

Issues and Perspectives

Internationalization of Higher Education: Considerations for Adult Education

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Internationalization has increasingly become an integral part of higher education in the past few decades. This process has posed both opportunities and challenges for adult education in higher education settings. This paper reflects on the implications of internationalization of higher education for adult education. A brief overview of the meanings, purposes, and approaches of internationalization is presented to provide some background to the shifting context of higher education. By looking at the emerging forces shaping the reality of research and practice in higher education, this paper proposes that teaching and learning in universities could dedicate more concerted efforts to sustainable student mobility, internationalizing curricula for intercultural understanding, and enhancing international collaboration.

Depuis quelques décennies, l'internationalisation fait de plus en plus partie intégrante de l'enseignement supérieur. Ce processus s'accompagne tant de possibilités intéressantes que de défis pour l'éducation des adultes dans le milieu de l'enseignement supérieur. Cet article porte sur les incidences qu'a, sur l'éducation des adultes, l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur. Un aperçu du sens et des objectifs de l'internationalisation, ainsi que des approches à ce phénomène, offre un contexte à l'évolution des études supérieures. En posant un regard sur les forces émergentes qui façonnent la recherche et la pratique dans l'enseignement supérieur, cet article propose que l'enseignement et l'apprentissage dans les universités soient davantage axés sur la mobilité durable des étudiants, l'internationalisation des programmes d'études de sorte à promouvoir la compréhension interculturelle et l'amélioration de la collaboration internationale.

Under the prevalent influence of neoliberal globalization, internationalization has become the key agenda for higher education institutions around the world. Integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the mission and vision of a university has become part of the institutional strategic planning processes and practices. Since higher education is an important form of formal adult education (Colletta, 1996), the impact of internationalization on higher education has inevitably shaped the changing principles and contexts of adult education. This paper explores the implications of internationalization of higher education for adult education. Reflecting on the emerging opportunities and challenges, this paper proposes some directions for adult education in responding to the intensification of the internationalization in higher education.

Internationalization: Multiple Approaches and Contested Purposes

Some researchers (e.g. Altbach, 1998; Knight & de Wit, 1997) believe that historically the university has always been globally connected in nature, while others believe that internationalization is one of the measures taken by modern universities facing globalizing pressures. Corresponding to the increasing focus on internationalization in higher education, there has been a growing body of academic literature that offers understanding of different approaches at both policy and practice levels. Knight (2003) defines internationalization as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 2). It is worth noting that the term *process* is used in Knight’s definition to convey the developmental quality of internationalization as a continuing and evolving effort in higher education.

Often associated with the evolving process of internationalization, there are two related terms referring to how higher education institutions integrate international dimension in their initiatives and activities: internationalization at home and internationalization abroad (de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2004). Internationalization at home focuses on initiatives that happen on a home campus in developing an international awareness and intercultural understanding. Internationalization abroad refers to different forms of cross-border activities, such as cross-border collaboration of research projects and programs and emergence of new providers in higher education. Knight and de Wit (1997) further identify socio-cultural, political, academic, and economic factors as the four underlying motivations for internationalization of higher education at the national and institutional levels.

Rumbley, Altbach, and Reisberg (2012) suggest that internationalization of higher education is a shifting landscape. They recognize that some of the central factors pushing universities to participate in this process could attribute to the increasing student and scholarly mobility, the interest in educating students for international and intercultural understanding, and the emphasis on international cooperative network among higher educational systems and institutions. A major push for different countries and universities to adopt the internationalization agenda is the manifestation of international competition. Maringe and Foskett (2013) note that there has been a blurring of various purposes across the four categories that have led to more complex rationales and approaches to internationalization at the national and institutional levels.

Similarly, Guo, Schugurensky, Hall, Rocco, and Fenwick (2010) find that internationalization of adult education in Canada could be described as a process with multiple meanings and contested rationales. Student and faculty mobility, internationalization of curriculum, and collaborative programs such as joint international research projects and partnerships are among some of the important initiatives and activities for Canadian universities to engage in international competition. Guo et al. (2010) also raise the concern that there is a lack of awareness of the hidden agenda for revenue generation and colonization in the mask of internationalization and one-way flow of international cooperation.

Implications for Adult Education: Potentials and Challenges

International cooperation and competition may seem to be contrary in nature but can be seen as two sides of the same coin in the process of internationalization. There is a fine line between knowledge mobility and a one-way flow of knowledge. While the process of internationalization

offers opportunities for universities to join an international network, there are many associated risks. The challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning in the context of internationalization could be found in three main areas: student mobility, internationalizing curricula, and international collaboration.

One of the most important impacts of internationalization on teaching and learning in higher education is the increasing mobility of students and scholars. In the case of Canadian higher education, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2014) internationalization survey indicates that student mobility has become one of the most important priorities for Canadian universities in considering institutional strategies. Taking the University of Saskatchewan as an example, the most recent policy document on institutional internationalization, the *International Blueprint for Action*, identifies one of its key pillars for global engagement as engaging students in education abroad and enhancing international exchange. Apparently international student recruitment and outbound student mobility through study-abroad programs have become top priorities for institutional internationalization.

One of the primary imperatives for international student mobility is to increase intercultural understanding and prepare students for a globalized labor market. However, while Canadian universities invest heavily in recruiting international students to study in Canada, there are not enough initiatives and programs that support international student settlement and enhance their learning experience. Particularly, there has been a mismatch between the amount of tuition fees paid in the form of international differential fees and the amount of investment in student services specifically targeting international students. There are also very few initiatives or services that support faculty members to integrate international content in their curriculum. Since most Canadian universities have centers for teaching and learning, these centers could potentially be a great resource offering training and support for developing curricula that incorporate content for international and intercultural understandings.

As an example of such initiatives, my academic department recently developed a seminar to provide support for international graduate students in their transition into life in Canada¹. This seminar also brought in campus resources to help international students understand the context of teaching and learning in a Canadian university. Students in the seminar provided constructive feedback for this seminar and said they appreciated courses that made efforts to incorporate international content and class activities that created space for interaction and communication between international and domestic students.

Bridging the gaps between the international and the local, between research and practice is another challenging area in the internationalization process. In mapping the field of adult education, Rubenson and Elfert (2015) note that internal developments and external conditions have turned adult education research into an increasingly sophisticated and fragmented field. They highlight the shift of adult education research from focusing on practice to research conducted just “for the sake of research” (p. 135). This concern is particularly meaningful as we are facing the reality of universities in a globalized world. In this respect, enhancing international research collaboration could be a very useful tool to bridge research and practice in adult education. Comparative perspectives in adult education could help adult educators and learners in different countries to learn from each other. In my previous research on the international branch campuses in China, some of the universities and programs have become leaders in bringing together perspectives from both the Western and Chinese contexts to address local issues such as urban development, environmental sustainability, and social entrepreneurship in China. Utilizing international and comparative approaches through

research collaboration could potentially address the gaps between the international and the local and foster dialogues between learning and action through increasing community engagement.

International collaboration between higher education institutions have brought many benefits to adult education. Partnerships between different universities and research institutions have increased cross-border learning opportunities and intercultural understanding. While most Canadian universities are moving towards considering the strategic value and quality of such partnerships over quantity (AUCC, 2014), a main challenge has been building reciprocal and social accountable partnerships with international institutions. Reciprocity is an important factor in considering international collaboration in higher education. Internationalization of higher education has entered a phase of calling for respect for different cultures and multiple knowledge systems. Therefore, universities should increase their commitment in internationalization towards fostering cultural diversity and two-way flow of knowledge.

Conclusion

Rethinking the policies and practices for adult education in today's universities, we must recognize that internationalization has become one of the shaping forces in education. In addition to an already fragmented map (Rubenson & Elfert, 2015), research in international education and interest in a worldwide vision have added another layer of complexity to the landscape of adult education. Since the essence of adult education is to solve real-life issues and promote fundamental social changes (Merriam & Brockett, 2007), our research should inform institutional decisions in developing a cohesive institutional strategy that commit to actions promoting cultural diversity instead of homogenization. While considering institutional policies and strategies, internationalization at home (de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2004) will become increasingly important by integrating the international and intercultural dimensions in teaching and learning. Internationalization at home also allows for space for learning from and interacting with local communities and ethnic groups.

With the above outlined opportunities and challenges, sustainable student mobility, internationalizing curricula for intercultural understanding, and enhancing international collaboration are the three important focal points in internationalization at home. Accordingly, I propose three streams of research to be considered when we look at the implications of internationalization for adult education.

In response to the increasing need of international student mobility and demand for teaching and learning in higher education institutions, we need to consider whether universities focus too much on revenue generation and not enough on developing a long-term strategy to support international student settlement and enhance their learning experiences. University teaching and learning centers and academic units may be able to provide more training opportunities and support programs for faculty members and staff that are facing the reality of teaching in culturally diverse classrooms. In addition, we also need to consider how to prepare domestic students for a culturally diverse university and develop an understanding and appreciation for international and intercultural experiences.

In mapping research and practice, it is important to consider how our research in adult education in the higher education contexts could benefit the local communities and ethnic groups. As educators and researchers, we want to consider how we design programs and facilitate learning that could bridge the international and the local. International collaboration and partnership programs across educational systems could offer great potential to foster

community economic development and community participatory research. For example, since settlement and transitioning experience of newcomers have become a pressing issue in Canadian society, international and comparative approaches could be very useful in developing re-credentialing programs for internationally educated professionals. The University of Alberta has had great success with its bridging program for internationally educated teachers. The University of Saskatchewan has also initiated a similar program to meet the increasing demand of internationally educated teachers in the province.

With the growing international partnerships between universities across the world, research and practice in adult education could be very important in informing the university policy and decision-making process. As Merriam and Brockett (2007) propose, what we could learn from many community-based programs around the world is to trust the individual culture and knowledge system in its own approach to problem-solving, and adult education could be a forum for the exchange of ideas internationally and interculturally. To address the lack of awareness and avoid a one-way flow of knowledge mobility, we need to promote reciprocal process in international cooperation and partnerships by including voices from multiple knowledge systems and worldviews in the teaching and learning in universities. In this regard, international partnerships and collaboration in educational research could be a great approach for developing culturally responsive international universities.

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Note

¹ This was a seminar I taught in fall term 2017. It was created to provide information, guidance, and skills for international graduate students to succeed in their academic program.

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