Not Your Parents' Internationalization

Next Generation Perspectives

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Internationalization of higher education is generally considered to be a “young” phenomenon—as a field of inquiry, an area of professional practice, and a strategic undertaking for higher education institutions. Even so, there is today a sizable corpus of published material on the subject, and a recognized cadre of experts whose work has shaped the field in profound and long-lasting ways. The contemporary “founders” of the study of internationalization stand out for the contributions they have made in proposing and defining key terms, positing conceptual frameworks, shaping relevant debates, drawing the attention of a multitude of stakeholders, and connecting theory with policy and practice.

The intellectual evolution of internationalization has occurred in tandem with the development, around the world, of a community of organizations dedicated to serving international education through programming, knowledge development, and/or professional training for those working in this field. Some of these organizations are decades old, including the Institute of International Education in the United States, which celebrates 100 years in 2019; the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), founded in 1925; NAFSA: Association of International Educators, which was established in the United States in 1948; and The Netherlands-based European Association for International Education, which dates from 1989. These entities—and the plethora of related organizations and associations that operate at national, (sub)regional, and (inter)continental levels around the world—have set the scene for much of the conversation and the action agenda connecting international education globally. Indeed, the founding scholars and organizations in international education have had an immensely influential role in determining how we understand and enact internationalization in higher education worldwide.

Acknowledging both the utility and the “baggage” that the past provides, important questions arise as we simultaneously reflect on where we have come from and where we are headed, as we hurtle toward the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century: How and in what ways can “next generation” perspectives on internationalization of higher education lead us meaningfully into the future? Why does innovation—both in terms of sources of

information and content—matter? From our perspective, the increasing complexity of the global higher education landscape, the rapid evolution of internationalization dynamics, and the high stakes connected to quality in higher education and human capital development in a global context, make it crucial to (re)focus the conversation on internationalization across new modes, new contexts, and new topics. Considering these matters through a collection of new voices from around the world is also vital, if we are serious about understanding and responding to the possibilities and challenges that lie ahead.

1 New Modes, New Topics, New Contexts

Previous exploration into various data sources has given us a clear indication that research on higher education is overwhelmingly concentrated in a relatively small number of research centers located in a select number of (wealthy, largely English-speaking) countries. Furthermore, research output specifically on internationalization in higher education is similarly clustered, emanating disproportionately from Australia, Europe, and North America. Certain topics are also overrepresented in the literature at our fingertips, ranging from the American study abroad experience to the international student adaptation process and to the single program or institutional case study analysis. Quite literally, a world of dimensions related to the phenomenon of internationalization remains poorly researched or ignored altogether.

To rectify this situation, commitments to explore new modes, new topics, and new contexts for internationalization must be made by key stakeholders. These stakeholders include governments and policy organizations that frame lines of inquiry to explore and fund research; established researchers with the ability to determine their individual agendas for ongoing scholarship, and to influence peers within their networks; as well as graduate students and young academics undertaking preliminary theses, dissertations, and early post-doc projects, and the advisors guiding these early career individuals.

2 New Contexts: The “Where”

Internationalization is clearly a worldwide phenomenon, yet the bulk of research is still produced by—and concerned with—large English-speaking countries in the global North. As such, new contexts for internationalization include countries and regions of the world, categories of institutions, and other settings where there has been limited research to date. Examples we

are familiar with of research being undertaken in relation to new contexts include a focus on remote geographic locations and/or highly marginalized communities (e.g., due to the predominance of a non-widely spoken language, or the prevalence of insecurity or cultural isolation), or in contexts of extreme economic crisis or deprivation. What do we really know about internationalization of higher education in contested borderlands, in relation to indigenization movements, in regions with highly inhospitable climates, or in remote rural or wilderness settings? We know of several young researchers who are digging into these topics, and more need to be encouraged.

3 New Topics: The “What”

Given the complex and dynamic world in which we are living, new topics for internationalization should be finding their way into our collective knowledge base every day. We note with excitement a number of early career researchers who are looking at how internationalization of higher education serves the surging numbers of individuals coping with forced migration around the world. Others are helping us learn from internationalization efforts undertaken at primary and secondary education institutions in different contexts and to reflect on how internationalization intersects with the formation of individual identity, national identity, and regional engagement in various regions of the world. Still others are exploring ways in which we may leverage internationalization in the approach to training future academics, or advancing the work of university-based schools and faculties of education, among other themes. The need for attention to new topics in relation to internationalization is acute, and broader exploration of the landscape around us requires sustained attention and support.

4 New Contexts: The “How”

New methods for researching internationalization push us collectively toward important considerations about how our knowledge base is developed in this field. The work of a number of early career researchers we are familiar with is giving us insight into everything from the possibilities of mining existing data sets for deeper understanding about the choices of internationally mobile students and the dynamics of their satisfaction; to the potential for topic modeling to make sense of a wide-ranging pool of government policies and initiatives focused on internationalization in different national contexts; and the

philosophical and historical considerations of Protestant roots undergirding the Western theory of internationalization. From biological processes to narrative analysis, the methodologies for exploring the phenomenon of internationalization can be taken in a range of compelling directions that should offer consequential insights over time.

5 May the Force Be with the Next Generation

An uncertain future for internationalization offers both opportunities and challenges for the next generation of scholars and scholar-practitioners who are committed to ensuring that international engagement and global learning play their rightful role in advancing both high quality and equitable education, knowledge development, and social relevance in the coming decades. The work of the rising generation of internationalization specialists has significant potential to achieve these ends, building creatively and dynamically on all that has come before.

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