

Keynote Address for the 2015 Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference

The Internationalization of Higher Education: Tensions and Debates

Melissa White

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I would like to acknowledge that this keynote address takes place on the unceded traditional lands of the Wolostoyey people.

Introduction:

In thinking about how to approach this topic today I debated about how to begin. Should I start with neoliberalism and then move into internationalization? Or should I do it the other way round? Do I talk specifically about neoliberalism at all? Should I distinguish between globalization and internationalization? And how do I ensure that I don't go off on a tangent because there is so much written and so much happening in the field of internationalization, especially when it comes to higher education. In the end, I decided I'd start at the beginning: at my beginning. So I want to share with you first, my experience of internationalization and higher education. And from there, I'll move into the tensions and debates surrounding the internationalization of higher education, weaving my experience throughout.

My Introduction to Internationalization

I've been working and studying in the field now for 28 years as a staffer, a student and a faculty member. In 1986 I was hired as the administrative officer for a new, Masters level international, interdisciplinary, inter-institutional program called Marine Affairs based at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The Program drew on resources, faculty and courses from across relevant disciplines at both Dalhousie and St. Mary's Universities. The Program was established through funding from a Crown Corporation called the International Centre for Ocean Development or ICOD. ICOD was what the Brits call a Quango - an organization operating at arms length from government departments but funded by a government department. The government department through which our funds ultimately came was the Canadian International Development Agency, or CIDA.

ICOD's mandate was to fund development initiatives and projects specifically for small-island and coastal states in the developing world. With this mandate in mind, ICOD in collaboration with these two universities, established a 12 month, course-based Masters level academic program focusing on a variety of marine-related fields such as management, law, oceanography, and the like. ICOD funded the entire budget of the program for five years and provided full scholarships for students from their target countries, small-island and coastal developing nations. These were the days of bi-lateral international development agreements.¹

¹ "Member States of the United Nations that provide development assistance directly to recipient countries are often referred to as "bilateral donors"" (UN http://www.unrol.org/article.aspx?article_id=22)

Funding through bi-lateral agreements is channeled government to government, directly, for use in international development activities. In the case of scholarships, the intent of bi-lateral funding is, or at least was, to provide students with the opportunity to obtain an education in a host nation and return home to help in the development of their home country. National governments in those nations sponsored individuals, usually those in middle or senior level positions in governmental organizations and departments and those not as senior who the government believed showed promise and potential. Over the 6 years I worked on this Program we had students from around the world including Ghana, Cameroon, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Samoa, The Cook Islands, the Maldives, Tanzania, Fiji and Canada to name a few.

This was my first international experience. As a child, my family had traveled across the country several times but I'd never been 'overseas'. I'd never even been on a plane. One of my key responsibilities was to facilitate the arrival of these students and to provide them with an orientation to the Program, the University and Canada. I was the only full time employee for the Program (the Coordinators were all half time with us and their home departments) and, as such I spent a lot of time with the students. I learned a great deal about internationalization. I learned what it was like for them to leave home, to leave family and children behind, and come to an unfamiliar country with an unfamiliar higher education system. I learned the challenges international students may face in classes with professors who'd had little experience with international students and the challenges for international students with curricula grounded solely in domestic and local concerns with unfamiliar ways of teaching and learning.

I learned as well of the need for programs and services to support international students personally and professionally.

I worked often with those responsible for international activities and programs on the campus, such as the International Student Office and the International Student Coordinator. I liaised closely with ICOD, who had several other scholarship students at Dalhousie. It was through this work that I was exposed to international student issues at a national level as well, becoming involved with CBIE, the Canadian Bureau for International Education and the work they did around challenging differential tuition fees for international students and lobbying for the provision of supports for these students.

This work is what led me to graduate school. I wanted to know more about international development and internationalization, especially in relation to education. I enrolled at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto where I completed both my Masters and PhD degrees in the Comparative, International Development Education program. My Masters thesis focused on how small and medium scale international development organizations take up the issue of gender in their projects and programming. My Ph.D. dissertation was a comparative analysis of re-training and economic development programs for displaced workers in Canada and England. It was at OISE that I was exposed to the theories, ideas and debates around international development, international education and internationalization.

My International Experiences

I then had opportunity to experience internationalization first hand when I took up my first academic post as Lecturer at a small, regional university, The University of New England (UNE) in northern New South Wales, Australia. I arrived in Australia in 2005 and the country's universities were, by then, well steeped in internationalization, but in a way different from my experience. Many of the students at that institution were distance-based, both domestically and internationally. It was in Australia that I was first exposed to higher education as a market place, in the contemporary context. My department had contracts with several universities in Hong Kong and Vietnam and with civil service organizations in New Zealand. If sufficient numbers of students enrolled in each of these markets, faculty would travel to those locations for intensive, short-term teaching visits to supplement the regular distance education delivery. Students would study by distance for the full academic term, and our teaching visits would happen at some point during that term. What we taught depended on when in the term we visited. Often, we would facilitate a full-term overview of the topic. Though my institution did not, many Australian Universities had branch campuses internationally, most in Asia.

From there I moved to Leicester in England to take up a post at the University of Leicester in the Centre for Labour Market Studies. Again, many of the students in our program were distance based and international. Our Centre had contracts with organizations through which we recruited students. Similar to my Australian experience, if we had enough students in any given area, we would send a team of faculty for short-term intensive teaching visits. With the exception of our contract with the University of Hong Kong, all our partners are the University

of Leicester were not universities but private, for profit educational consulting firms.

I left the University of Leicester after four years to take up my post here at UNB. So you can see I have a long history of international and internationalization experience so I suppose its no surprise that I am very much interested in the process.

Internationalization and Globalization

There are several key themes emerging from the literature on the internationalization of higher education. Key among those is the conceptual confusion, as Beck (2012) calls it, over the distinctions between globalization and internationalization in higher education. Globalization often refers to political and economic forces (and sometimes technologies). A key researcher in internationalization who produced some of the seminal, often cited work in the field, Jane Knight (2004), describes internationalization of higher education as “...the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching/learning, research and service functions of a university of college” (p. 3) and asserts that globalization is a different process. She defines globalization as, “...the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas...across borders” (Knight and Dewitt, 1977 cited in Knight, 2004, p. 4). While Knights definitions have gained wide acceptance there remains tension some around what internationalization means and whether it is distinct from globalization, part of globalization or one in the same. One can see the connections and relationship between the two and it seems a challenge to extract one from the other. But this tension is relevant for this discussion in considering the role of neoliberal ideology in the internationalization of higher education.

Neoliberalism

A second theme to emerge from the literature is the influence of economic globalization on education, including higher education, and that universities are becoming more consumer and market oriented. Neoliberalism is the dominance of the market, and economics, in all aspects of public life. Within this framework, governments lessen their regulation of economies and allow the market to regulate itself. In doing so, proponents say the liberal tenant of free choice is expressed fully. (Olssen and Peters, 2007; Harvey, 2005) Individuality, entrepreneurialism and competition become aspirational characteristics. In the public sector, students and patients become consumers and purchasers of services. The impact on higher education has been an increase in managerialism, greater 'transparency' in the form of additional administration and surveillance of employees and an emphasis on tangible outcomes. Olssen and Peters (2007) cite Barnett, "...marketization has become a new universal theme manifested in the trends towards the commodification of teaching and research and the various ways in which universities meet the new performative criteria, both locally and globally in the emphasis upon measurable outputs" (p. 316).

Scholars long known for their support of internationalization are alarmed at the dominance of commercial interests and ideologies in Internationalization (Beck, 2012). This emphasis on the commodification of higher education and the push for universities to be more entrepreneurial (classic neoliberal ideology) together with funding cuts to higher education in Canada and other Western nations places

substantial pressure for institutions in those countries to find funding elsewhere.

When I was in the UK, government funding to universities was cut quite substantially. My understanding of the funding model in the UK is that government funding for universities is tied to domestic student enrollment. Rather than implement cuts across the board, the government placed a cap on the number of domestic students universities could enroll. No such cap was implemented for international students. I do know that at my institution, international student enrollment increased quite substantially. And I have to add, seemingly without concurrent increases to programs and services to support those students. 'Bums on seats' was an often heard phrase in my University and elsewhere in UK higher education.

Diversity

Diversity is another key theme of the literature. Internationalization, it is said, brings diversity to the institution through student recruitment, international research collaboration and international projects. Domestic students experience diverse cultures through overseas study tour programs and service learning. Indeed, a recent Universities Canada (2014) (formerly AUCC) survey notes diversity as the number one reason Canadian Universities engage in internationalization.

Critiques of internationalization, or perhaps better put, critiques of the process of internationalization, question diversity as a rationale and the extent to which institutions engage in thoughtful, strategic policy and program development as opposed to responding to the pressure of decreased funding and

globalization generally (Jubas and White, 2015). In the Universities Canada survey increased revenue was listed at the bottom of the reasons why universities engage in internationalization. It must be noted, however, that this survey was of senior administrative personnel only. Faculty, other staff and students did not participate. Aside from that obvious methodological limitation, I wonder whether any institution would admit that potential funding from increased international students recruitment, study tours, and projects might be a more important factor.

Others ask us to think carefully about what diversity might actually mean in the context of internationalization. Or perhaps I should say, we are cautioned to consider a different understanding of diversity and how that different understanding might influence an institution's engagement with internationalization (Jubas and White, 2015). Yes, internationalization provides opportunities for cultural and educational diversity. Critics caution, however, that diversity in internationalization can also be conceived of as a diversification of markets. Internationalization, can, to be sure, expand an institution's 'markets' for students, research collaboration and entrepreneurial projects.

What we Don't Talk About:

Now, let's talk about what we don't talk about. There are a number of areas connected to internationalization that we do not seem to discuss. Key among these are:

- Brain drain
- Service learning and voluntourism, especially when it comes to the critique of both

- Internationalization as a ‘cash cow’
- Inadequate supports for international students (I’ve discussed this in my example of enrollment caps and international students in the UK)
- The neocolonial nature of internationalization in higher education.

At one point, especially in the late 80s and early 90s and corresponding with the end of bi-lateral scholarship funding in many jurisdictions, the emphasis in international development and in the internationalization of higher education was capacity building. Discourses around brain drain were prominent then, especially in relation to developing countries, in both the literature and in practice. The concern was that students coming to the West to study would stay. If students did not return, it was believed, the potential for these scholars to return and help build their nations, and their higher education systems, would be lost. As such, the notion of building capacity by students returning to their home country was rather moot. There followed, then, concerted efforts to strengthen higher education, most especially in the developing world. To enhance the quality of education and the reputation of universities in these countries so that students would undertake education at home.

At the same time, globalization was on the rise. There was, in some circles, concern around the dominance, and the spread of that dominance, of western thinking through globalization and the way in which internationalization of higher education can play directly into that process.

I thought about this a lot when I was in Australia and the UK. I have a very clear memory of my first international teaching

visit to Hong Kong while I was at the University of Leicester. We held our classes in the Continuing Education building at the University of Hong Kong. (And I do appreciate that Hong Kong can hardly be called a developing nation, but the notion of the superiority of Western education and thinking is my point here.) I recall my first day walking down the hall to my classroom. At the entrance to almost every classroom was a sign indicating which University was represented in that room. I was struck by the number of UK Universities - Sheffield, Hull, Durham, Leicester, Lancaster, Sussex, and so on. There must have been at least 12 different institutions represented. And that was one weekend.

It was then that the scope of internationalization in UK higher education hit me. And I remember thinking, what happened to capacity building? Are we not, am I not, simply engaging in educational neocolonialism? What happened to all those discourses decrying the dominance of the West though globalization?

At my institution, we were encouraged to incorporate local examples and case studies so as to make the content more relevant to the students. And we did that. Nonetheless, it was still a 'Western education'. Students would still receive a Western degree. Indeed, many students told me it was better for them to get a Western degree; a UK degree. They believed these institutions to be much more respected institutions than their own. They believed it would be easier for them to get jobs with a UK education. And I have to say I was surprised given the reputation of the University of Hong Kong but students in Vietnam, Malta and Dubai indicated this belief as well.

International service learning, such as internships, is gaining prominence in Canada as higher education institutions internationalize. It has, however, been criticized of late. Much like, voluntourism, critics claim service learning can often do damage to a host community in that more is taken from the community than is given (Sharpe and Dear, 2013). Learning, they claim, in these situation is not always reciprocal. Critics claim, short-term, directed, service learning, may not provide either the student with sufficient time for deep learning, or the community with a voice in what projects are undertaken.

Canada

While many Canadian institutions have engaged in internationalization for many years, we are somewhat behind other Western nations in the scope and extent of that internationalization, though we are quickly trying to catch up. As I noted, establishing branch campuses in other countries has been a hallmark of Australian internationalization. And if I might return to my own experience for a moment, I do know that process has largely failed in Australia. When I arrived in Australia in 2005, many universities had branch campuses. By time I left in 2007, many had closed. The reasons why are not within the scope of this paper. I raise this as a cautionary note and to reiterate the need to be thoughtful and strategic in expanding our internationalization and to learn from the successes and failures of others.

Let's take a quick look at internationalization in Canada in 2014. These statistics are from the Universities Canada (2014) survey mentioned earlier.

- Internationalization is a priority for 96% of universities surveyed. (75 universities participated in this study)
- 80% offer international degree programs
- 97% offer international experiences to their students
- Only 3.1% of students study abroad annually
- Nearly all enable students to do academic work abroad
- 70% send students to foreign field schools
- 67% offer service opportunities for volunteer work
- 67% help students to do research abroad
- 66% offer foreign work experience
- 72% bring an international dimension to the classroom (I have to note here that that number is 72% of institutions, not 72% of classes)
- There are 89,000 international students in Canada

Conclusion

There are many ways in which internationalization can positively impact an institution. But there are just as many ways the results can be negative. Especially if it the process is ill considered and ad hoc. I believe it would also be worthwhile for us to admit, rightly or wrongly, that internationalization does generate revenue. We are, many of us, cash strapped. Money doesn't have to be the big bad wolf. Budget cuts are a reality. Internationalization can generate additional income. Let's just put it on the table. Make it part of the discussion. Perhaps by admitting internationalization is a source of funding, we might be better placed to engage in a full, *transparent* and thoughtful process of internationalization.

I do want to end this paper on a positive note. There are ways to do this. There are champions out there; those who know how to come together, learn from each other and build. The Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia is one such example. And here is what I think makes the difference; what fuels its success. Acclaimed throughout the world, the Coady has never lost sight of its original philosophy: education for social justice.

Until 2011, CIDA offered/mandated inter-cultural learning programs, part of their bilateral agreements. These programs were run through the Centre for Intercultural Learning (CIL). CIL was mandated to provide inter-cultural training to individuals involved in CIDA funded bi-lateral projects. This would have included higher education.

Here at UNB, we have a strong, 30-year, history with bi-lateral CIDA funded programs that foster cooperation, development, research and scholarship, specifically with Bhutan. The relationship with Bhutan continues today beyond the end of CIDA bi-lateral funding. Today, many of the Butanese students who participated in this program now hold senior government positions in Bhutan and can influence policies and programs in that country. I can say this about the Marine Affairs Program at Dalhousie as well. Several Marine Affairs graduates have taken up senior positions in their governments. One example is a student who returned to The Cook Islands and is now the Director of Employment Relations for Internal Affairs.

So what are the Tensions?

I have identified several tensions in this presentation. Two of the key tensions, for me, both centre on the purpose and potential of the internationalization of higher education. The dichotomy is, that we understand education increases quality of life. It is the number one indicator of quality of life. So on the one hand we engage in a system that can change people's lives. On the other, we engage in a system that can, potentially, perpetuate neocolonialism and Western hegemony. For me, then the tension is recognizing that education has value both in the market and beyond the market. We know how to do internationalization really well. I've given only 3 examples. But there are many varied interests at play, including governments focused almost exclusively on economics and the global market. So we need to continue to have open, informed discussions about what, as institutions, we understand internationalization to be and what we want from it for our students, staff, faculty and community. Achieving a balanced internationalization that incorporates social justice is a fine line.

References

- Beck, K. (2012). Globalization/s: Reproduction and resistance in the internationalization of higher education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 35, 133-148.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Jubas, K. and White, M. (2015). "Diversity" as academic keyword: Rhetoric and meaning in equity and internationalization higher education texts. In L. Sauvage

(Ed.), *Reanimating adult education: Conflict, violence and learning*. Proceedings of the western regional conference on the education of adults.

Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: Definitions, approaches, and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8, 5-31.

Olssen, M. & Peters, M. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20, 313-345.

Shapre, E. & Dear, S. (2013). Points of discomfort: Reflections on power and partnerships in international service learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 19, (2).

United Nations. (n.d.) United Nations Rule of Law: Bilateral Donors. http://www.unrol.org/article.aspx?article_id=22.

Universities Canada (2014) *Internationalization at Canadian universities: Quick facts*. Ottawa, ON: Universities Canada.

Melissa White, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. Her research interests include adult education theory, policy and practice, and comparative education.

Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed to Melissa White at Melissa.White@unb.ca