Editorial

Transnational higher education (TNHE) is a term used for a range of international activities but most commonly it describes programmes where students are located in a different country from the degree-awarding institution. Partnership models include distance learning, dual degrees, franchising and 'flying faculty', where academics from the degree-awarding institution fly to another country to teach a programme there. TNHE partnerships are established between institutions for several reasons, not least because of the increase in marketisation of higher education together with the reduction in public funding in many contexts. Interrogating how 'commercial imperatives nest with academic integrity' (Sidhu and Christie 2014: 2) is important as many TNHE partnerships are established between 'Northern' universities, in particular from Anglo-Celtic countries such as Australia, the U.K. and the U.S.A., and those from the 'South' or the 'East'. Care needs to be taken, therefore, in exercising academic integrity in learning, teaching and assessment in contexts with different academic traditions from those of the degree-awarding institution.

In compiling this Special Issue, I wanted to include articles from different settings that varied in their conceptualisation and practices of TNHE, articles in which authors reflected on and problematised their learning and teaching practices. The contributors highlight the complexities, including the perils of educational and linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992), but also foreground the opportunities to be realised from this international knowledge economy, provided that one is vigilant.

There are threads that connect each article, such as English as the lingua franca and the dangers of linguistic imperialism; postcolonialism; cultural mediation of learning and teaching and internationalisation of the curriculum, all of which involve critique of the 'essentialist thinking and culturalist logics that are embedded in the institutional memories of many "international universities"' (Sidhu, this issue). In other words, unless one is aware of the ways in which learning and teaching are influenced by the values and beliefs that prevail in different cultural contexts, there is a danger of TNHE being another form of colonisation. In addition, three authors reflect on their

use of contemporary methodological approaches such as narrative inquiry and autoethnography to investigate TNHE environments.

Viv Caruana and Catherine Montgomery's review of TNHE research published between 2006 and 2014 frames the TNHE landscape. Using the concept of positionality, a powerful notion drawn from economic geography, the authors articulate how it can encourage those working in the sector to consider their practice within socio-political and cultural discourses. Literature from several contexts, including Southeast Asia and Africa, identifies a lack of research on TNHE curricula and pedagogy. Moreover, from their review, the authors acknowledge the need for 'academic sojourners' to adapt, personally and pedagogically, through intercultural learning processes, which are core themes of this Special Issue. Concluding that academics and students have 'yet to find their voice' in TNHE, Caruana and Montgomery highlight how, in doing so, academics and students have much to contribute 'beyond the chalk-face', as is attested in the subsequent articles.

Much of higher education teaching in the Netherlands is in English, not the first language for the majority of students and academics. Focusing on experiences of four European medical students studying in the Netherlands and undertaking electives in Africa, Kevin Haines argues for the value of narrative research in making students' interactions with the complex social contexts of TNHE more transparent. Haines claims that creating spaces for diverse learners to recount their experiences and to articulate the assumptions and expectations that they bring to a transnational environment may lead to change, not only in individuals but also in institutional practices. Such change can result in the breaking down of institutions' dominant discourses and power relationships to ensure greater awareness and sensitivity through the development of an internationalised curriculum that emphasises global perspectives and is respectful of different academic traditions.

Travelling from northern to southern Europe, in the next article, Dione Mifsud uses narrative ethnography to recount the experiences of students, academics and administrators involved in a Masters degree in Transcultural Counselling (T.Couns). T.Couns is a dual degree awarded by the universities of Malta and Maryland in the U.S.A., which is taught in English in Malta and attracts students from many countries, including the local one. Mifsud focuses on the interplay between the academics and administrators in 'two totally different academic cultures', as well as the student constituency, in a context that itself is grappling to accommodate high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. The T.Couns participants' words reveal the struggles

inherent in dual-degree programmes, in particular the different learning, teaching and assessment approaches. They also, however, celebrate the opportunities for learning from each other. Mifsud concludes that 'international learning and teaching is achievable' in a challenging transcultural situation, provided that there is a willingness from all parties to bridge the 'divide between two different academic cultures'.

The last two articles discuss TNHE in postcolonial contexts. Ravinder Sidhu critiques partnerships between Australian universities and institutions in Singapore and Malaysia, through a postcolonial critical lens. The three countries share a legacy of British colonialism but their experiences and postcolonial trajectories differ, with Australia being one of the most significant TNHE providers in Southeast Asia. Arguing that the relationship between TNHE and social equity has been given little theoretical and empirical attention, Sidhu foregrounds the opportunities to 'limit the possibilities of a universalising epistemology', that is an uncritical assumption that the knowledge dominant in one context is appropriate for others, through an 'engaged and care-full pedagogy' that enables students to 'play active roles in the profoundly complex worlds in which they are immersed'. Proposing strategies for developing such a pedagogy, Sidhu draws particular attention to the need to focus on the body, which, as she suggests, 'makes its presence and needs felt, sometimes forcefully' in TNHE contexts.

Writing about teaching in Hong Kong, a context that hosts the highest number of TNHE programmes, I illustrate autoethnographically how I endeavour to be aware of the postcolonial context, which in my experience adds yet another layer of richness to and potential for 'discomfort pedagogy' or 'engaged pedagogy'. I explicate how critical interrogation of my values and beliefs about pedagogical approaches continues to enable me to develop my teaching and relationships with students in the U.K. as well as in Hong Kong. Locating these reflections within frameworks of 'doubt' and 'unhomeliness', I strive to foreground the affordances of such concepts in problematising pedagogical approaches in a global environment.

Hawawini (2011: 6) advocates a 'metanational higher education model', arguing that the 'mission of a truly global HEI is to learn from the world rather than teach the world what the institution knows'. In similar vein, Zeleza (2012: 3) pleads for 'more empowering knowledges for the south and symmetrical forms of internationalization in higher education' as a way of 'decentering the hegemonic stranglehold of the Eurocentric epistemological order'. The articles in this Special Issue reflect these challenges in their

discussion of TNHE and present opportunities to decentre the Eurocentric stranglehold on approaches to learning and teaching in such environments.

Sheila Trahar, Editor of the Special Issue

References

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