

Postcolonial Directions
in Education

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CONFERENCE REPORT

‘INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: EMERGENCES AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES’. REPORT ON A UNIVERSITY OF FRIBOURG WORKSHOP, 4-7 MAY, 2015.

Anne Hickling-Hudson

Queensland University of Technology, Australia.

An exploratory workshop with the theme: *‘International Education: Emergences and Future Possibilities’*, was held at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland from 4-7 May 2015. The workshop, organised by the university’s Department of Educational Sciences, was made possible when the head of department Professor Edgar Forster and lecturer/PhD candidate Ms. Rose Eder applied for and won a grant of 24,810 CHF (Swiss Francs) from the Swiss National Science Foundation. Participants in the workshop included a number of invited global scholars of international education from universities in Canada, the USA, Brazil, Australia, Singapore, Japan and Vietnam (papers listed below), as well as graduate students in Education and their supervisors from the University of Fribourg, some from the transdisciplinary postdoctoral program ‘Migration and Postcoloniality meet Switzerland’.

As an invited participant in the workshop, I gained new insights into international education from perspectives based on postcolonial theory, critical theory and post-structural theory. The workshop took inspiration from the concept of exploring and further developing epistemologies of the Global South, discussing (i) how this could be useful in recognising potential emergences and future possibilities in the field of

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education, and (ii) how it could be integrated in educational collaboration, particularly in international education.

Discussing how postcolonial /critical perspectives provide different understandings and analyses of international education led participants into exchanging experiences concerning the nature of knowledge. Case studies of education in different cultures, social groups and socio-economic strata illuminated questions such as: What do we want to know, what can we know, what is absent from our mental frameworks? Postcolonial theorising was applied to exploring different ontologies and epistemic difference, and we made progress in understanding ways in which knowledge production is shaped in unexpected ways through the lens of postcolonial thinking.

I experienced this week-long workshop as a stimulating meeting of minds, with global scholars and PhD students exchanging critical papers on, among other issues, how ways of knowing influence education (with examples from research into Amazonian, Quechua and Tamil cultures); colonialism without colonies – the case of Switzerland; elite schooling, examinations and imperialism (examples from Africa and the Caribbean); Spain and the encroachment of English accreditation programs; Chinese aid to education in the Pacific region; an historical analysis of Japanese colonialism in South East Asia; problems in organising the education of Indigenous groups in Vietnam, and how international education is being conceptualised in the USA, Canada, Switzerland and other countries, with discussion of the extraordinary case of Cuban internationalism in education and health.

The exploratory sharing of different ways of knowing sharpened our scholarly criticism of these objects of interest:

- (i) current international education policies for their complicity in perpetuating the commodification of education, especially higher education, and
- (ii) the asymmetrical power relationships produced when education imitates and partially reproduces the ethos of colonial structures.

When these current developments were analysed from the framework of critical theory and postcolonial theory, reflection was enhanced on the directions that international education takes and on the values, ranging from commodification to socio-political solidarity, that it promotes. Special attention was paid to the three heuristic concepts set out by the workshop proposal: stories (including matters of representation, identities and agency), systems (including socio-historical processes promoting injustices, resistance and challenges), and spaces (including the idea of education as a sphere of tension, conflict, struggle, dialogue and transformative action). A selection of papers presented by participants (listed below) gives an overview of how themes in the workshop were introduced and explored. It was valuable to the four PhD candidates to be able to present their research projects and have them commented on by the other workshop participants. At the same time, established scholars benefited from the early-career researchers and students by getting fresh insights and ideas on the practical implications of employing postcolonial studies in the study of education and international education.

As the week of scholarly exchange progressed, the presentations laid a foundation for workshop participants to discuss ways of theorising the future of international education. The following issues were explored:

- (i) To what extent are we witnessing paradigm shifts in the epistemologies of education?
- (ii) How could the current social imaginaries in education premised on the 'laws of the market' be changed?
- (iii) How could academics and other stakeholders engage and collaborate to overcome the market-led thrust of international education, and enhance their practical support to interventions for social justice?

This innovative workshop therefore contributed to current scholarship by setting the stage for an 'education of emergences' – a meta-reflexive concept that was explored to facilitate recognition and acceptance of emerging alternative possibilities in international education.

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At the end of the workshop we agreed to work on developing articles based on the lecture-seminars and discussions. Two journals have the possibility of bringing out special issues – the journal *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, and the *Journal of Education Studies*. We decided that each special issue would be co-edited by professors who participated in the workshop. These publications will help to concretize the achievement of the workshop, which appears to be bringing about intense intellectual change for many of the students who attended. In post-workshop feedback some of the Masters students said that it had opened for them new perspectives ‘on what education is, or what it can be’, and others expressed appreciation with comments such as this: “Thank you for this life-changing experience”. Some students also felt discomfort, as they started to question the very foundation of their knowledge and practices as Europeans – which is surely a good space from which to start rethinking education. From the group of PhD candidates, appreciation was summarised in this unsolicited comment in an email sent to all of the professors a week after the workshop:

In my reflections, I came to the realization that the workshop was without a doubt one of the most formative - and indeed pivotal - experiences of my PhD journey thus far so thank you” (21 May 2015: PhD candidate who attended the workshop)

PAPERS AND DISCUSSION SESSIONS IN THE WORKSHOP

Monday, 4 May 2015

09:00 Welcome and introduction to the programme and overarching theme; overview of the conceptual framework
(Rosalyn Eder, Edgar Forster)

09:15 – 12:15 Deconstructing the imperialist education project – mapping the blueprints of colonialism and new imperialism in education
(Roland Coloma, Vanessa Andreotti)

13:30 Colonialism without colonies: perspectives on Switzerland, and lessons for international education
(Bernhard Schär)

15:30 – 17:30 Between governance and governmentality: critical discussions and practical implications (Edgar Forster, Edgar Porter)

Tuesday, 5 May 2015

09:00 Conceptual reflection on travelling theories: Universalism vs. / and particularism? (Doris Gödl)

10:00 – 12:30 International education, politics and the sphere of influence of supranational organisations. (Anne Hickling-Hudson and Maria Cuevas Tabuenca). Case study (1) how supranational organisations continue to influence imperial models of stratified schooling. Case study (2) Spain's national languages and the challenges posed by English accreditation programs.

13:30 Indigenous education: perspectives from Latin America. Knowledge systems in Amazon cultures. (Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza)

15:30 Indigenous education: perspectives from Malaysia and Viet Nam (A. Mani, T. N. Tran)

Wednesday, 6 May 2015

09:00 – 12:00 International education as a critical space of struggle: tensions and contentions in the North/South and South/South relationships (Anne Hickling-Hudson, Roland Coloma)

13:00 Rene Suša: PhD Project “Embodying cognitive justice in global education”

14:00 Nima Sobhani: PhD Project. “The Impact of Changing Geopolitics on Educational Aid: Exploring Shifting Pacific Island Perspectives”

15:30 Rosalyn Eder: PhD Project. “Internationalisation of Higher Education in ASEAN. Postcolonial perspectives and Southern Theories”

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16:30 Maxwell Caughron: PhD Project. “Educational contributions in Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal's 1968 work Asian Drama”

17:30 – 18:00 Summary

Thursday, 7 May 2015

09:00 ‘Education of emergences’ – re-framing international education based on alternative epistemologies and theories, future possibilities, limitations and implications, theoretical and methodological issues
(Vanessa Andreotti, Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza)

13:30 – 16:00 Summary, feedback and conclusion (Edgar Forster, Rosalyn Eder)

16:00 End of Workshop

GUEST SPEAKERS (ALPHABETICALLY)

Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti – Canada Research Professorial Chair in Race, Inequalities and Global Change, University of British Columbia, Canada

Maxwell Caughron – PhD candidate, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan

Roland Sintos Coloma – Professor & Chair of Education, Miami University, USA

Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza – Professor, University of São Paulo, Brazil

Rosalyn Baldonado Eder – Lecturer and PhD candidate, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Edgar Forster – Professor and Head of Education, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Doris Gödl – Professor, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Anne Hickling-Hudson – Professor (adjunct), Queensland University of Technology, Australia

A. Mani – Professor, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan

Edgar Porter – Professor, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan

Bernhard Schär – Professor, ETH Zürich, Switzerland

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Nima Sobhani – PhD candidate, University of Melbourne, Australia

Rene Suša – PhD candidate, University of Oulu, Finland

Maria Cuevas Tabuenca – Associate Professor, Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia, Spain

Tran Ngoc Tien - Lecturer; Faculty of Foreign Languages, Da Lat University, Da Lat City, Vietnam

ORGANISERS

Rosalyn Baldonado Eder and Edgar Forster