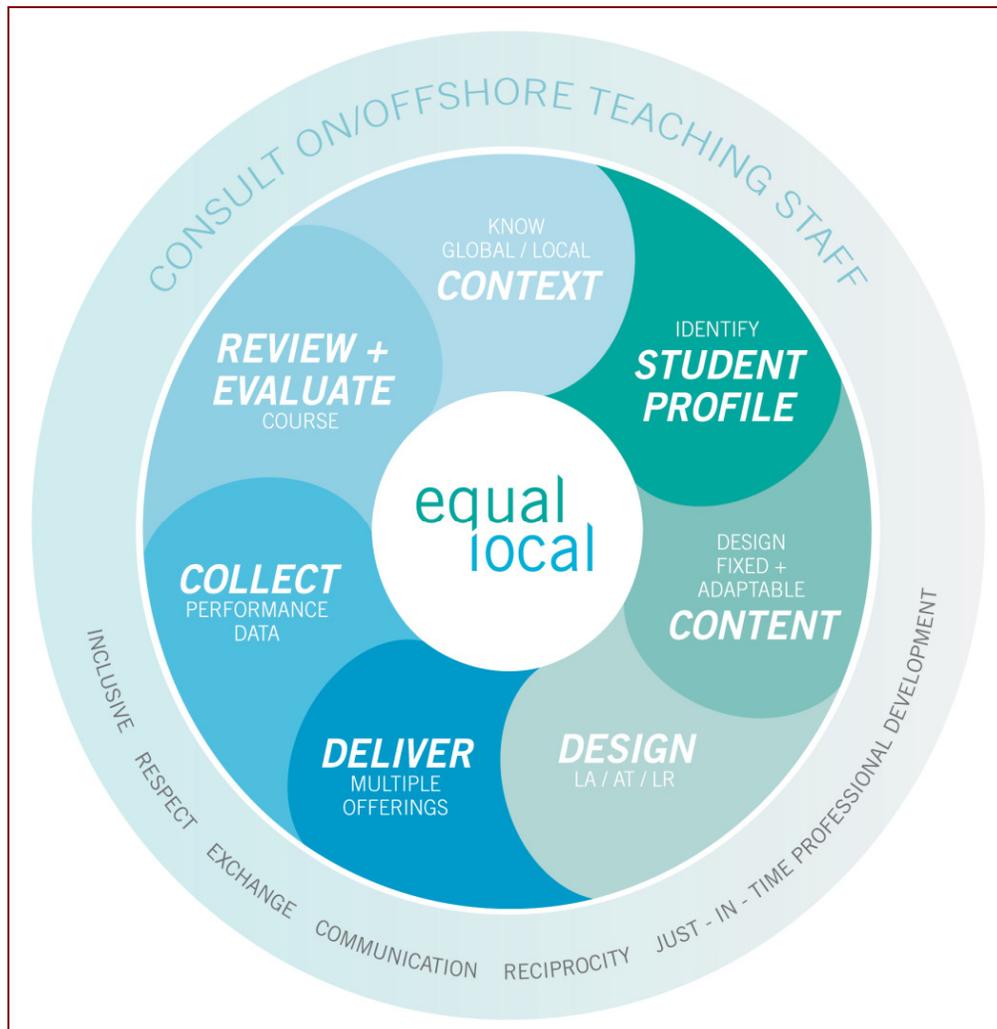
The second diagram (Figure 5) includes information about how this implementation process fits into RMIT systems and processes. The diagram references the various mandatory processes associated with the evaluation of courses such as course experience surveys, student/staff consultative committees and monitoring of grade averages. The diagram also suggests that collecting feedback from teaching and administrative staff is valuable. Reference is made to the RMIT course guide process, rather than seeing the evaluation of Part B course guides as a self contained process, the diagram prompts course teams to consider how Part A course guides can also be adapted to provide students with both local knowledge and global literacies.



**Figure 5: Adaptable Curriculum Implementation Process B**

The third diagram (Figure 6) provides an overarching philosophy for achieving success in course adaptability. The core emphasis is an inclusive and collaborative team-based approach to teaching that is respectful, reciprocal and consultative. In transnational education, both onshore and offshore staff should be equally valued and supported for their professional experience, expertise and knowledge of their specific educational context. Establishing collegiate relationships through clear and regular communication is critical to achieving success. Professional development support should be responsive to the immediate local needs of staff (just-in-time) and should focus on the continuous improvement of teaching practice.

These diagrams are for use in course reviews, curriculum design and just-in-time professional development for transnational educators. They provide succinct information for staff in all locations and begin the process of developing a shared language for transnational education that is grounded in contemporary learning practices and help establish professional communities of practice.



**Figure 6: Adaptable Curriculum Implementation Process C**

## 3.5 Case Studies

A further outcome of this project is the development of two case studies that provide real world examples of how the framework and implementation process presented in this report have been applied in specific contexts.

### 3.5.1 Art History and Theory Case Study

This is a first year core theory course in the Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) degree in Melbourne and Hong Kong, which is also offered as a university elective in Melbourne, and as an elective for Design students at RMIT Vietnam.

#### Context and Student Profile

- Mixture of School Leavers/Mature Age students
- Combination of Full/part-time study (Hong Kong students are full-time working with little time to review materials in between classes)
- Range of disciplinary contexts: Fine Art/Design/Other (University Elective)
- Fine Art and Design students are selected by portfolio into their program, so there is a range of written/research skills and abilities when they start the course.
- Students come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds.
- There is a diverse range of school-leaver prior experiences in Art History: in Hong Kong/Vietnam students have minimal prior study of Western Art History; in Melbourne there may be some prior experience but it varies amongst the cohort.
- Graduate attributes and student expectations: graduating students either work in their field or related activity, continue to work privately as artists, and others go on to further study in Honours or Postgraduate.

Information specific to each offering:

#### *Melbourne*

- Core course in BA Fine Art degree and offered as a University Elective
- Largest course in the School of Art with 200+ students, and 4 teaching staff
- Largely taught by sessional staff
- Delivered face to face

#### *Vietnam*

- Taken as a University elective by Design students
- Delivered face to face by local staff, with course moderation by RMIT Melbourne Art History & Theory Coordinator
- Ongoing staff member delivers the course

#### *Hong Kong*

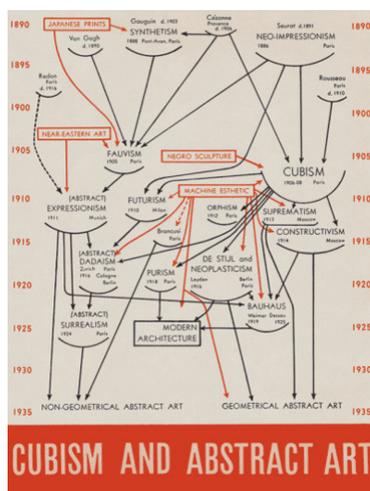
- Core course in BA Fine Art degree
- Online lectures (recorded in Melbourne) with face to face tutorials taught by a local tutor.
- Tutors are sessional, often change from year to year, and are usually appointed close to start of semester by Hong Kong Art School, making forward planning and communication more difficult.
- 80% of the assessment is marked by staff in Melbourne

#### Content

- Covers Modernism in 20th C Art, largely focussed on art movements in Europe and North America

- Key issues for localisation of content include: the narratives being told about modernism, challenges to traditional Euro-centric approach and creating alternatives just teaching the 'canon', considering what 'Modernism' means in Australia, Vietnam, Hong Kong.
- At the same time, students wanted and need literacy about European/North American modernism in order to articulate their practice in the contemporary art world context, and to understand the historical context of that world, which still tends to be dominated by Euro-American interests.
- Consideration of the trans-disciplinary classroom (even within areas of fine art/design students have discipline specific specialisations – each with its own history)
- To identify how to make a theoretical/historical course relevant to students who are largely focussed on their art/design practice.
- Need to create flexible delivery and assessment methods, to encourage peer learning and to make the link between theory and practice more meaningful to students.
- Need to scaffold students in academic literacies: research, critical analysis and writing/presentation skills.

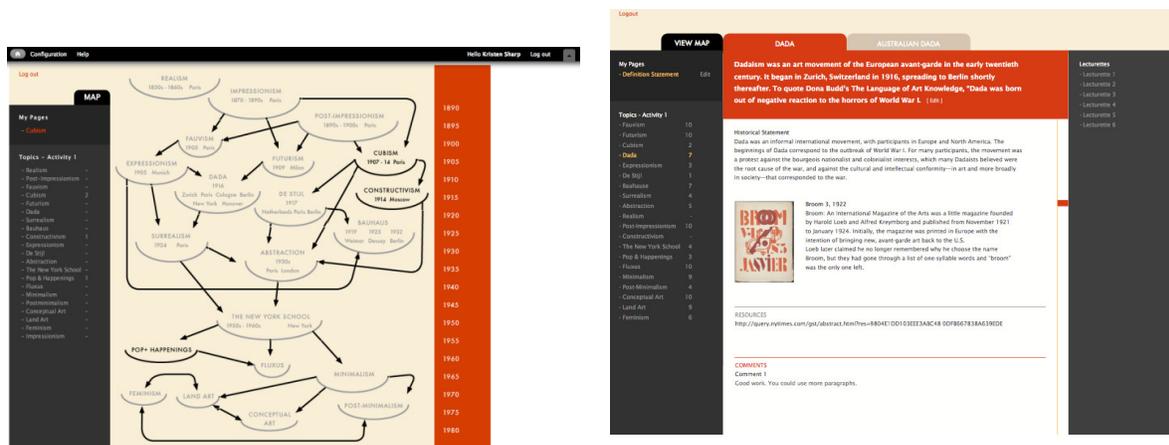
## Design and Deliver



Alfred Barr Cubism and Abstract Art 1936, MOMA

### Modernism in 20th C Art – alternative delivery & assessment

In order to address the curriculum content issues outline above, three online learning and assessment activities were specifically designed for this project, in collaboration with EduTAG (Jody Fenn, Darren Smith, Emily Glenn) who created the software design and provided critical advise on the education design of the activities. The aim of the three activities was to build up students' research, writing and analysis skills and confidence. Each task is designed to build on the previous activity and to introduce advanced skills. All activities are group-based, with individual roles and tasks. The activities were designed to be completed in-class, and to maximise student autonomy and agency in selecting topics, groups and roles and in being able to complete tasks (i.e. flexibility is built into the design if students need or want to complete the assignment outside of class time). This circumnavigates one of the most common complaints against group work, the reliance on other members fully participating in order to complete the task. In these activities the tasks can still be completed individually as well as collaboratively. The structure of the activities is designed to encourage self-management and peer-learning. The design and structure of the activities are based on an adapted version of Alfred Barr's 1936 diagram of European Modernism.



**Homepage and Activity 1 Example**

- Activity 1: Defining Key Movements of Modernism, including socio-historical context, formal analysis of artworks, and annotated resource links. This online group activity is based on the following learning outcomes: independent research skills, analytical skills, communication/presentation skills, peer learning and collaborative work practices.
- Activity 2: Applying Modernism to Local Context. As above, but students are focussed on considering how modernism emerged in their local context (Australia, Vietnam and Hong Kong).
- Activity 3: Critique of Alfred Barr’s 1936 diagram of European Modernism. In this group activity students first analyse Barr’s diagram and compare it to other maps of modernism, including the Tate Artist Timeline, and analyse and critique how modernism is communicated through these diagrams/timelines, with a core focus on location of modernism vs. euro-centric approaches. Students have online materials (short papers which also critique these examples) with which to refer to. Working together the students create their own map of modernism and present it to the class, utilising their fine art/design skills and discipline specific histories in drawing up a new map. The core learning outcomes of these activities are: research, critical thinking and analysis, contextualising, synthesis, peer-learning and presentation skills.

The three activities are centred on creating an understanding of Modernism in its European/North American context, and then considering Modernism and how it emerged and developed in a local context (eg Australia). Activities one and two are research and writing-based activities building student skills. The third activity asks students to critically analyse the use of timelines in art to consider how information is selected and categorised and to critically evaluate the meanings inherent in such presentations. This activity emphasises the importance of critical evaluation and synthesis.

The activities were developed to respond to the need for alternative means of assessment and to create greater interaction amongst students, who often come from different disciplinary backgrounds. While writing is still considered core literacy in Art History, these activities responded to the need for more contemporary forms of writing and presentation. The activities scaffold students through core academic literacies (writing/research skills) based on research indicating that students are increasingly starting at University with less-developed skills in this area. They also provide students with experience in an important contemporary skill: searching, identifying, selecting and applying relevant, meaningful and reliable information sourced online.

## Lecturettes

A series of 4 short (10 minute) 'lecturettes' were developed to compliment core tutorial and in-class material. They were produced EduTAG (Iain McKay and Opie Sayner Hassall) and were presented by teaching staff (Kristen Sharp, Richard Streitmatter and Mikala Tai) from different locations. This provides students with a variety of voices for the curriculum content and an extension of learning approaches beyond the classroom. Students from all offerings can access these materials anytime and anywhere. It is intended that each semester further lecturettes will be added to this bank of resources. Given the plethora of quality digital materials students are now accustomed to and the fact that this project was being funded, it was decided that the lecturettes would have high production values. However, it is envisaged that the future production of lecturettes could utilise more low-fi but equally effective recording methods using existing keynote/powerpoint technologies when funding is less available for these purposes.



*Filming the Lecturettes: Kristen Sharp, Richard Streitmatter-Tran (Vietnam) and Mikala Tai*

## Flexibility of Design and Method

The activities were design to create greater choice in the method and subject of assessment, and to provide students with a more meaningful localisation of content.

The design of the curriculum was also intended to move away from a repetitive weekly lecture/tutorial structure, to allow for more groupwork and workshop activities. The intention is to shift the focus away from class time being a 'content dump' into a active space with increased interaction and peer-learning. It was also designed to maximise on the natural rhythms of a semester and student attendance, which tends to peak at the beginning, middle and end of a course (usually in relation to assessment points). However, this approach also needs to be flexible to meet the practical demands of University timetabling/room allocation, including locating access to suitable learning spaces to facilitate such flexible delivery approaches. Another issue faced in the re-design, was ensuring that students across offerings, and within offerings, had equitable access to appropriate online technologies in order to complete the activities/access online content.

Working collaboratively with Don Gordon and Richard Streitmatter (RMIT Vietnam) was integral to the development and design of a revised curriculum. Their experience in working with local students, how to adapt content to meet the needs and profile of their cohort and how to make meaningful connections between offerings brought a critical perspective to the project. Throughout the project the provided important points of reflection and feedback, as well as contributing to the development of online materials, such as the lecturettes, which were a core part of the success of the project. Creating and maintaining positive and collaborative relationships between teaching staff across offerings is an important consideration in the successful delivery of transnational education.

## Collect, Review and Evaluate

The curriculum materials will be implemented progressively over the three locations as follows: Vietnam, January 2013; Melbourne, March 2013; and Hong Kong, January 2014. Data will be collected via extra questions on the course experience surveys and the courses will be evaluated via staff interviews and university program annual reporting processes during 2013.

### 3.5.2 Communication and Social Relations Case Study

This is a core course that is offered across a range of six undergraduate media/communication and design programs as well as a University elective (in RMIT Melbourne). It is offered in programs in Melbourne, Singapore and Vietnam.

#### Context and Student Profile

- Foundation Course for first year students in the five different awards of the Bachelor of Communication as well as second year students in the Bachelor of Design
- Range of disciplinary contexts: Advertising, Communication Design, Journalism, Media, Professional Communication, Public Relations, and course is also offered as a University elective
- Mode of delivery ranges from conventional 12 week semester to a two-week intensive delivery
- Student profile ranges for mature age working adults studying in the part-time in evening to fresh out of high school full-time students
- Class sizes varies of lectures of 550+ students with two-hour tutorials of 28 students to three-hour seminars 60 students
- Selection criteria varies from by portfolio, ATAR and advanced standing so range of skill and knowledge of students varies significantly
- Students come for a varied cultural background and academic cultural background

#### Melbourne

- Core course in 5 different awards of the Bachelor of Communication in Semester 1 and Bachelor of Design in Semester 3
- Largest course in the school with more than 550 students, and a varied and large number of teaching staff (have had more than 11 tutors per offering in the past)
- Delivered in 12 week semester
- Tutorials mostly delivered by sessionals
- Face-to-face delivery
- Offered as University elective

#### Singapore

- Core course in Bachelor of Communication students in Semester 3 and Bachelor of Design in Semester 3
- Delivered in 2-week intensive mode in three-hour seminars
- Taught completely by RMIT Melbourne staff
- Students in Bachelor of Communication are part-time mature age students studying in the evening while Bachelor of Design students are full-time students studying during the day
- Face-to-face delivery

#### Vietnam

- Core course in Bachelor of Communication (Professional Communication) students in Semester 2
- Delivered in 12 week semester
- Taught by RMIT Vietnam Staff
- Face-to-face delivery

#### Content

- Provide students with a common language and knowledge base to understand the field of communication
- Introduction to foundational Communication theory – from semiotics to discourse to production of ideology as well as communication models

- Introduction to the role of communication in understanding society, community and nationhood
- Introducing students to academic culture and language
- Attention to trans- and intra-disciplinary nature of the course and classroom
- Making courseware – especially assessment – relevant and suitable to the varied student cohort
- Emphasis on allowing and encouraging students to investigate both local and global contexts in the learning activities and assessments

### **Design and Deliver**

For the redevelopment of the courseware for *Communications and Social Relations*, we started by defining the parameters and limitations of course given its student cohorts, staffing considerations, and delivery timeframes and locations. This was done so that we could then define and design a successful course within its constraints. The course content was developed based on the Part A as well as previous iterations of this course. It was during that stage that the program directors of the various programs were consulted. This was done to ensure that the course would serve the needs of the programs, would work with the students' other courses in their programs, to prevent content duplication, and reinforce their skills and competencies. Program directors were also consulted to ensure that by being able to draw from their disciplinary skills and knowledge the students could undertake the learning activities and assessment in this course. Furthermore, where needed, the course developed in a scaffolded manner the skills and knowledge needed, on top of their disciplinary ones, by the students to successfully complete the course and its assessments.

Based on those consultations, the course content was developed. The course was divided into two themes – Communications and Social Relations. In the Communications theme, the students learnt about the various definition of communication, the various models used to understand it and the making of meaning. In the Social Relations theme, the students learnt how communication impacted on the individual as a member of a community and society as well as a citizen. The students examined how communication function within and created the aforementioned as well. Key skills identified by the various program directors were also worked on, with an emphasis on reading and writing.

The course in Melbourne was structured in the traditional lecture and tutorial style. The number of physical lectures was reduced and the students were provided with online lecturettes instead. The physical lectures were used to set the stage and layout the key directions and activities in that theme over the next few weeks. The lecturettes were a series of 10-minute recordings of presentation slides with narration. They were used to provide overviews of various theoretical approaches, application of theory on artefacts (case studies) and explanations of exemplar assessments.

In terms of the tutorials, in the past the course has had up to 11 different tutors. This has lead to issues in terms of equity when the tutors have not followed the teaching plan set up by the lecturer. So in this offering, the number of tutors was reduced and the teaching plan made public via Blackboard. Each week, an activity sheet was published that detailed what the students were going to be doing that week in class, how that links to what they did the week before, as well as the series of learning activities. Preparation for the following week, including take-home tasks, was also detailed. This was important as it not only ensured equity across the tutorials and tutors in terms of what students did in a classroom, it directed students to preparations for the coming week while giving them the ability to design their learning practices by being able to timeshift.

Students were expected to come to the class having completed their preparation and take-home tasks. In the classroom, they engaged in a variety of learning activities that reinforced the knowledge gained in their preparation. They would then undertake a series of activities that helped

them to understand, and apply what they have learnt. These learning activities also build towards the successful completion of the assessments tasks by scaffolding the skills and knowledge that they would need in the learning activities. This interplay of learning activities and knowledge scaffolding to the assessment task was vital to the achievement of the learning outcomes (Part A).

The key to developing the assessment tasks was to acknowledge that the students were coming into the course with varied literacies and capabilities. Given that it was a trans- and inter-disciplinary classroom and course, the design of the assessment has to be sensitive to this, and not privilege any particular capability, literacy and/or learning style. Traditionally, theory courses tend to privilege academic essay writing and this does not work well for the students in creative disciplines. In this iteration of the course, the assessments were project based with a strong emphasis on student agency.

To illustrate, for the first assessment, the students were asked to produce a single A3 poster and an unstructured rationale. They were provided with a brief – an original interpretation of a communication artefact that is reflective of the epoch within which it sits and/or reflective of the society and cultures from where it originates. The students also had to submit an unstructured rationale dealing with the question of narrative, context and argument.



**Student work: Poster Presentation**

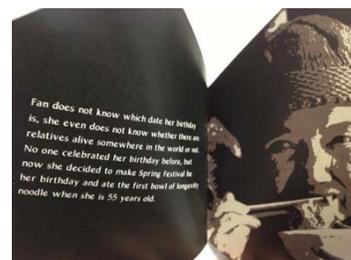
For example, this poster investigates the Singapore Girl – an artifact used by Singapore Airlines to market itself. The poster says that the Singapore Girl is reflective of a particular notion of Asian femininity. She is inscribed with variety of orientalist narratives from the region as illustrated by the combination of Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Indonesian adornments. This poster presents a fairly sophisticated visualization of a problematic artifact.



**Student work: Poster Presentation**

This poster considers creativity. The visual of the crushed Lego instructions counterpoints the tensions between the object, its intended use (application) and the user's autonomy. For long, Lego has been considered a non-gendered and non-culture specific building material build whatever one wishes with few limitations. The very idea of Lego instructions is an anathema for some. However, as Lego has evolved in the global market place, it has responded with sets that build particular objects. This poster attempts to interrogate that idea.

For the second assessment, the brief allowed for more student agency. The students were asked to make a media artefact of their choice that would explain the how a global issue is articulated in the specific localised space. This time however the rationale was loosely structured as an essay would be; they were given a series of questions that covered the same ground an essay would. So while we have increased student agency, we still have a clear and defined brief that connects explicitly to the knowledge and skills developed in the course.



**Student Media Artefact: Child Bride**

For example, this project investigates the role and place of women in society. It examines the global issues such as rights, equality, education, violence, displacement and the such using the specific example of the story of a child bride in China. In the assessment, the rationale provides the space for the student to explain what it artefact is and how is articulates the global issue in a specific localise space. The artefact made by the student is a book telling the story of the child bride.



**Student work: Media Artefact**

This project investigates ethical food consumption. The rationale details the issue of and challenges of ethical food consumption at a global level. It examines what impacts on such practices by focusing particularly at the specific example of the factory farming of chickens for meat and eggs. The artefact made shows a toy chicken squeezed into a small cage.



**Student Work: Variety of Artefacts**

Students made a variety of artefact: brochures, books, advertisements, infographics, videos and podcasts for this assessment. They also made objects that were not necessarily from their disciplinary practices. Students were not pushed to make any particular type of artefact and were encouraged to explore and experiment.

In order for the learning activities and the assessment to be achieved successfully, the tutorials were run similar to studios. The tutors worked with the students to ensure the learning activities were engaged with and that students had ample time to work with the tutor. The learning activities not only create a culture of studio-model teaching but also built on helping the students complete the assessment

The key for a trans and intra-disciplinary course offered to a diverse student cohort in varied geo-cultural locations is to focus on content that is conceptually driven. This will allow students to explore those concepts in familiar and comfortable contexts rather than prescribed contexts. This should be supported with case studies are explicitly illustrative of the concept and not the content itself. Assessment should allow the students to define the context – both global and local - of their object of study. Not only will this give the students a sense of ownership of their learning but the links between the two. The assessments should also echo the more familiar and real-world outcomes of their disciplinary practices. Finally, it is important that the course content and the learning activities work in tandem scaffolding the skills and knowledge needed for the students to complete the assessments successfully.

**Collect, Review and Evaluate**

The Communication and Social Relations course was delivered in Melbourne and Singapore in 2012. In Vietnam the delivery will occur in February 2013 for the first time. Data was collected from staff and students in Melbourne and Singapore by interview. The questions focused on their learning and teaching experiences in 2012 (see appendix A & B).

The following comments from staff illustrate their experiences of teaching in this re-designed course:

*I think what is really interesting about this model is how well it worked, because we run a lecture theatre like a design studio and this content and material allow you to maintain a studio feel/environment.*

*There is a need for self directed learning, building research/conceptual skills and collaboration. These issues are similar for both onshore and offshore cohorts, self direction is not something that comes naturally, even for the strong communicator.*

*Student's can apply their own cultural knowledge (local) to their learning. Therefore classroom becomes a trans-cultural space and a space for exchange.*

*Workshop style teaching and time to work on assessment in class enables immediate feedback and interaction.*

*The practical exercises that we do in class...they [students] go around and talk to everyone in the class and they'll be very active in coming up to me [lecturer] and then the online stuff props it up.*

*Activities being broken down was successful because it: built upon each experience; helped students connect with theory in visual ways; took the fear out of doing theory; helped them approach journal articles and Harvard articles without fear;*

*This course built confidence evidenced by the fact that there were fewer questions and clarifications.*

The following comments from students illustrate their experiences of learning in this re-designed course:

*The conceptual skills and processes of thinking are really useful.*

*The course facilitates experience with diversity.*

*The focus on research in global/cultural issues is useful.*

*Open assessment meant you could really research the things that you were interested in.*

*Working with students from other disciplines was a good challenge.*

*The openness of assessment was a challenge at first, but eventually it allowed students to be more creative.*

Based on these responses from staff and students the re-design of curriculum has been successfully implemented. There are however some administrative and structural issues that need to be attended to in further iterations of this course which are now being dealt with through the program annual review process.

### 3.5.3 Summary

The case studies presented here illustrate the adaptable curriculum framework and implementation process in action. They provide real-world examples of how complex it is to develop meaningful transnational educational materials. The case studies highlight the challenges associated with delivering culturally specific theoretical materials in multiple global contexts. These narratives also highlight the importance of working collaboratively with offshore partners in ways that draw upon their local knowledge and expertise.

## 4 Dissemination strategies and outputs

The following dissemination strategies were used to share the project outcomes across RMIT University and the wider tertiary sector:

- A dissemination presentation was held on 13th December 2012 to a range of invited staff who are involved in the co-ordination, delivery, administration or support of onshore/offshore courses to share findings and outcomes.
- Two dissemination sessions were held with the Director International Academic Policies, Associate Professor Eveline Fallshaw. Professor Fallshaw is currently seeking to include the *Equal Local* diagrams in the policy review of transnational offerings.
- A dissemination session was held with academic development staff from the College of Business and will be held with academic development groups in SEH and DSC in early 2013. A materials pack will be made available to ADG staff for use in their learning and teaching support work with academics in schools.
- A meeting has been scheduled for mid-February 2013 with Saskia Hansen, Director International Relations from the DVC Office International and Development with the view to quantifying the cost of using the adaptable curriculum design framework and implementation process. The outcome of this meeting will be made available to all international units at RMIT.
- Discussions are underway with EduTAG to add the newly developed materials to the RMIT equivalence and comparability webpage.
- A journal article is currently being written for *The Journal of Studies in International Education*

## 5 Evaluation of project outcomes

An external review of *Equal Local* was conducted by Dr Cate Gribble who is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Educational Futures and Innovation at Deakin University in Melbourne. Cate's research interests lie in the areas of comparative and international education. In the past decade she has worked on a number of research projects, including an investigation of RMIT University's transnational programs in Vietnam and Tanzania and a ten-country comparative study of international education policy development. Cate's recent research focus is international student mobility and migration and she is currently working on an Australian Research Council Linkage project investigating stakeholder responses to changing skilled migration policies for Australian international graduates.

An internal evaluation of the professional development resources is taking place over 2013 as the *Equal Local* team disseminate the project outcomes amongst senior management at RMIT University. The professional development resources are being piloted in other contexts over the course of 2013 and will be evaluated in terms of their transferability and flexibility.

### 5.1 External Review of Equal Local

Dr Gribble reviewed the professional development resources and an abridged version of the final report. Her review found that:

1. The creation of diagrams designed to illustrate complex ideas and processes is a key outcome of this study....The simplicity and clarity of the diagrams is a key strength of the professional development materials.
2. While a key goal of the **Equal Local Project** is to ensure that offshore students are receiving an equivalent educational experience, this project equally has the potential to enhance the educational experience of RMIT Melbourne based students.
3. TNE represents a significant opportunity for internationalisation and it is hoped that the resources and relationships stemming from this project will enhance and strengthen the curriculum in ways that benefit local and offshore students and staff.
4. In sum, the **Equal Local Project** has produced important and timely research and resources that will be of significant value to both RMIT onshore and offshore staff, as well as staff involved in TNE in other university settings (see appendix D for full report).

## 5.2 Recommendations

### 5.2.1 RMIT

- That the *framework and implementation process* presented in this report be considered in RMIT's policy review of transnational offerings
- That the *framework and implementation process* presented in this report be further piloted by on/offshore program teams in a range of disciplines and contexts
- That the International and Development group work with the project team to determine the financial cost of working with the *framework and implementation process* presented in this report

### 5.2.2 Higher Education Sector

- That the *framework and implementation process* presented in this report be further tested against a variety of offshore teaching models so that it may be used to inform existing and future teaching models more widely within the Australian transnational education
- That university policies and guidelines move more explicitly towards an inclusive and global onshore/offshore curriculum design and delivery approach that is underpinned by the community of practice principles

## 6 Budget report

Total funds approved for this project: \$80,036

Final amount of funds acquitted: \$78,934

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## 7 Signature page

Please see attached.

## Appendix A

### Equal Local LTIF: Interview Questions: Staff

*The following questions relate to your perceptions and experiences of teaching the Art History & Theory 1 course, HUSO 2186 (Melb), HUSO 2218 (Hong Kong) , or HUSO 2325 (Vietnam).*

*or*

*The following questions relate to your perceptions and experiences of teaching the Communications and Social Media COMM 2411 (Melb), COMM 2438 (Sing) COMM 2491 (Viet)*

1. How relevant is this course to students' life experiences in their local environment?
2. How does the method of teaching in this course match how you think students learn best?
3. Do you believe students begin the course with the skills to successfully complete the assessment? Why/Why not?
4. Do you believe students have the relevant English language skills to complete this course?
5. What are some of the benefits/challenges student's may experience doing a theory course in a largely professional practice/studio based course?
6. Have you any previous experience of combined onshore/offshore (or international) delivery of the same course? If yes, how does this teaching experience compare to your previous teaching experience?
7. This course is offered at other locations around the world – do you think students would be interested in connecting with students in these courses? Why? What are some of the best way to get them to connect? What are the issues involved? Eg on-line discussions, collaborative assessments etc
8. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience of teaching in this course?

## Appendix B

### Equal Local LTIF: Interview Questions - Students

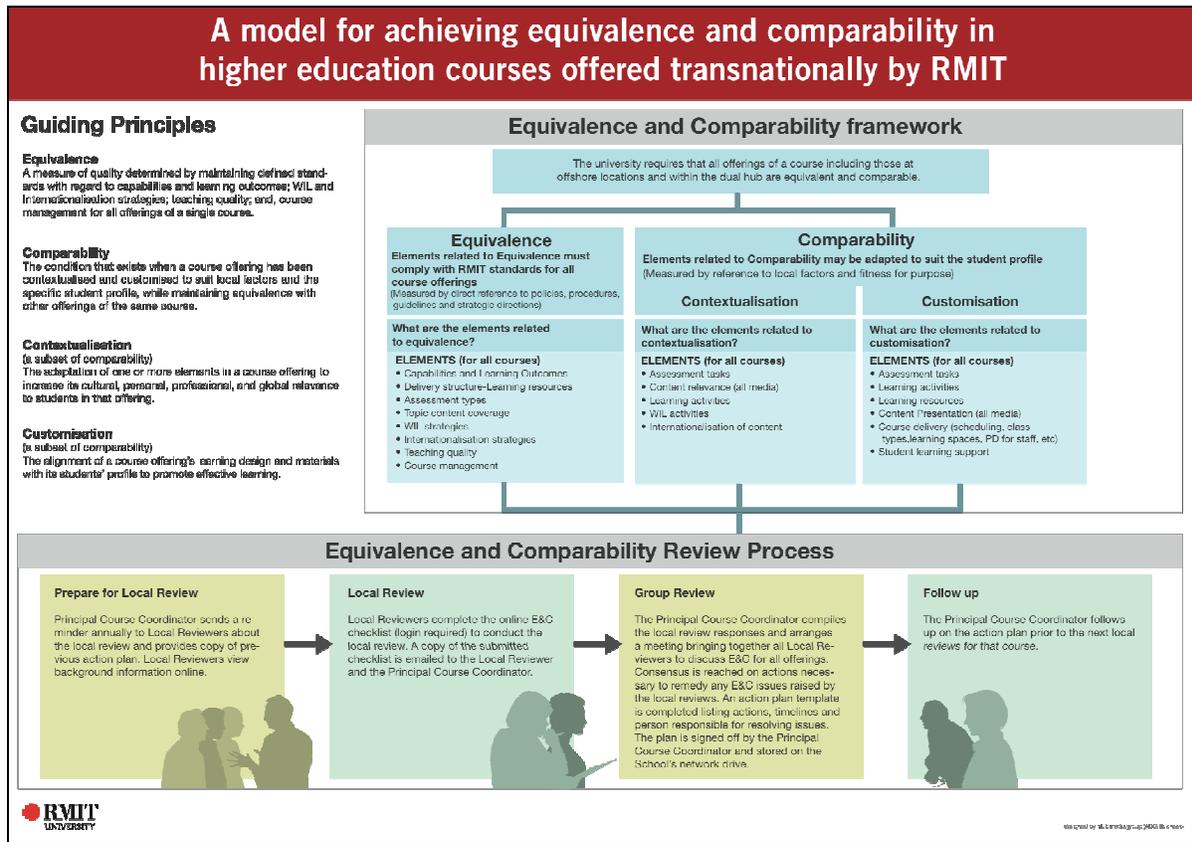
*The following questions relate to your perceptions and experiences of the Art History & Theory 1 course, HUSO 2186 (Melb), HUSO 2218 (Hong Kong), or HUSO 2325 (Vietnam).*

*or*

*The following questions relate to your perceptions and experiences of the Communications and Social Media COMM 2411 (Melb), COMM 2438 (Sing) COMM 2491 (Viet)*

1. How useful will this course be for your career?
2. As a student in (Vietnam/Hong Kong/ Australia/Singapore) how is this course relevant to your life experience?
3. In your experience, how do you learn best? (by doing, by listening to a lecture, by watching something on line, by finding out things yourself, by reading etc..)
4. What do you think of the assessment tasks in this course?
5. This course is offered at other locations around the world – are you interested in connecting with students in these courses? Why? How would you like to connect? Eg on-line discussions, collaborative assessments etc.
6. A large part of this course involves writing tasks (in English). Is this an important/necessary skill for you to have in your profession?
7. What are your plans after you graduate (e.g. type of career you would like, your planned location – will you work/study overseas etc.)?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience of studying in this course?

# Appendix C



## Appendix D



### EVALUATION

#### Equal Local: Future-proofing RMIT's global reach by promoting equivalence in onshore and offshore learning

Transnational education (TNE) has experienced rapid expansion in recent years with strong growth predicted to continue driven largely by unmet demand in key source countries in the Asia region. TNE offers many benefits to source countries including the opportunity to study a more diverse range of quality programs than those available in their home country. TNE can help strengthen local higher education capacity as well as reduce the likelihood of brain drain. For host countries, such as Australia, TNE can lead to greater intercultural learning and internationalisation of the curriculum, as well as the opportunity to forge strong international partnerships.

The **Equal Local Project** is very timely given the rapidly changing nature of transnational education (TNE). Traditional source countries such as China are rapidly expanding their domestic higher education systems with the aim of both meeting domestic demand and attracting foreign students from the region and beyond. The impact of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) is yet to be fully understood, however, it is clear that Australia's continued success in what has become a highly competitive environment is dependent on the capacity of its institutions to offer high quality educational opportunities that will satisfy an increasingly discerning overseas student population.

Building on existing research carried out by RMIT University (Pasakas and Gopal Pannan, Gribble & Barnes), the **Equal Local Project** has produced significant research on the importance of curriculum design in the transnational setting. Key outcomes of the project include: guidelines on course adaptability; an adaptable curriculum design framework and implementation process; two case studies which provide important 'real world' examples of how theory has been applied in RMIT courses offered in TNE settings. Collaborative research is a strength of the study achieved largely by the 'community of practice' approach adopted by the project team which involved ongoing collaboration with offshore partners and academics. While the project team used Skype and other means of communication, face to face interactions were considered critical in order to gain a full understanding of the offshore context and establish strong collegial relationships. The importance of good communication and strong relationships between teaching staff operating in different geographical settings cannot be underestimated.

Through surveys and focus groups, the research team developed a thorough understanding of student cohorts in onshore and offshore settings. Key information (prior learning, future plans, English language levels, etc.) provided critical input into the team's thinking around curriculum development and delivery in transnational settings. Individual case-studies provide concrete examples of some of the challenges associated with delivering culturally specific subjects, such as art history, in offshore locations. The case-studies also highlight approaches for both overcoming potential barriers as well as the importance of drawing on offshore partners to capitalise their knowledge and expertise. Importantly, the **Equal Local Project** emphasises ongoing curriculum renewal. The continual review and updating of curriculum material and delivery is critical given the pace of change in the higher education sector, both locally and globally.

CRICOS Provider Code: 00119U

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One of the goals of the **Equal Local** project was to undertake research and develop resources that can be used by others involved in TNE at RMIT University as well as in other institutions both in Australia and elsewhere. Given the predominance of TNE, both in Australia and globally, the outcomes of this project are likely to be highly relevant to other institutions. The focus on DSC history and theory courses provides interesting contrasts and parallels with available research which predominantly concentrates on other discipline areas such as Business and IT. It is likely that a growing number of subjects/areas will be offered offshore and this study illustrates how delivering a subject such as art/history in different geo-cultural areas offers distinct challenges and opportunities. As part of the project a suite of online resources, including 10 minute lectures, were developed by onshore and offshore staff. While research indicates that students in offshore settings highly value the opportunity to attend lectures by academics from the home institution (Ziguras & Rizvi, 2011; Miliszewska, 2007), financial and other constraints place limitations on face to face lectures. How these online resources are received by students will be of interest to those involved in TNE and further evaluation of such resources would be very worthwhile.

The creation of diagrams designed to illustrate complex ideas and processes is a key outcome of this study. Research conducted in onshore and offshore locations informed the development of visual materials which will be used to assist both on and offshore teaching staff design and implement adaptable curriculum materials. The diagrams provide a step by step journey through the process of curriculum design and implementation. The series of diagrams commence with a 'scene setting' diagram illustrating where individual courses fit within both the overall university structure (and the Australian tertiary sector more broadly), and conclude with a diagram that traces the adaptable curriculum implementation process within an overarching philosophy that emphasises a collegial approach based on mutual respect and requiring strong lines of communication. The simplicity and clarity of the diagrams is a key strength of the professional development materials. The project team may consider reviewing Figure 5 as elements of the graphics reduce their clarity. However changes may not be feasible given the complexity of the ideas the team are attempting to convey in a single diagram.

While a key goal of the **Equal Local Project** is to ensure that offshore students are receiving an equivalent educational experience, this project equally has the potential to enhance the educational experience of RMIT Melbourne based students. For example, it would be interesting to explore how RMIT Melbourne based students can potentially benefit from interaction between offshore teaching staff and students. Considering the current emphasis on 'Asia literacy' and developing Asian capabilities TNE offers multiple benefits to Australian students who may also be able to draw on the expertise and experiences of offshore lecturers and students. TNE represents a significant opportunity for internationalisation and it is hoped that the resources and relationships stemming from this project will enhance and strengthen the curriculum in ways that benefit local and offshore students and staff.

In sum, the **Equal Local Project** has produced important and timely research and resources that will be of significant value to both RMIT onshore and offshore staff, as well as staff involved in TNE in other university settings. To maximise the potential benefits stemming from this project, it is critical that the project team share their research widely. While the team have a number of plans to disseminate their research within RMIT Melbourne, opportunities to share this research with offshore staff (i.e. RMIT Vietnam, Hong Kong) should be encouraged and supported. It is critical that offshore teaching staff are included in any pilot programs and that their input forms part of any further refinement of the materials. I also suggest that the findings of this research would form the basis for an excellent paper to be presented at Australian International Education Conference (AIEC) or another suitable forum. Discussions with others involved in TNE will provide important opportunities for both dissemination of the research and critical feedback that may lead to further refinement.

DISSEMINATION PLAN

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Dr Cate Gribble is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Educational Futures and Innovation at Deakin University in Melbourne. Cate's research interests lie in the areas of comparative and international education. In the past decade she has worked on a number of research projects, including an investigation of RMIT University's transnational programs in Vietnam and Tanzania and a ten-country comparative study of international education policy development. Cate's recent research focus is international student mobility and migration and she is currently working on an Australian Research Council Linkage project investigating stakeholder responses to changing skilled migration policies for Australian international graduates.

CEFI098 - Study Guide - CATE

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