

# **A Book Review of Killick, D, & Foster, M. (2021). Learner Relationships in Global Higher Education: A Critical Pedagogy for a Multicultural World.**

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## **Introduction**

**L**earner Relationships in Global Higher Education: A Critical Pedagogy for a Multicultural World by Killick and Foster (2021) provides a comprehensive overview of higher education in a globalized and multicultural context. This book offers readers a reformed perspective on education in an increasingly globalized world. Contributing to important conversations on internationalization, Killick and Foster (2021) bring forth the danger of neoliberalism when we neglect the fundamental importance of human relationships in learning. This review employs Harvey's (2007) definition of neoliberalism, "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p.2). Under this definition, neoliberalism risks promoting commercialization in education, where higher education institutions are viewed as consumer products that prioritize efficiency and performativity (De Wit, 2019; Killick & Foster, 2021; Vavrus & Pekol, 2015).

Consequently, the book proposes the re-centering of human relationships in learning, particularly between diverse students across the globe. To illustrate this, Killick and Foster draw on culture-bound theories such as Critical Pedagogy to facilitate critical dialogue around learning within dimensions of diversity, such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, socio-economic class, in a global context. Critical Pedagogy challenges the exclusionary undertone of neoliberal principles such as a single-story narrative, where the authors argue that the single-story narrative does not sufficiently represent global and diverse learners' realities. This book further emphasizes the use of a "multi-realities" lens that better depicts a multicultural and globalizing world. Thereby, this book aims to enlighten higher education institutions and practitioners by presenting learning across different contexts and boundaries, offering a realistic representation of a globalizing world. It serves as an important piece for educators, learners, and practitioners to reconceptualize and reflect on learning and teaching under globalization.

## **Book Organization and Key Discussions**

Organized into eight chapters, Chapter One introduces the limitation of higher education facing a globalizing world. Chapter Two briefly reviews the challenges in establishing intercultural learning and relationship development for globally diverse peers. Chapter Three illustrates the dynamism in learning between students and their environments. Chapter Four encourages inclusivity in curriculum design and implementation. Chapter Five highlights the importance of language and communication in learner relationships between globally diverse students. Chapter Six provides a critical analysis of assessment strategies for diverse learners. Chapter Seven draws on the challenges and limitations of optional curriculum activities for diversity. Lastly, Chapter Eight urges for the re-prioritization and attention to the cultural and social relationships between globally diverse learners.

Cohesively, each chapter reveals the limitations in higher education facing a globalizing world, urging for the re-prioritization and attention to the cultural and social relationships between globally diverse learners. Three major themes are explored in this book: 1) the Role of Higher Education Institutions in Internationalization, 2) Global and Diverse Lived Experience and Positionality in Curriculum Design, and 3) the Importance of Human Relationships in Learning.

## **The Role of Higher Education Institutions in Internationalization**

Killick and Foster assert that higher education has both the power to liberate and to disempower, and the responsibility to ensure equity resides within the structures of their institutions. For instance, the notion of a “hidden curriculum” was heavily discussed throughout this book (Chapters Two, Three, and Seven). Hidden curriculum was first introduced by Philip Jackson (1968) to describe education as an “agent of socialization”, where educators, for example, reproduce certain social and institutional expectations through implicit and “hidden” rules to students. The book speaks to this notion by depicting how institutional practices and policies may, intentionally or unintentionally, “silence, exclude, perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce stereotype threats” (p.88) for racialized and diverse groups. Further, this book positions that hidden curriculum is not limited to describing what is left out in the traditional curriculum but also the social interactions that get elicited beyond the curriculum. The prioritization of western knowledge in curriculum content and design may risk devaluing and excluding non-western perspectives. Under this pretense, learners’ success then depends on their familiarity with a particular context and their prior experiences. As higher education institutions move towards internationalization, the authors successfully highlight the importance of considering learners’ lived experiences and positionality in both the “hidden” and “unhidden” aspects of policies, practices, and processes in higher education.

### **Global and Diverse Lived Experience and Positionality in Curriculum Design**

Speaking to this contention, Chapters Three and Four draw attention to the importance of lived experience and positionality in learning, and as a vehicle to inform inclusive curriculum designs. In particular, issues of power and privilege are raised throughout this book to bring forth the inequities that may exist in curriculum design. Traditionally, curriculums are designed by practitioners, teachers, and instructors based on their perceptions and lived experiences (Alsubaie, 2015). However, Killick and Foster argue that designing the curriculum should be a collaborative process with the involvement of the learner. Each learner brings their prior lived experience into a learning space, and the learning that occurs will then re-inform a new lived experience, further shaping their relationship with learning. Consequently, the current curriculum and systems of assessment, often standardized and uniformed, may risk viewing diverse learners as a homogeneous group (Killick & Foster, 2021). As recommended by the authors, an inclusive curriculum should be person and student-centred, meaning, it should reflect the learners’ cultural and diverse identities to achieve cultural integrity. Under the same principle, Killick and Foster posit that curriculum and assessment designs must remain adaptable and flexible to the needs of diverse learners, which may involve incorporating more cultural representations and international perspectives.

### **The Importance of Human Relationships in Learning**

Beyond the role of institutions and curriculum, the authors set forth that human relationships and interactions, especially intercultural and diverse relationships require further exploration. For instance, the book argues that when learning occurs, there is a social exchange between people that impacts how learning is experienced. The use of Critical Pedagogy in this book gives credence to the importance of “people” in diverse learners’ relationships, where the interactions between people may contribute meaningfully to the shaping of learning environments.

In addition, the element of “reciprocity” in human relationships is reiterated throughout this book. Reciprocity involves equal give and take by all participants, and in this discussion, the act of “reciprocity” may be reinforced between domestic and international students, bringing liberation and empowerment for all involved. The book highlights examples of how global literacy and cultural diversity may be achieved through appropriate and successful interactions between diverse peers. For instance, the nurturing of intercultural and growth-fostering relationships, both in-person or digitally, between globally diverse learners can have positive implications for learning. In this respect, the book upholds the importance of human relationships in understanding, transforming, and examining the learning realities between diverse learners globally.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Book**

The strength of this book lies in the book's organization and discussion of key themes. The chapters were clearly organized and easy for readers to follow. The book discusses important themes concerning internationalization, such as the role of higher education institutions in internationalization, global and diverse lived experience and positionality in curriculum design, and the importance of human relationships in learning. The three themes are comprehensively and extensively discussed throughout the chapters in this book. The themes discussed in the earlier sections provide readers nuanced understandings of the higher education landscape in a globalizing world. Furthermore, tables, graphics, relationship maps, learning cycles and models of assessments for mutual learning are presented as visualization aids to help readers better understand relationship development among diverse students in diverse contexts.

I propose that the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991)—the intersecting nature of learners' social categories, can be examined more explicitly and rigorously when looking at Critical Pedagogy, intercultural and human relationships. Especially as the authors suggest, diverse people are brought together into the same space and are faced with the challenge to connect across different cultural boundaries and diverse identities. I believe that a more extensive discussion on the intersecting nature of diverse identities through the lens of intersectionality can strengthen the authors' overall argument. For example, a more extensive discussion on the historical roots, power relationships, and impact of racism in higher education institutions can strengthen the authors' critiques on internationalization under neoliberalism.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, Killick and Foster's book provides valuable insights for readers, practitioners, and educators to re-think curriculum design for global learners and the importance of human relationships in learning. The book serves to enlighten educators, researchers, and students by suggesting that intercultural and multicultural relationships are important elements of educational development in internationalization. Killick and Foster present a necessary piece for us to better understand learning in a globalizing world.

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