



# Working with, against, and despite global ‘best practices’

EDUCATIONAL CONVERSATIONS  
AROUND THE GLOBE

A volume of articles from April 2014 RICE/CIDEC  
Symposium at OISE, University of Toronto

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*A RICE/CIDEC compendium...*

**WORKING WITH, AGAINST AND DESPITE GLOBAL ‘BEST PRACTICES’  
EDUCATIONAL CONVERSATIONS AROUND THE GLOBE**

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**INTRODUCTION**

**Background to the compendium**

In the unfolding 21st century, there is an expansion and intensification of *transnational* educational interactions and initiatives across the globe. Increasingly educational actors—school teachers, teacher educators, researchers, development specialists, and community organizers—are working in transcultural contexts (in interconnected locations) in Canada and around the globe. In this context, we are increasingly confronting idealizations of “best practices” that are travelling across political borders, especially from the ‘west’ to the ‘east’ and to the ‘south,’ in an uneven world. Once legitimated as “best practices”, these techniques and strategies travel across the geographic, national, and cultural contexts to provide solutions to the problems faced by particular education systems. Educational transfer has been central to comparative, international, and development education for more than a century, but as of late the intensifying transnational rhetoric of ‘best practice’ requires much scrutiny as both danger and opportunity. What are global best practices? What is the character of these so-called best practices, their conceptual underpinnings and routes of assemblage? Which ‘best practices’ are travelling, how, and to which ‘local’ educational domains? How are they interpreted and engaged in local contexts and what are their effects? And ultimately, how are progressive and critically-minded educators to *work with, against and despite global ‘best practices’*?

To address these conditions and questions as framed above, a symposium for Ontario-based comparative and international educators and researchers was convened at the Ontario Institute of Studies of Education, University of Toronto on April 25, 2014. The forum was a

collaborative project between the two comparative and international education centers in Ontario: Western University's *Research in International and Contemporary Education* (RICE) and OISE's *Comparative, International and Development Education Center* (CIDEC). Though small in scope and modest in its format, this symposium proved to be a unique opportunity for Canadian education scholars, practitioners, and graduate students to converge and to critically and collectively engage these questions. Twelve faculty and twenty graduate students from Universities of Toronto, York, Western and Ottawa served as panelists and discussants. Professor Gita Steiner-Khamsi, a leading scholar in the field of educational borrowing and lending, from Teachers College, Columbia University gave the keynote address. In addition 80 participants from Ontario's education faculties, NGOs and government agencies attended this one-day intensive symposium.

The forum served as a unique place for Ontario comparative and international educators to exchange ideas, as well as to develop theoretical insights and practical strategies to more proactively engage in our respective trans-national/cultural contexts across the levels of policy, pedagogy and research. One of the key recommendations of the symposium was to make this theme-focussed forum an annual or biannual tradition in Ontario. The event of the full day symposium was preceded by a series of meetings between the two key organizers of the symposium (who are also the editors of this compendium). During those meetings six key conceptual themes were identified, reiterated with a number of colleagues and used to identify graduate students working in these areas. About half of the graduate student panelists eventually contributed to the compendium; their contributions herein should be seen as reflecting the work of collaborative processes begun in the planning stages of the symposium to the call for contributions post-symposium. The articles provided by the students underwent a double review process before their inclusion in this compendium. In concluding this background information we would like to thank the forum participants and discussants, the keynote speaker, the support staff, and especially the compendium contributors.

### **Global 'best practices': Engaging the terrain**

As organizers of the symposium and editors of this compendium, we are well aware of the contested nature of so-called best practices. In this introduction, we think it valuable to present

our perspectives on this overarching theme. We intend our notes in this section to work as a guiding framework for this multi-authored compilation.

First, the symposium title presupposes the problematic nature of ‘best practices’ and their global take up. We believe and argue that so called global best practices are produced from particular locations, built up with the strengths and limitations of socially located individuals and collective geniuses, interests, and limitations. The social constructedness of best practices does not mean that they are without material force and effects; we acknowledge the reality of the global discourses, perceptions, and operations of certain educational ‘practices’ elevated and circulated as ‘global’ and ‘best’ in fields of power and through particular terminology, procedures and operations. These perceptions and concomitant realities have significant consequences for both the providers and users of education, such as the students and parents and societies in which they live. These consequences, both positive and negative, need to be taken seriously. Given both the problematic and material consequences of global ‘best practices’, we suggest that educators and researchers need to strategically work with, against and despite global ‘best practices.’ This and-both approach is complex and non-dichotomous; it is open to possibility, strategic and/yet critical; we suggest engagement and dialogue and reflexivity of one’s locatedness with/in the power-knowledge fields and effects of global ‘best practices.’

To unpack the concept further, we discuss four sets of issues to further situate the articles of this compendium. The first set of the problems, as we have already signaled, is definitional. The notion of best practice is inflected by the theoretical and practical inclinations of its users. What is or are best practices for liberals or critical pedagogues, for example, may not be so for conservatives or neoliberals. It is thus important to know how the author of ‘best practices’ is mobilizing the term; one could ascertain, for example, the authorial agenda and who is served and underserved by it. Some have neutrally proposed *best practices are those which work in one or more contexts to produce desired outcomes with high degree of quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and within defined time and with limited resources.* Of course, in practice, neutrality dissolves as it becomes necessary to make determinations on what constitutes “desired outcomes,” “quality,” etc. Terms such as efficiency and effectiveness are often rejected as being fundamentally technical and economistic, conceiving of education as neutral, commodity and deterministic, rather than as a public good to be democratically debated and enacted in pluralistic societies, as a human right, or as unpredictable existential endeavour. Notions of quality,

efficiency, time and resources are not only contested, but become manifest in unequal and radically distinct contexts. Differentiated understandings and manifestations of best practices emerge dramatically, for example, when they confront human diversity as marked by gender, religion, ethnicity and language. In sum, ‘best practices’ requires a nuanced examination of underlying assumptions, modes of deployment and the material consequences of their deployment.

The second set of problems relates to the sometimes limited scope of the term ‘practice’. We believe the use of word practice is purposefully misleading. Practice sounds not only catchy and ‘real-world’, but also straightforward—unencumbered by sophisticated theories of social reality, subjectivity and development or by political agendas and various ideologies. So, on the one hand ‘practices and their effects,’ can be researched and validated *atheoretically* by simply surveying “what works” whilst maintaining an internal methodological validity. On the other hand, ‘practices’ as where we face the ‘real world’ can be seen as ideology-blind; Tabulawa (2003) has usefully exposed a deep connection between the technical terms and their ideological underpinning. English as a global language of communication, for example, is often framed as politically neutral or as simply a technical acquisition issue; such blind spots/omissions are critically engaged by Diane Dekker in this volume. Conversely, child-centered techniques and strategies are unproblematically tethered to progressive visions of democracy, human rights and choice, but can effectively operate seamlessly in the prevailing neoliberal ideology of competition, privatization, financialization, and economically driven education agenda; or, alternatively these techniques when applied to different educational contexts can produce outcomes contradictory to the spirit of the progressive visions. Wu addresses this train of the adoption of ‘progressive’ Western pedagogies in the Chinese context. In summary, we suggest that the word ‘practice’ be understood as much broader than techniques and strategies. It is constituted by ideas, concepts, models, programs, and approaches. The papers in this compendium emphasize the less visible underpinnings of the term ‘practice,’ making explicit that best practices are fundamentally representational/discursive and thereby politico-ideological and theoretical.

The third set of issues deals with the long-running historical trajectory of sharing practices across human societies and groups. Human beings have always borrowed and lent ideas to each other as individuals, communities and nations (Bereday, 1964). As such there are

changes and continuities in the ways practices have been borrowed and lent across times and places. Human history shows that ideas have been both borrowed and imposed: In the ancient times, the West, including Greece and Rome, heavily borrowed ideas, techniques and methodologies from India, Egypt, Iran and China, the superpowers of the time. In the medieval ages, Arabs and Muslims borrowed from Persians, Indians, Chinese and Greeks and early Christians, which they subsequently lent to the West. At the same time, the conquering Greeks, Romans, Persians, Arabs, and others imposed their best ideas on the conquered. The scale of these impositions has been as small as changing names of cities and as large as, what Anwaruddin notes (in this compendium), epistemicide—a concept one can apply to the swallowing up of ancient Phoenician and Persian civilizations by the Romans and Muslim Arabs. In other words, the current transferring of best practices is not necessarily new or uniquely Western. They should, as Froman argues in the compendium, be seen as results of ongoing transformations and updating of existing practices.

Still, in the last two to three centuries the trajectories of official borrowing and lending has been rather unidirectional, flowing from the West *to* the peripheries, eastbound and southbound. The western imposition and lending has been dramatic and qualitatively overwhelming. Furthermore, many of the recent so called south–south transfers have been nothing more than a second hand transference, transmission, and translation of the existing western ideas and practices (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000). In the 17-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, these practices served the purposes of western colonization and *mission civilitaire*, assembled through orientalist, eugenic and other supremacist ideologies. According to these discourses, non-Westerners have ceased to produce anything worthy of borrowing and emulation. The white man had to take the burden of civilizing for all of humanity. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, epitomized in the post WWII period of international development, global best practices were imposed as part of the development projects, leading to few successes and fortifying dependencies in neocolonial fashion. Subsequently, current global best practices come out of these past trajectories as products of late modernity, embedded in the ideological and political enlightenment civilizing mission—to release and unleash human freedom and capabilities to innovate and create new technologies that have supposedly made the West what it is now: the pinnacle of humankind, still showing others the paths of progress and democracy as the only social imaginaries, imaginable to humanity. While some of these claims of western modernity in terms of unleashing human

potential and technological and intellectual progress are understandable, these ‘developments’ are also implicated in colonizations, world wars and conflicts and vast ecological destruction. From the perspective of a Eurocentric modernity with an Anglo-American globalization as the most recent chapter, it is important to trouble the notion of ‘global’ given how often, at least in macro policy discourses, global is synonymous with Western.

The notion of global therefore can serve as camouflage hiding the contextual production and parochial intentions with universalizing moves; in effect the ‘global’ here ‘speaks’ on behalf of all humanity as proposing these best practices as non-contextual and equally applicable in any context and culture worthy of the modernizing path. This tradition leads to the neo-institutionalist claims of non-imposition and of voluntary borrowing by developing countries and different cultural and epistemological milieu due to their quality, efficiency, practicality, effectiveness, and production of equity (Meyer and Ramirez, 2002). What is missing once again is a historical memory, which shows that the new lending and transfers are often simply recycled or adapted solutions to the earlier lending and impositions such as (for a particularly weighty example) a universal model of modern schooling. In the current situation of multi-generational and recurrent lending, where educators in non-western contexts have lost much of the indigenous capabilities under colonization, and who now must rely on the earlier borrowed and out-dated western frames and structures, *it is difficult* to criticize the updated western ideas that may indeed propose better solutions to the existing problems that colonizations have helped shape.

And yet still, the call for and work in, the revival of non-western practices is burgeoning and a number of the articles of this volume illustrate this movement. Whether the papers discuss language, internationalization, knowledge production or indigeneity, the thread of critical examination and alternative possibilities in reference to a history of domination or inequality surfaces in each. However, it is also important to not frame Western concepts and practices solely in negative terms. They need to be understood with attention to their conditions of production and to their purposes and effects. In doing so, we may identify empowering and liberating ideas and practices from individuals and networks working in the West. We may also be able to translate these practices to serve different, global humanistic, just purposes, as Afridi suggests in her article in this compendium.

Lastly, the fourth set of challenges with global ‘best practices’ is more empirical and literal. Many ‘best practices’ are themselves struggling to find substantive adoption and impact

in the idealized Western well-resourced classroom. Various modes of progressive education as ‘child-centered’ pedagogy and inquiry learning are perceived as play-like ideas, promoting relativism and validation of diverse viewpoints without deep engagement, or confuse means (specific teaching methods) with aims (higher purposes as intellectual autonomy). In the first case—under the trend Biesta (2014) names “learnification”—they can confuse the role of the teachers, who in many countries have abandoned their intellectual and authoritative roles (expected from them) in favour of facilitation and validation of diverse perspectives, playing safe, and political correctness. Further, this movement to progressive education as “facilitation” in a wider context of privatization and standardization can further inequalities and marginalization along class, gender and ethnic lines. Standardization has led to the narrowing of education to technical and measurable outcomes and has marginalized humanistic, arts, and social subjects as not directly related to the market or application (Lyotard, 1984). In many countries, teachers and schools are unprepared to apply this form of best practices and often see them as unnecessary intrusion and imposition on their discretion and wisdom. They have too few resources, too little time and insufficient moral support to implement these potentially useful approaches. Their salaries are meagre, their students are undernourished, and their classrooms are overcrowded. The teacher training models that accompany their induction are often inadequate for ensuring teachers’ mastery of these good practices. Largely top-down and outside in, these practices are seen as an imposition and denigration of the teachers’ existing knowledge and a disregard of their classroom realities and life and work conditions. Indeed the irony of *imposing inquiry learning* (given that inquiry learning is founded on the recognition of the autonomy of the learner) on teachers in “developing” country contexts should not be overlooked!

These models of teacher professional development are often promoted by the international agencies or outside change agents through a cascading approach, which has proven unsustainable for ensuring the incorporation of these ideas and practices. Many of these best practices require additional resources that are not available in the context of poor schools in the West and public schools in non-western contexts. As soon as the political (e.g., elections or joining a particular ‘club’ such as in the Bologna process), and economic gains (funding transferred and some attempts at implementation) coalesce, the sustainable application of these global best practices on the ground remains more aspiration than achievement supported through sufficient resources and top-down commitments. The search frantically starts for new global best



practice on the horizon, because of the latest political and economic opportunities to chase. (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000)

In the second case, it is important to note, that even in the idealized classroom of the West, as progressive pedagogies have been mainstreamed, the emphasis on the underlying deeper visions as learner autonomy and critical thinking are sidelined under schooling, where the need for standardization, measurement, (equitable) sorting and, indeed, the development of teacherly ‘best practices’ tend to press for recipe creation and following, and the instrumental take-up of critical thinking. So for example having more sophisticated recipes to follow or devising entrepreneurial solutions to fundraising (as an answer to social inequality) may represent important skills in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning contexts, but this approach is unlikely to be what the progressive reformers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had in mind in terms of the learner’s capacity for thinking and self-authorship (Dewey, 2007).

Finally one must consider the inevitable subjectivity and agency on the part of those who ‘borrow’ global ‘best practices.’ In addition to the financial, there are also political and cultural forces shaping the borrowing and lending of best practices. Policy makers, including top level politicians, may be interested in how global best practices help them get re-elected, gain access to large scale funding, or join the ‘club of civilized nations.’ International agencies and civil societies obtain more funding and legitimacy if they promote western ideas and can produce evidence of their implementation. Schools can improve their ranking and budgets if they accept being part of these best practices schemas. Teachers may get exposure to new methods of teaching, free travels to meet their colleagues, release from their routine work, and may secure promotion. At times, and over time, it is difficult to contest the convincing rhetoric of these practices and even more difficult to *not* play along. Parents and children may feel that learning English and accessing other forms of academic capital is necessary in the struggle for upward social status and mobility; at times native language and cultural capital may become secondary. Nevertheless, global ‘best practices’ undergo numerous transformations such as full-scale acceptance, creolization, glocalization, modification, indigenization, domestication, and out-and-out rejection. Anderson-Levitt (2003), Steiner –Khamsi (2000), Niyozov and Dastambuev (2012), Nykiel-Herbert 2004), Silova (2006) and others have documented many of these single and multiple transformations on the ground. Wu’s article in this paper represents an example of how these transformations are taking place in the case of one Chinese college.

### **The panel themes and introductions to the graduate students' short articles**

This compendium reflects the organization of our 2014 April symposium. The symposium consisted of six thematic panels, dealing with various issues around the principal theme of 'global best practices.' The first of the six key themes addressed the question of *Idealizations of the 'Good' in Internationalizing Higher Education: Curriculum, Research, and Service Learning*. In contrast to the neoliberal manifestations of internationalization coming under much critique, the participants of this panel focused on what *is* or *might be* desirable—either as exemplary current initiatives/'best practices' or as alternative potentialities. Accordingly, presenters engaged with what constitutes ideal forms of internationalization in terms of research, curricula, partnerships and service learning in the global South. Two papers from this panel, by Momina Afridi and Ali Khorsandi are presented in this volume. While acknowledging the value of internationalization, Ali Khorsandi Taskoh criticizes the gradual extension of commercial logic and market rationales into the educational and academic initiatives in the Canadian context. For best practice, he suggests that the central goals of internationalization activities should be educating new generations of world-aware students who are globally competitive, academically creative and critical and politically committed to the values of democracy, diversity, and equity. Momina Afridi, on the other hand, proposes that *Globally Networked Learning Environments* (GLNE) can become a global best practice, if managed well, i.e., grounded in equal and mutually inclusive dialogue between scholars, educators, and students across the North–South boundaries. As a dialogical site of critical engagement with existing and new practices, the GLNE can produce practices and models that serve the interests of global justice and equitable growth represented through multiple epistemological frameworks.

The second thematic panel, *Knowledge Production and Publications: Center – Periphery Relations*, addressed important questions as the following: What are the current limits and possibilities of international knowledge production in an uneven world? What are the implications of the dominance of English in the construction and dissemination of research publications? How are more peripheral knowledges produced in non-Western societies interacting (or not) with mainstream knowledge production in the university under imaginaries of modernization? And, how might relations be more reciprocal as in the spirit of internationalism?

Critically engaging the post-colonial thoughts of Alatas, Tabulawa, Santos and Paraskeva, among others, Sardar Anwaruddin presents a provocative concept of *epistemicide* as the swallowing up of non-western epistemologies by western education systems, which leads to colonization of mind, deskilling, and academic dependency. Anwaruddin ends his chapter with proposing an idea of rooted cosmopolitanism, which, as a best practice, he borrows from the Ghanaian scholar Anthony Appiah. As an open and embracing concept, rooted cosmopolitanism denounces dichotomies such as West and East and tradition and modernity but, most importantly, replaces the idea of epistemicide of any kind with dialogical synthesis and syncretism. Olivier Bégin-Caouette takes us into a thrilling journey of global inequalities in academic publication. He suggests that global knowledge production is dominated by the Anglophone countries, English language, and natural sciences. To overcome this troika, Bégin-Caouette suggests how knowledge production and dissemination inequities be remedied, an approach that in itself could be called an alternative best practice, based on concerns for equity, diversity, relevance and rethinking what is a worthwhile knowledge. In the last paper in this section, Clara I. Tascón, invites us to rethink the whole process of knowledge production in international research collaboration. Grounding her paper in the experience of Latin American scholarship, Tascón informs us on the developments in knowledge production alternatives from the continent. She mentions contextualized network analysis (something reminiscent of Afridi's GLNEs) as an approach that is based on dialog, collaboration, relevance, and validation of alternative forms of knowledge.

The third panel, *Aboriginal and International Education: Conjunctures and Disjunctures*, in fact overlapped with the previous theme, while also having unique elements. On the one hand, the 'international' or intercultural may represent a less assimilative and/or 'treaty-blind' inflection than that of the 'multicultural' education. On the other hand, international educational discourses have often privileged elites' mobilities and been blind to historical and ongoing forms of colonialism in their idealizations and practices. Critical perspectives on global citizenship education GCE have begun to bring these overlaps and conflicts to light. This panel examined the (potential) conjunctures and disjunctures of these two discourses/imaginaries/'practices in the world.' Michelle Froman's short piece debases the Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon claims of educational best practices, suggesting that best practices, even though claimed by the West and western-based scholars as their own, may in fact be assumptive and subsuming of ideas from

other sources, such as indigenous cultures. Eurocentrism did not occur in a vacuum, suggests Froman. She presents two of the 49 UNESCO-listed Canadian best practices, both of which are in fact indigenous approaches. Froman ends by detailing one of these best practices, *Generative Curriculum Model*, a bicultural community-based model for building capacity for early childhood care and development.

The fourth thematic panel addressed the question of *Internationalizing Teacher Education*, focussing on how faculties of education are beginning to awaken to the growing number of Canadian and other Anglo-Westerners teaching in international (and first nation) contexts. From private IB international schools to hybrid English/National schools to national schools in developing contexts, the demand for international school teachers has intensified. It asked: how are teacher education programs are responding through curriculum, international practicum, and specialized programming? Presenters in this panel focussed on ‘best practices’ or programing to support teachers’ cosmopolitan capacities in their (prospective) international or transcultural contexts. Regrettably, no paper was submitted from this panel.

Panel five examined themes related to *English Language Pedagogy in Transnational Contexts*. Using English as a medium of communication in teaching and research is seen as one such best practice. The demand for English had made English language teaching an expansive industry across the globe and engendered so-called best practices for teaching English as a foreign language. Native and non-native English teachers as expats and locals are teaching English to students in many educational jurisdictions in Anglo and non-Anglo countries. Across the various kinds of institutes and levels of education there seems to be a notion of ‘best practices’ for English Language teaching, albeit how these largely Western/’progressive’ language pedagogies interact and perform across the diverse contexts of English language classrooms remains complex and in need of greater examination. This panel focussed on conceptions, interpretations and responses to/of ‘best’ English language pedagogies in transcultural (East-West) contexts.

The three papers of this panel are best summarized by Dr. Stephen Bahry,<sup>1</sup> who coordinated the work of this panel and summarized their contributions, as follows:

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The three papers in the compendium on language and education each raise interesting and significant issues related to the field of comparative international and development education and, in particular, the question of *the place of language* in comparative, international and development education. These three papers taken as a whole bring language to the forefront and raise several problematic issues in regard to second language teaching and learning. Dekker's piece on education and development in the Philippines argues that in such a fundamentally multilingual, multicultural context, taken-for-granted notions of monolingual English education as "best practice" are incompatible with quality education, and implies a broader critique of the "best practice" of using dominant languages of global metropolises as primary languages of instruction. Plonski's look at international students studying academic English at a Canadian university takes up the complex interplay of language learning, intercultural learning and individual identity development in adult second language learning and the importance of teachers opening themselves to learning from and about their students as part of providing a space where language learning and personal development can flourish. Kandil shifts the theme to the identity of teachers, namely the frequent identification of teachers as native or non-native English-speaking, another example of a taken-for-granted distinction based on a precritical, atheoretical prejudice. Kandil problematizes defining teachers by what they are not: just imagine if we termed Native English-speaking teachers as ISLLs (Incomplete Second Language Learners) or FBTs (Failed Bilingual Teachers). Rather than Non-native English-speaking Teacher (NEST), Kandil argues for a term that valorizes plurilinguallism and the self-identification of teachers, which raises further questions about the "ownership" of language.

Bahry concludes that,

these three papers constitute an intriguing exploration within Comparative International and Development Education (CIDE) in Canada of the role of first and second languages in quality education and the interconnection of language(s) and identity development, all of which run counter to views of language as a neutral fixed instrument that can simply be taken up or put down at will, and is easily separated from experience. The papers are consonant with Gadamer's view that language is the medium in which human life overwhelmingly takes place. Clearly, taking a hermeneutic view of language and

experience has strong implications for the search for best practices, suggesting that a sensitivity to context, relationship, interaction, personal meanings and identity can point us to good practices and even better practices, but challenging the assumption that universally valid “best practices” can or even should be found.

The last, sixth panel addressed the theme of *Peace and Conflict Education*. It suggested that education, as ‘double edged,’ could promote peace-making, peace building and conflict resolution as well as hate, conflicts, wars, and animosities. From school bullying, to ‘emergency education’ in conflict or disaster zones and classes in refugee camps, locally and internationally, schools and teachers are engulfed in different kinds of conflict and conflict resolution. Why has education, both formal and informal, seemed to have done so little to reduce wars, conflict, and violence? How can education’s peace building potential be more fully realized? What can education do in sites of, and in the aftermath of, conflict? What can we learn from the approaches, achievements, and challenges of international education research? This panel aimed to respond to these questions, issues and themes. The paper by Ahmed Kaderi Salehin takes us into a critical analysis of grade 9-10 Bangladesh and Global Studies textbooks where Salehin explores how the binary approaches to creating heroes and evils in the Social Studies and Humanities textbooks in South Asia contribute to political violence or to its reduction (Lall, 2008). Salehin suggests that pedagogies of cooperation and solidarity, as well as critical analysis of historical narratives, of myths and truths, and “teaching history as a fallible human construct can ...guide young citizens’ democratic decision making about their political engagement”. This may lead to political democratization and subsequently to “cultivating peace-building citizenship.”

Professor Gita Steiner-Khamsi’s afterword, *Crossing the Thin Line between a “Best Practice” and an International Standard*, presents a fascinating extension to the discussions engendered by the articles of the compendium. She unpacks three facades that collectively serve as a cover-up for turning contextually-produced practices into universally applicable best practices: (i) rationality, (ii) precision, and (iii) universality. Building on numerous critical analyses of global neoliberal-induced education reforms and her own research experiences, Steiner-Khamsi demystifies the uses of numbers, statistics, evaluation schemas, and the ‘what went right approach’, which provide legitimacy to the “export of reform packages from one country to another.” Steiner-Khamsi examines two key methodologies used to elevate local

solutions the status of universal applicability: (i) standardization and (ii) comparison. Taking the reader through three methods of comparison, she draws our attention to standardized comparison, which, as a new fashion:

privileges international over local developments, in that globalization is presented as a pervasive external force overwhelming local influences, which somehow renders the nation-state motionless by paralyzing policy actors (p. 86).

Lastly, Steiner-Khamsi questions practices of making education systems comparable and disregarding the unique contextual challenges between the lenders and borrowers, so as to get the ‘best’ education practices travelling and justified by policy makers on both the lending and borrowing sides. To deny that policy transfer has actually occurred or to downplay the differences between the systems, using methods of standardized comparison, are just two of such methods. Exposing the politics and economics of borrowing and lending, Steiner-Khamsi asks: who do international standards and policy transfer empower and who do they disempower? The ultimate lesson that needs to be acknowledged is that:

There is no wholesale policy borrowing and lending. In the same vein, there is no wholesale adoption of international standards. What is adopted, what is not adopted, and how, and why, international standards or “best practices” are locally reinterpreted are topics of great academic interest and professional curiosity (p. 88).

With this lesson, this compendium comprises a humble contribution toward Silova’s call (2014) to critique the prevailing ‘normative’ task of comparative international education and to revive its analytical task of proposing alternative social and education imaginaries to the dominant (neoliberal) ones. We invite our readers to an enjoyable intellectual journey in engaging our graduate students’ contributions upon such a complex and contested terrain as global ‘best practices’ in education.

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## ***THEME 1 - IDEALIZATIONS OF THE ‘GOOD’ IN INTERNATIONALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION: CURRICULUM, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE LEARNING***

### **Globally Networked Learning Environments (GNLES): Exploring their potential as a global ‘best practice’**

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The field of education is witnessing an era where the advent of digital technologies has opened up new spaces and possibilities of learning. While some theorist such as Benkler (2006) proclaim that there is “a battle between traditional, established institutional practices and the new alternative practices enabled by digital network technologies” (cited in Starke-Meyerring 2007, p.3), others emphasize the networks, connections and flows in education that are made possible through using technologies that complement traditional learning and teaching practices. Globally Networked Learning Environments (GNLEs) are part of globalization initiatives that are tied to the development of new technologies. GNLEs “link students to peers, instructors, professionals, experts, and communities from diverse contexts; challenge students to negotiate and build shared learning cultures across diverse boundaries; and provide students with new opportunities for civic engagement in a global context” (Starke-Meyerring, 2007, p.4). In this paper, I demonstrate why GNLEs are important for us to consider in higher education and question their potential as a global ‘best practice’. In addition, I also highlight some key challenges that instructors and institutions face in designing and implementing GNLE programs.

#### **GNLEs, Globalization and Higher Education**

As mentioned above, GNLEs are tied to the phenomena of globalization that is characterized by heightened transnational flows of goods, ideas and finance. The local context is now affected by and intertwined with these transnational flows. With the increase in the use of technology, higher education is also witnessing heightened cross-border collaborations in research, pedagogies and educational activities (Beck, 2012). GNLEs depend on such transnational partnerships that extend across institutional, linguistic, national, and other boundaries (Starke-Meyerring, 2007). Often in the form of joint courses, activities or degree programs, GNLEs create sites where students work with peers in different geopolitical locations

to question and re-think how globalization affects their own learning environments. An example of a GNLE we can draw upon is a ‘global classroom’ created at a Quebec college where students were connected virtually to a classroom in Russia, discussing literature and French linguistics (Begin-Caoutte, Khoo & Afridi, 2015). Relying on the expertise of two or more professors while increasing the number of student participants, GNLEs are to foster cross-boundary knowledge-making and enhance the educational experience of students. As GNLEs constitute a shift from international concerns (those affecting relations between nations) to global concerns that are centered on a global economic and social order, GNLEs can be conceptualized as preparing learners for the complexities of global work and citizenship (Starke-Meyerring, 2007). Hence, GNLEs offer students, across boundaries, the opportunity to develop key intercultural and global competencies that are important for their professional development. In addition to students, faculty members can also benefit from GNLEs in learning and developing new teaching practices and acknowledging the perspectives of partnering faculty and students with whom they interact.

### **Potential of GNLEs as ‘best practice’**

A case can be made for GNLEs having the potential of serving as a global ‘best practice’ in higher education, provided they are designed and implemented well. GNLEs are part of a larger vision that includes the need for developing new knowledge cultures, building shared collaborative learning cultures, developing intercultural understanding and critical literacies, facilitating faculty development for globally networked learning, and reaching out to new learners, citizens, professionals, and communities—in particular to those who have been marginalized and disadvantaged in the current processes of global and technological change (Starke-Meyerring, 2007, p. 5). Learning environments that bring together faculty and students from diverse contexts provide new opportunities for asking critical questions about what knowledge is legitimized, or in Michael Apple’s (2004) words, “where knowledge comes from, whose knowledge it is, what social groups it supports, and so on” (p. 13). In GNLEs students are facilitated to speak and engage with both teachers and students in a different context and through this interaction they get a chance to question their common sense assumptions and ways of thinking, reading, writing and doing. In a GNLE in a Quebec college course, the instructor invited to join, via Skype, an individual from Rwanda who spoke on the role of the Francophonie

in the global context (Begin-Caoutte, Khoo & Afridi, 2015). For both the instructor and his students, the experience was profound and it changed their perception of Africa and their understanding of conflict. The students also found the speaker to be very eloquent in his speech and valued the experiences that he shared with them. Such experiences show that through GNLEs students gain insight into other cultures of knowledge and become aware of different identities and values.

Through building collaborative learning cultures across multiple boundaries- often through digital networks, GNLEs can give both teachers and learners the opportunity to question identity and contemplate the many realities they encounter in the classroom and the world. GNLEs allow students to learn to appreciate the complex identities of individuals, and to negotiate diverse ways of knowing in an effort to ensure that each member can fully participate to build shared ways of learning and knowing (Starke-Meyerring, 2007). Students in GNLEs also have new opportunities to understand and critically examine the ways in which their own identities, ways of knowing, and daily practices are rooted and shaped by the social, cultural, and political conditions of their lived experience (Starke-Meyerring, 2007). In a GNLE course at a Quebec college, the instructor stated that through student's interactions with partner instructors, guest speakers and students, he was able to discover new abilities and competences developed in his students. The instructor argued that GNLEs open a way for students to communicate and receive comments from another cultural context and that students are more receptive to this new way of teaching (Begin-Caoutte, Khoo & Afridi, 2015). With regards to developing intercultural sensitivity, in a GNLE program between a Quebec college and a Spanish institution, the Canadian instructor stated that his students appreciated the ideas of the Spanish students and realized that while they spoke different languages they could still communicate and that all were human (Begin-Caoutte, Khoo & Afridi, 2015). This shows that in a GNLE learning can happen at multiple levels.

### **Faculty professional learning**

In addition to providing learning opportunities to students, GNLEs can also benefit the faculty. In a recent study of GNLES in Quebec (Begin-Caoutte, Khoo & Afridi, 2015), we found that faculty collaboration is a key factor in successful GNLE programs. Findings of their study confirmed that unlike many inter-institutional projects (Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008),

GNLEs are grassroots partnerships owned by instructors who, despite an externally-framed curriculum become both “knowers” and curriculum makers (Begin-Caoutte, Khoo & Afridi, 2015). Therefore, GNLEs have the potential for creating unprecedented opportunities for faculty development across institutional and often national boundaries (Starke-Meyerring & Andrews, 2010). Because GNLEs rest on partnerships for shared learning cultures, they often involve extensive discussions among the partnering faculties of pedagogy, sharing and negotiation of course designs, the rationales underlying those designs, the ways in which pedagogy is shaped by institutional and other local policies and practices, and much more (Starke-Meyerring, 2007). Given that they involve partnerships across institutional and national boundaries, GNLEs enable outreach to new student populations, citizens, professionals, and communities, especially those at the margins.

### **Challenges of GNLEs**

Despite the immense potential of GNLEs in fostering innovative and intercultural pedagogies and understandings, there are some real challenges for faculty and institutions in their effective implementation. Faculty often has to negotiate and face different institutional policies, copyrights and undergo traditional forms of evaluation for GNLEs, which are very different from regular courses. GNLEs also require institutional resources and faculty time. Instructors often note the laborious nature of designing and implementing a GNLE (Begin-Caoutte, Khoo & Afridi, 2015). Another real challenge is the lack of an infrastructure that supports innovation at the institutional level that makes it hard to implement a GNLE program. Partnering institutions and instructors often don’t have access to the same technological resources, which can be a major barrier in holding joint classes virtually. In addition to technology, language can also be a challenge in the interaction that takes place in a GNLE. In some contexts, English may be the second language for students in partner institutions and that might affect the participation of some students.

It is often difficult and time consuming to have sustainable partnerships among institutions and faculty that are important in a GNLE program. Marginson (2004) notes that without visionary partnerships, early efforts at globalizing learning in higher education have failed and this aptly applies to GNLEs. In addition, Marginson highlights the power differences between Northern and Southern institutions, which can be a major obstacle in ensuring equal

participation in a GNLE. Without partnerships rooted in equality and reciprocity, Marginson argues, curricula will remain monocultural and monolingual, lack sensitivity to local contexts and needs, and overlook power asymmetries. In the above –mentioned study by Begin-Caoutte, Khoo, and Afridi (2015), the interviews with Quebec instructors supported the hypothesis that power imbalances may undermine GNLEs. Without partnerships characterized by mutual respect, equal contribution, and cultural sensitivity, faculty will find it difficult to develop a shared instructional culture, which is not only necessary to facilitate learning in a GLNE, but also to model and facilitate ways in which students can learn how to build such a shared learning culture themselves (Starke-Meyerring & Andrews, 2006; 2010). This grassroots nature of GLNEs is important because GLNEs require intensive collaboration, commitment, and trust among partnering faculty to negotiate a shared learning culture and to facilitate the daily work across institutional, national, and other boundaries.

Despite some of the challenges I outline in my brief paper, I still believe that as researchers and educators we can work to better develop, implement and understand GNLE projects. Partnerships that enable and sustain GLNEs require thoughtful mutual engagement, discussion, the building of trust, respectful negotiation of a shared vision, approaches, and practices, as well as a deep understanding of institutional and technological constraints and conditions under which all partners work (Starke-Meyerring, 2007). By paying attention to these factors and trying to see how student learning is impacted by GNLEs, we can in the near future hope to see GNLEs as a best practice in cross-cultural higher education initiatives. As we see more GNLEs programs being launched in different institutions, researchers in international and comparative education need to engage with GNLEs as a practice. As researchers of comparative education we need to understand the vision that is being used to drive internationalization efforts in higher education. We need to study and question GNLEs, so that they do not narrowly focus on preparing students as workers for the global market but rather as global citizens. In sum, for GNLEs to become a global ‘best practice’, they need to be driven by a strong vision of shared learning across boundaries, based on equity and respect for different voices and identities on a global scale.

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## **Internationalizing Canadian Campuses: A Few Insights for “Best Practice”**

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### **Introduction**

Internationalization has been a core element of university initiatives and “a significant feature of the Canadian [higher] education landscape” (Beck, 2012, p. 133). Most higher education institutions (HEIs) in Canada engage in some form of international activity and “internationalization has in many ways become part of the mainstream of universities’ organization and overall strategies” (AUCC<sup>2</sup>, 2007, p. 3). Nearly all Canadian institutions include internationalization as part of their mission statement and strategic planning, and “more than 80% identify it as one of their top five planning priorities” (AUCC, 2014, p. 4). In addition, the Government of Canada has taken a central role to play in fostering internationalization in universities and colleges and has issued Canada’s first-ever strategic recommendations for internationalization of higher education. (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2014).

According to Canada's Global Markets Action Plan, international education is one of the major strategic priorities and ways to grow and develop Canadian business and to foster economic opportunities nationally and globally (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2013). The main objectives of internationalization are recommended to be reached through activities such as attracting the best and brightest international students; doubling the number of international students on campuses; encouraging local students to study outside of Canada; strengthening more engagement with a select number of key education markets; and promoting research and education collaboration between Canadian institutions and abroad. Accordingly Canada is planning to be a leading country in internationalization of higher education and a premier destination for many international students and the world’s leading scholars (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2014; (Khorsandi Taskoh, 2015).

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<sup>2</sup> Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada



## **Background on Current Practices of Internationalization**

Like many institutions in the Anglo-American tradition of academia (de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2008; Maringe et al., 2013), universities in Ontario are largely motivated by the socio-economic incentives of internationalization and revenue generation (Beck, 2012; Coates & Morrison, 2011; Jones, 2009, 2010; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011; McNeil, 2013). Drawing on the official policy documents and administrators' perceptions, although the research-academic objectives and components are theoretically the central rationales driving international initiatives, the university administration cannot ignore the tempting economic benefits of internationalization in practice (Khorsandi Taskoh, 2014). A report from the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade* shows that in 2010, international students contributed over \$8 billion to Canada's economy through tuition, accommodation, and discretionary spending.

The issue is not merely that finances are driving internationalization initiatives in most top-tier universities in Ontario; the criticism primarily is that the market and instrumental-based rationales and incentives are threatening and eroding the intrinsic values of post-secondary education. Internationalization also faces 'policy hypocrisy' in the Ontario context. Internationalization theoretically means all those good initiatives that university administration and policy makers like to talk about, but when it comes to actual implementation, this idealist rhetoric falls by the wayside. In other words, internationalization is a 'policy hypocrisy' because it is rhetorically associated with academic rationales and activities such as international research, partnership and collaboration, recruitment of top talented students, mobility programs, and educational quality and excellence, but, in practice, the dominant tendency is mostly related towards commercial-financial and visibility-profile rationales (Khorsandi Taskoh, 2014).

Such 'policy hypocrisy' regarding internationalization appears to be worrisome for the academic community. Faculty members are worried and skeptical because they believe that the institutions have been approaching postsecondary education with a business mindset, rather than from the perspective of social justice- educational rationales of schooling. It is also worrisome because internationalization is becoming more corporate and less enlightened and academic. The problem is that the strategic plans of internationalization commonly are public relations documents that bear little correspondence with reality 'on the ground'. All these indicate the gradual extension of commercial logic and market rationales (historically absent from the traditional university policies in Canadian context) into the educational and academic initiatives.

## **Toward Best Practice**

I propose three interconnected, research-based recommendations and insights for the best practice of internationalization of higher education in Ontario:

### **A) Commitment to Praxis**

According to official policy documents like strategic and academic plans, what is rhetorically acknowledged as internationalization are ideological slogans, ideal components and academic declarations. In contrast, what is literally (in practice) recognized as internationalization are some pragmatic components with different realistic objectives. The disconnect between what internationalization theoretically means and what is practically required is large. This disconnect highlights something that I call the ‘policy hypocrisy’ of internationalization of higher education in the Ontario context. Policy hypocrisy is where the official version and approach of internationalization seems like an excellent policy, but in practice the concentration of administrators is about rationales such as recruiting international students from privileged countries; securing national profile and building international branding and reputation, selling the university credentials, competition, and corporatization, among others. Ontario universities need an approach that would address the gap between the notions of internationalization in theory (rhetorically) and its perception and uses in practice (literally). In other words, the administrators of HEIs in Ontario need to move from policy (text and rhetoric) to praxis. They need to move toward all those good things that are written in policy texts such as diversity, mobility, exchange opportunities, educational and intellectual values, global awareness and international impact, among others. Universities need to show more commitment to serving collaboration, the public good, persuasive inclusiveness and scholarly excellence. Such a commitment to praxis can largely decrease the present misconceptions and tensions between the administrators’ understanding of internationalization and the expectations and observations of faculty regarding the actual practice of international activities in on-and off-campus.

### **B) Community Engagement**

Internationalization initiatives in Ontario universities favor some voices and disadvantage others. While the current policies and programs mostly favour voices of administration, followed by those of the government’s, the main issue from my perspective is how all faculty and students’ voices could be considered and integrated into the strategic plans of internationalization. It is self-evident that the policy’s success or failure in an academic institution depends on the nature

and quality of power distribution, influence and voices of stakeholders. In a democratic context, policy is established based on the majority and minority voices, and the expectations of policy makers. If faculty members and students as first-hand stakeholders, for example, feel disgruntled by what is happening within the university and in the community as a whole, then they have an intellectual force and scholarly duty to act differently to ensure their philosophy and academic missions and goals are addressed. The policy recommendation here is that the main stakeholders' voices should be at the heart of policymaking for internationalization. This point addresses the fundamental influence and notion of consultation, collective participation, and power to be heard in policy creation. Instead of top-down and non-democratic procedures, universities in Ontario need to move toward a bottom-up, democratic-based, and evidence-based policy making process in order to cover different voices.

### **C) Balance Between Two Polar Sides**

Commercialization is the dominant trend (if not the only trend) influencing and governing internationalization in HEIs in Ontario. From this perspective, internationalization is evaluated as an objective in itself. With due attention to the necessity of making up for the declining public funding at public universities in Ontario, the policy recommendation is that there is a need to maintain balance in the global market of internationalization and to protect democratic public and academic values and principles of higher education. In addition, under the condition of aggressive competition for international students, there are two factors that may make Ontario universities much less attractive than they once were and, consequently, decrease international student enrollment. These are: 'imbalanced procedures' such as increasing tuition rates, grant discriminatory policies, and 'dual valuation' such as double standard regarding tuition fees for international and local students, and partnership with institutions in a few economic-booming countries. If the central goal of institutions in Ontario is to increase the population of the best and brightest international students, making a policy of equivalence tuition for local and international students is a first and most important step. In other words, what is actually influential in increasing the number of international students on campus is to decrease international students' tuition fees. Therefore, internationalization in HEIs in Ontario requires persuasive and effective equality and dynamic balance between different policies and procedures discussed above. It is evident that striking the equality and dynamic balance between two polar sides of internationalization in the context of neoliberal restructuring of higher education is an

administrative challenge, but it is a one that the administrators and policy makers have to do extensively and transparently. Therefore, it is important that the institutions set up a bridge between aspects of market rationales and educational-academic rationales in order to reach all their goals and objectives of international activities on and off campus.



Figure 1: Components of best practice

### **Conclusion**

Institutions in Ontario need to re-imagine their enthusiasm for international initiatives because the over-enthusiasm for commercial objectives and rationales can jeopardize the academic and educational objectives of the university. Administration needs an imaginary that recognizes the university as an academic-socio-cultural enterprise. As an educationalist, I believe that the central goals of internationalization activities should be educating new generations of world-aware students who are globally competitive, academically creative and critical and politically committed to the values of democracy, diversity, and equity.

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## **THEME 2 - KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND PUBLICATIONS: CENTER – PERIPHERY RELATIONS**

### **From Epistemicide to Cosmopolitan Openness: Re-Shaping Discourses of “Best-Practices”**

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The novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) tells a story about her early writing experiences. She started to write when she was about seven. All her characters were white and blue-eyed; they played in the snow, ate apples, and often talked about weather. She created these characters although she lived in Nigeria and had never been outside the country. She did not talk about the weather and always ate mangoes and not apples. Through her anecdotes, Adichie (2009) demonstrates “how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story” (para. 4). Because all the storybooks she read had foreign characters, she was convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreign characters. In this way, Adichie’s early readings developed in her a notion of narrative as a single story. This kind of narrative denies the existence of other possible stories. Such denial is an example of the colonization of human mind. The danger of the single-story-narrative is that it creates stereotypes, which are not only untrue, but also incomplete. These stereotypes “make one story become the only story” (para. 24).

Such single-story narratives have dominated the creation and dissemination of academic knowledge. For instance, the study of social sciences formed itself on the ethnocentric assumption that modernity created itself within the North Atlantic region—independent of the rest of the world, and that there was only one form of modernity, which was the hallmark of Europe. Various analytical models constructed on the basis of this assumption were transported to other parts of the world. A 1996 report by an international panel, chaired by Immanuel Wallerstein, stated that the history of social sciences “was immaculately Eurocentric, and the viewpoint from which it discussed current problems was North American. Ideas from the rest of the world were treated as footnotes to ‘the heritage’ of Comte, Weber, Marx, Smith, Ranke, and friends” (cited in Connell, 2007, p. x).

The single story of European/Western modernity often results in what some scholars describe as academic dependency. Among others, Alatas (2010) defines academic dependency as

a condition in which the knowledge production of a scholarly community is influenced and conditioned by the knowledge of other scholarly communities to which the former is subjected. Taking a curricular approach, Alatas (2010) shows not only absence of non-European thinkers in social science textbooks in Asia, but also a subject-object dichotomy therein. In most textbooks, Europeans are presented as the “knowing subjects” who do the thinking, theorizing, and writing. If non-Europeans appear at all, they are presented as the objects of the European theorist’s study. Uncritical adoption of European knowledge traditions creates and sustains academic dependency, which according to Alatas (2006) plagues the Asian social sciences. He argues that most theories and concepts that dominate the Asian social sciences “originated from a Greco-Roman, Latin-Christian and European tradition” (p. 15). This fact in itself is not a problem, but it becomes problematic as “the concepts are passed off as universal when in fact they derive their characteristics from a particular cultural tradition” (p. 15). Academic dependency may open doors for what scholars such as Bennett (2007) and Santos (2014) describe as epistemicide, i.e., the dominance of particular epistemological traditions that renders “other” knowledges invisible or swallowed-up.

With the increasing popularity of the trope “knowledge society,” we have witnessed a proliferation of “best practices” in all fields of academic activities. Some of these practices are enjoying global reputation and acceptance. Critics argue that having originated in a particular socio-cultural context, a “best” practice cannot address problems of global scale. Others believe that the spread of “best” practices is nothing but a Western conceit. For example, Richard Tabulawa (2003) shows that learner-centred pedagogy is an ideological tool to produce individuals whose worldviews would be compatible with neoliberal democracy and free-market economic systems. He argues that “although the efficacy of the pedagogy is often couched in cognitive/educational terms, in essence, its efficacy lies in its political and ideological nature” (p. 7). Additionally, the principles of learner-centred pedagogy often undermine learning traditions in societies where respect for teachers and elders is an enabling factor in students’ meaningful education. Thus, learner-centred pedagogy, which has been established as a “best” practice in most parts of the world, is implicated in the processes and prospects of epistemicide.



## **Curriculum Studies: A case in point**

Many curriculum scholars argue that Western English-speaking scholars control the projects of knowledge production and dissemination in the field of curriculum studies. Therefore, they argue for the creation of transnational spaces where scholars from all over the world can trust each other and contribute to intercultural and transnational knowledge projects. For example, Paraskeva (2011) proposes an itinerant curriculum theory to fight epistemicide committed by the West. He argues that deterritorialization of the field is necessary to achieve socially just curricula because the knowledge of the Western male has dominated the field. He calls for freeing curriculum studies from Western epistemological boundaries.

In my view, Paraskeva takes a dualistic approach to his itinerant curriculum theory, portraying the West as the oppressor and the non-West as the oppressed. Although I support his call for freeing the field from Western epistemological boundaries, I find his binary logic problematic. Such binarism runs counter to the vision of a truly egalitarian, global knowledge community. As we know from post-colonial scholarship, “the repressive structures of imperial power themselves operate rhizomically rather than monolithically” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 207). Since power does not always operate in a simple vertical way, it is problematic to create essentialist political and cultural categories given that they constantly diffuse and intersect within the rhizomic networks of imperial and cognitive violence.

Elsewhere I have presented a detailed critique of Paraskeva’s proposal (Anwaruddin, 2013). In short, Paraskeva argues that curriculum inquiry should move beyond the Western epistemic boundaries and “stay in a kind of permanent exile” (p. 177). However, I contend that the Western/non-Western binary is not helpful and that curriculum inquiry needs to be vigilant against advancing *any* oppressive boundaries. We should be mindful “of the dangers of simply reversing the categories of oppressed and oppressor” and “of the dangers of creating a new indigenous elite who would act merely as neo-colonial puppets” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 78), or as internal colonizers. Proposals such as Paraskeva’s aim to displace Eurocentric knowledge practices through oppositional epistemologies and counter-hegemonic work. Those who support such oppositional work “do battle, on their own terms as individuals, as Third World institutions, or as part of coalitions without frontiers” (Odora Hoppers, 2000, p. 290). However, “battles” may not be helpful because we have seen that “fighting” for “peace” is not

only oxymoronic, but also ineffective. Furthermore, a clear demarcation of oppressor and oppressed does not seem to work in educational affairs. For example, when a policy is “imposed” from outside, it is not usually implemented in a way envisioned by the (hegemonic) promoter/policymaker. As anthropologists of education have shown, “teachers and other local actors sometimes resist and always transform the official models they are handed” (Anderson-Levitt, 2003, p. 4). They adapt official methods and models in order to respond to their local needs.

### **Towards Cosmopolitan Openness**

Rather than accepting the binarism of oppressor/oppressed, I propose that we turn towards cosmopolitanism in order to disrupt any single-story narrative that promotes epistemicide. Cosmopolitanism, which originated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, “posits that our political and moral existence should be played out on a world stage and that each of us belongs to a community of human beings that transcends the particularities of local affiliation” (Kymlicka & Walker, 2012, p. 1). My proposal does not, by any means, imply a naive acceptance of domination, but rather it advocates a radical resistance, re-defined by the principles of love and humility. This redefinition is strongly opposed to an Enlightenment-style cosmopolitanism that was often used as the basis of European colonialism to suppress cultural, linguistic, and epistemic diversity (Kymlicka & Walker, 2012).

Today there are several strands of cosmopolitanism (see, e.g., Hansen, 2010). I recommend that we draw insights from a relatively recent trend known as *rooted cosmopolitanism*, popularized by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1997, 2006). While most strands of cosmopolitanism maintain that we should transcend local attachments, rooted cosmopolitanism suggests that we carry our roots throughout our journeys elsewhere. Departing from the more traditional views of cosmopolitanism, Appiah (1997) claims that a cosmopolitan can, and perhaps should, also be a patriot. A cosmopolitan patriot is the one who is “attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people” (Appiah, 1997, p. 618). Therefore, rather than reversing dualistic categories of oppressor and oppressed, we can embrace the view of rooted cosmopolitanism and ask ourselves to be attached to home while remaining open to the world. This view of cosmopolitanism teaches us that oppressive epistemologies are always

oppressive, regardless of where they come from—home or abroad. Thus, we can refrain from a game of blaming all that is foreign and glorifying all that is home-grown. It is my hope that rooted cosmopolitanism as a conceptual framework will prove helpful for us to seek truths through dialogues with self and others. As scholars such as Bakhtin (1984) have shown, dialogues nourish a plurality of contending social voices, without forcing us into a monologic truth. In true dialogues, there is always more than a single story. In this sense, rooted cosmopolitanism is inherently dialogical because a cosmopolitan takes “an interest in the practices and beliefs” of others (Appiah, 2006, p. xv), and recognizes that “human beings are different and that we can learn from each other’s differences” (p. 4). Therefore, a cosmopolitan perspective may foster dialogues between “home” and “abroad,” and enable us to avoid simplistic identity politics and to take a stand against all kinds of epistemicide occurring under the guise of “best practices.”

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## **Three Peripheries in the Global Quest for Prestige in Higher Education**

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### **Introduction**

Since their inception, universities have been global institutions. In the Middle Age, Latin was the lingua franca and students were traveling across Europe to study law in Bologna, theology in Paris and philosophy in Oxford (Neave, 2001). Knowledge exchanges even spread out to the Muslim world – such as Damascus or Baghdad – where Italian, Spanish and French students studied dialectics and sciences in madrasas or masjids (Makdisi, 1981). If higher education systems had been “nationalized” with the development of nation-states, the recent geospatial process of globalization has heightened the global quest for academic prestige. This competition appears to be regulated by metrics such as the impact factor, h-index and citation counts (Kumar, 2009). Moreover, since 2003, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) ranks universities based on the number of highly cited researchers, staff who won Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, papers published in *Nature* or *Science* and papers indexed in Science Citation and Social Science Citation indexes.

University rankings have become private instruments of governance (Marginson, 2006) and, like credit rating agencies, they give value to specific outputs and define the “best practices” in higher education. While metrics can help scholars to understand the geopolitical transformations in knowledge production, presenting these metrics as ideals encourages a transnational isomorphism (Marginson & van der Wende, 2009) that might adversely affect the pursuit of science. While diversity could enhance science’s innovativeness, robustness and relevance (Page, 2007; Sommers & Babbitt, 2010), a convergence in methods, fields of study, language and means of communication could prevent parts of the reality from being studied, as well as parts of the world from benefiting or contributing to knowledge production. The core-periphery dynamic in science is not a new phenomenon and used to be structured by nationality, colonial past, scientific heritage and infrastructure (Zelnio, 2012). Yet metrics create new peripheries based on scientific disciplines, language and economic resources.

### **Academic tribes in turmoil**

Based on an ethnography of academic disciplines, Becher and Trowler (2001) define an academic tribe as a coherent and informally governed group that takes place within disciplinary boundaries. The first core-periphery issue concerns inequities between these tribes: metrics favour natural sciences, thus leading to the “scientification” of social sciences and humanities - SSH (Stratilatis, 2014). There are now over seven million researchers around the world who publish more than 1.58 billion articles in 100,000 scientific journals (Kumar, 2009; Royal Society, 2011). Reuter's Web of Science and Elsevier's Scopus are the two most popular subscription-based bibliographic databases collecting publication and citation data for respectively 9,000 and 18,000 journals. Yet, most of the citations, journals and patents indexed regard bio-and medical sciences research, and the databases appear much less reliable for SSH (Hazelkorn, 2013). Moreover, while there were 25,400 journals in science, technology and medicine in 2009 (Fraser & Dunstan, 2010), the SJTU only counts publications in *Nature* or *Science*. Similarly, it counts the number of Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals; prizes that ignore SSH. Finally, books remain an important mean of communication in SSH, and if Reuters has a Book Citation Index, it is not taken into account by the rankings (Stratilatis, 2014). While “scientification” might reinforce SSH, it also suppresses their peculiarities, delegitimizes them for governments' funding and conditions their researchers' behavior.

### **At the margins of the lingua franca**

In 1910, German, French and English had an equal share of scientific publications (Ammon & McConnell, 2002). Today, 79% of the journals in Scopus are in English, 90% of the articles indexed by the Institute for Scientific Information (acquired by Thomson Reuters) are in English, and 19 of the top-20 universities in the SJTU are either from the US or UK (Hamel, 2007; Ordorika & Lloyd, 2013). Since the work not taken into account by these metrics is “invisible”, a non-intended vicious circle takes place: native Anglophones have easier access to top journals (Altbach, 2012), non-Anglophones publish in English to be cited (Olesen & von Ins, 2010) and non-Anglophone institutions encourage their staff and students to work in English (Buhler, 2004). Non-Anglophone journals therefore receive fewer ground-breaking articles, obtain a lower impact factor and attract even fewer ground-breaking articles.

English as a lingua franca is not an issue *per se*. On the one hand, it may facilitate international collaborations, increase research impacts and allow more scholars to pursuit science

(Royal Society, 2011). On the other hand, in addition to the devaluation of various languages as means of scientific communication, the hegemony of English slows the process of science (since promising scholars might remain at the margin) and limit the access of practitioners to knowledge. This disjunction undermines the impact of research (especially in SSH) and especially universities' service mission, i.e. to provide a bridge between higher knowledge and societal needs through technology transfer, interactions with external stakeholders (e.g. enterprises, politics and school systems) and engagement with the general public (Predazzi, 2012).

### **The cost of scientific community membership**

The influence of publishers increased in the 1970s (Pignard, 2000) and, today, Elsevier, Thomson Reuters, Wolters Kluwer and Springer represent 50% of the world market, for a value of \$20 billion (Couperin, 2013). In terms of publications, Springer, Elsevier, Wiley and Taylor & Francis (owner of Routledge) comprise around 30% of the world's total scholarly peer-reviewed journals (Van Noorden, 2015). They also index most journals. Articles published outside their control might not be indexed and therefore not be found in data bases. In this oligopolistic market, subscription prices rise by 5% per year; subscription to one journal like the *Chemical Physics Letters* costing more than \$15,000 per year (Bosch & Henderson, 2013). In North America, university library budgets increased by four times the inflation, yet it is far exceeded by the 400% increase in subscription price since 1986. For this reason, the Université de Montréal (2014) resigned its subscription to John Wiley & Sons Journals, thus losing 29% of the articles it had. Since governments in the OECD (2014) already finance more than 80% of the research conducted in universities, is it fair to ask citizens to pay again for studies they already financed? Developing countries are even more marginalized since their researchers do not have access to up-to-date studies, have difficulties in building credible literature reviews and are hardly accepted in prestigious journals (Altbach, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

The quest for prestige is inherent to higher education, yet some competitors are unduly disadvantaged. Governments, research councils, publishers and scientists must, therefore, take action to bridge the gap between the cores and the peripheries and encourage a “knowledge for

all” society. Researchers can take advantage of their position as principal agent in knowledge production to act as a bridge between fields, languages and regions. By translating their work as well as searching and citing articles in other languages and disciplines, they can improve the legitimacy and the impact of these “peripheries.” Scientific communities could also work in creating parallel databases that take into account work in other languages than English. Scientists can already benefit from databases such as PERIODICA, whose 71% of the publications are in Spanish, 18% in Portuguese and 11% in English (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2013). Research funding agencies could force researchers to make publicly-funded research publicly-available through, for example, Open Access journals. Governments also have the financial and legal means to negotiate open access clauses with publishers in which publications would be made freely available to anyone after a few years. Finally, as Guédon (1995) wrote, the public money already invested in libraries around the world would be enough to support all journals (in electronic format) so the world could access scientific knowledge for free.

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## **Rethinking how to analyze knowledge production in international research collaboration**

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Usually, co-publications are taken as the main indicator of knowledge production in international research collaboration (IRC). Accordingly, many scholars focus on citations and co-publication outputs to study this research initiative (Katz & Martin, 1997; UNESCO, 2005). In contrast, what I will address in this short presentation are *the taken-for-granted processes and practices* of knowledge production involved in IRCs, which have been insufficiently studied. I argue that the production of knowledge in IRC comprises the process of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation in a specific context. Thus, to better understand these processes and practices requires knowledge of the context and an open mind to be able to acknowledge other perspectives and ways of knowing. Studies on processes and practices of knowledge production have been mostly analyzed as a phenomenon of knowledge transfer from one site, one country, to another. On the contrary, I will argue that there is more to be seized and analyzed behind the scenes. Knowledge production in IRC then deserves a more comprehensive discussion.

According to Katz and Martin (1997), “research collaboration could be defined as the working together of researchers to achieve the common goal of producing new scientific knowledge” (p. 7). However, transnational relations embedded in fields of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1972) bring tensions and dilemmas in IRCs due to the implementation of a kind of research that do not respond to the immediate contextual needs, or to the imposed scientific models that do not suit the local realities. The one-way movement of ideas, policies and practices as knowledge transferred through IRCs has been criticized. This criticism calls into question the idea of knowledge produced in developed countries being transferred to the less developed ones, which means, learning from the “best practices” (Beech, 2009, p. 343) of the Western model. Thus, the best practices in these uneven relations are idealized as models created in the “centres” (Altbach, 2007, p.112), universities in the Western countries, to be reproduced and replicated in the “peripheries” (p. 112), universities of the non-Western countries, with little attention to context. Yet, scholars from developing and emerging countries do not fit well with this fashioned approach since there are multiple factors that determine their practices of knowledge production, especially in IRCs. Moreover, the idea of centers, entwined with capital, has been assimilated as centers of knowledge in the hegemonic discourse of the “knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup>

century” (Altbach, 2007, p. 113). Knowledge becomes capital for countries’ growth. Thus, centers of knowledge hold the prestige and power to decide what can be published, what research can be funded, and what policies rule knowledge production internationally. Consequently, this perspective of centers of knowledge underpins which knowledge is valued and which knowledge is not (Andreotti, 2010; Andreotti & Souza, 2008). The idea of center and periphery carries with it the binary oppositions or dichotomies of the “West and the Rest” (Hall, 1996, p. 249) such as Western/non-Western, North/South, as well as First World/Third World to the discussion of knowledge production.

Hall (1996) denies the notion of totality and binary of Western and non-Western. Totality is understood as the existence of only one way of thought that severs to trace all kinds of realities and, binary defines that there is no other way or approach rather than the Western system of thought. He points out that this “system of knowledge and representation” (p. 254), as part of the colonial narrative, blurs and simplifies a reality that claims for new discursive positionalities. And he emphasizes, that the idea of the binary of Western and non-Western perpetuates and reproduces relations of power/knowledge embedded in a single, one way, and universalistic logic. On the contrary, practices of knowledge production worldwide call for re-conceptualizations and the emergence of epistemological shifts (Andreotti, 2010) that embrace contextual and multiple logics. These logics follow the complexities of different flows of knowledge, policies, and practices that become part of processes of knowledge construction in relational contexts. Likewise, Escobar (2010), as part of *The Latin America modernity/coloniality research program* stresses the need for a new intervention in

the modern sciences in order to craft another space for the production of knowledge –another way of thinking, *un paradigma otro*, [which embraces] the very possibility of talking about ‘words and knowledges otherwise’...[where] an-other thought, an-other knowledge ...are indeed possible” (as cited in Mignolo & Escobar, p. 24)

It is worth noting that processes and practices of scholarly knowledge within countries in Latin America, part of the so-called periphery, have been creating their own path. Knowledge networks in this region comprise an important source of innovative thought, particularly in social sciences and humanities, supporting and responding to contextual realities. For instance, scholars in Colombia have a very clear understanding of the potentiality of sharing knowledge and doing collaborative research internationally with scholars across the world. They are interested in being

engaged in IRCs not because they do not know how to create new knowledge. They think that IRC can enrich their own perspective and expertise, and that they have much to offer to other scholars across the world as well. Indeed, an observation of one of the participants of my doctoral research elucidates her position on this matter: “It is important to share academically solutions, or knowledge, or bibliography” (Personal communication, translated from Spanish, November 12, 2014). Of course one can identify important challenges and limitations due to financial issues and language barriers, which determine significant gaps across countries. Knowledge produced and published in Spanish or Portuguese could be completely unknown to scholars who are not familiar with Latin American cultures and languages.

The opportunity to re-think knowledge production from other emergent epistemologies that refuse to go along with the existent colonial universalism of the Western model (Andreotti, 2010) creates new windows to better understand the processes and practices of IRC in different academic contexts. Moreover, it implies an understanding of what Bhabha (1994) calls the notion of “hybridity” (p.115). According to Bhabha, hybridity implies the idea of cultural difference as a result of the transformative processes that overcome the colonial settlement. Bhabha unveils the coexistence of different cultures and forms of thought that become part of modernity. He posits that “[d]eprived of their full presence, the knowledges of cultural authority [Western knowledges] may be articulated with forms of 'native' knowledges or faced with those discriminated subjects that they must rule but can no longer represent” (p. 115). In other words, the binary perspective of Western and non-Western can no longer become the lens to illuminate analyses of knowledge production in IRC. From this standpoint, the social articulation of difference in a given context creates a more challenging but mutual and reciprocal forms of intercultural interactions (Bhabha, 1994). To acknowledge these intercultural interactions and academic complementariness in a given context helps to better understand how knowledge is produced in IRC.

To this extent, the idea of best practices commonly understood as knowledge transfer entails a linear and one-way form of knowledge, from one model, and from one exclusive language. Alternatively, the idea of sharing and creating knowledge together, embraces more than two ways or multiple flows of knowledge in IRCs, where different voices and different languages participate. It brings about the need for incorporating a different approach to study the processes and practices of knowledge production in IRC, as well as producing new knowledge in

more than one language. Although I will not elaborate on this matter in this piece of paper, I would like to mention that *a contextualized network analysis* across countries and regions allows identifying the complexities of knowledge production in IRC. A contextualized network analysis delineates multiple interconnections among researchers that surpass the institutional and national order. Within these interconnections different flows of knowledge are assembled in numerous directions configuring networks of global/local dimensions. These research networks become a propitious space for knowledge sharing, discussions, and creation of new knowledge. Looking at the processes and practices of IRC through network analysis, we have the opportunity to observe how research is developed and performed in different contexts worldwide, what kind of procedures are used, how foreign designs are “adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated [or even] ignored” (Mignolo, as cited in Montaña, Dussel, Jáuregui, 2008, p. 18) in knowledge making. This approach of network analysis allows identifying global and local knowledge flows, policy flows, and actors’ positionalities in the processes and practices of knowledge production.

In sum, it is important to ask whether IRC becomes a process where research practices are concerted on researcher’s relations and the knowledge production is a process where scholars are involved in knowledge creation bringing their own backgrounds and expertise. Finally, it is key to understand how knowledge is produced through IRCs with foreign and local contributions and within historical, political, economic, social, and cultural conditions that shape the way in which knowledge is constructed in our interconnected world.

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### ***THEME 3 - ABORIGINAL AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: CONJUNCTURES AND DISJUNCTURES***

#### **Global Best Practices? Aboriginal and International Education: Conjunctions and Disjunctions**

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I begin by briefly locating myself so that I honour all my relations, create some transparency of who I am and where I stand (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), but demonstrate how an Indigenous approach is valued within the academy (Dei, 2000) by simply sharing (briefly) who I am.

I am a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) woman of the turtle clan and belong to Six Nations of the Grand River territory. I grew up primarily in Toronto, in a poor, single-parent family with my two sisters and mother, who is a residential school survivor. I dropped out of high school, but am now a final year graduate student in education, and a proud single mother to three boys.

In this paper, I am briefly highlighting the emergence of best practices in an Aboriginal and international education context. I use the word 'Aboriginal', 'Indigenous', or First Nations interchangeably to mean the original peoples of a place, but here in particular reference to the original peoples of the Americas with a focus on Canada.

#### **Making Room for Difference, 'Other', and Best Practices**

In the growing of Aboriginal education and the subsequent 'blooming' of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as a quintessential hybrid of International Education (IE), there has been a realization that Eurocentrism is not universal nor solely constructed from "pure" European thought, belief and lore, but rather is assumptive on many fronts (Battiste, 1998; Said, 2004). One merely has to look at all the 'inventions', 'contributions' or practices that Aboriginal, Native American or Indigenous people of the Americas utilized within their societies that have been taken up by 'Western' society that still persist in modernity today (Turner & Simpson, 2008). Such examples include democracy, suspension bridges, dams, chewing gum, row planting, electroplating, rubber and chocolate to name a few. This means 'Western culture' was not developed in a Eurocentric vacuum devoid of the cultural influences of those who were alongside either voluntarily or by force.



By being co-creators of our individual *and* collective cultures in shared spaces, Indigenous people and settlers are beginning to more readily take up a common citizenship identity via the birth of best practices. The term “best practices” that is used within this article and the scope of Aboriginal education means the *doing, following or performing of something that has shown to work in the real world* informed by an Aboriginal worldview and Indigenous Knowledge in relation to place, time, space and creation(s). By *practicing a more appropriate approach* to education, development and sustainability *with* Aboriginal people instead of ‘without’, ‘for’ or ‘on’ Aboriginal people demonstrates the Indigenous truly matters (Ball, 2004), but it is through the enacting of that change through self and in others that transformation occurs (Tarc, 2011). It is here, at the intersection of GCE and Aboriginal and international education that global best practices have come to the global stage to negotiate and find solutions to issues in a more pragmatic and locally informed manner.

Undeniably, many advocates of post-colonial and post-modern thought traditions cannot help but to wade into the waters of IK. Various kinds of development and program initiatives, with education systems still in its infancy, have taken a *vis-à-vis* best practices approach grounded in Indigenous Knowledge (IK). IK in these contexts works to listen and incorporate knowledge gained and practiced by Indigenous peoples in a particular place or situation. As such, there has been an awakening that rich knowledge is steeped within cultural and environmental practices of local people and therefore must be included in a project if it is to be successful. This does not assert this process is perfect or without criticism, as proclaiming to utilize IK may be viewed as one of the “cogs that fuel capitalism” in an invisible way (Tarc, 2011), but in this respect and perhaps through ‘development’ blunders, global organizations have taken a strong lead on IK. This can best be exemplified by a 2002 global best practices and IK publication from Nuffic, The Hague, The Netherlands, and UNESCO/MOST, which although Eurocentric, launch standards for valuing IK, characterize “inclusive processes that assert that Indigenous peoples’ voices and visions have been heard” (Battiste & Henderson, 2009).

Educational best practice within places can best be defined as a process used to facilitate “success” and increase academic achievement, however, there is not “*a* best practice” because BP’s are highly contextual (Tarc, 2013, p. 110). BP’s are not formulaic processes, but rather created and informed by individual communities. According to UNESCO (2014) BP’s are to be

used as a “template” (ibid.) to overlay local IK for community-specific purposes such as education, development and cultural endeavors and should be freely shared for communities, people and organizations to appropriately re-contextualize or rework according to their needs or goals. What has been most striking about the compilation of ‘best practices’ in and on IK from the UNESCO/MOST and NUFFIC joint papers and database (2002, 2014) was the gathering of information that was specifically important to the Indigenous community it involved. In this respect, *documentation* plays a key and central role for trumpeting ‘best practices’.

In co-operation with one another, both UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformation programme (aka “MOST”) in partnership with NUFFIC’s IK/Unit, released a database of best practices on IK in 1999, which initially had 27 BP’s and then added another 22 BP’s from 2001-2002 totaling 49 BP’s. UNESCO has a fairly comprehensive global list of BP’s organized by country, themes, and supporting organizations; however, as for the “international education” they are tied to and rationalized by is development and environmental sustainability, which blossoms from IK contextualized within specific communities or types of development. In these respects, UNESCO has modeled how to co-operatively work with Indigenous communities for a common goal. These best practices have been further bolstered because of the success attributed and reaped by all the stakeholders involved.

UNESCO has listed two BP’s from Canada for two very different applications. BP-II.20 and BP-11.21 are the two Canadian BP’s. BP-11.20 is: The Generative Curriculum Model: A bicultural, community-based approach to building capacity for Early Childhood Care and Development in indigenous communities in Canada (UNESCO/NUFFIC, 2001 & 2002), This model was demonstrably discussed in Ball’s (2004) article on the application of the “generative curriculum model” within a First Nations community in Canada, that found teaching and learning alongside community elders was integral to IK (p. 454). Student “success” was more appropriately aggregated from qualitative data gathering of how students felt (positive) about participating, and the importance of being heard through dialogue (p. 474).

BP-11.21 is based on the natural world or Aboriginal cultural relationship with the environment entitled “Voices from the Bay: Documenting and Communicating Indigenous Ecological Knowledge from the Hudson Bay Bioregion” (UNESCO/MOST & NUFFIC, 2001 & 2002). The Voices from the Bay IK Best Practice involves eleven themes ranging from curriculum development, cultural identity, to ecology and environment, which include 250 –

2,500 people in coastal and island communities comprised of two First Peoples' Nations of Inuit and Cree in the Hudson and James Bays, Hudson Strait and the Foxe Basin (UNESCO/MOST & NUFFIC, 2001 & 2002). In a unique coalescence of various public or private organizations / groups, information was gathered as an initiative to preserve local ecological and IK knowledge for environmental sustainability. The communities and participants all enjoyed being involved in the gathering of information because it was done by *interaction* with the community, rather than interviews. BP-11.21 is a very important example of ecological and IK knowledge gathering as the Bays have been considered the “black hole of Canada”, because it has been the locale that the least amount of appropriate and applicable information was known (UNESCO/MOST & NUFFIC, BP-11.21, 2014).

It is at the national-local level within Canada that Aboriginal Education best practices are showcased by the “K-12 Indspire Institute”, which is a free, diverse and inclusive participatory on-line website archiving of submitted BP's - referred to as “successful practices”, live dialogue, webcasts and interactive programs (see: [indspire.ca](http://indspire.ca)). Other national-local BP's are the inclusion of treaties within education history curricula. Examples are Alberta's inclusion of a mandatory treaty education for all students, and Tupper and Cappello's (2008) ‘treaty kit’ that resulted from research into student knowledge of treaties and subsequent Canadian citizenship. Being cognizant of resources, as well as specific socio-economic and political barriers (SME, 2009) creates a true sense of “knowing how it is...to activate the attention to detail as a way of disrupting the way Canadians hear and respond to stories of First Nations-Canadian relations”, but also the historical and contemporary versions of the Indigenous that is carried (Dion, 2009). Primary consideration for BP's in education must include: the history of treaties as (perhaps presented in a 1995 chapter by Henderson), socio-economic and political barriers (SME, 2009), be culturally relevant, empower students to experience academic success, develop or maintain cultural competence, and raise, instill or discuss critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Tapping into “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1992) within family structures can assist schools and organizations to not only draw upon active voices, but perhaps assert to interrupt who speaks and does not speak, in what Low (2011) terms as the “glocal”.

Over the past decade, it is increasingly evident in organizations and some places of learning that Indigeneity is being more appropriately included. It is by igniting our unique ways of knowing within power structures that should represent us, that we will begin to blossom and

grow valid ways to know and understand one another. The unique challenge is finally before organizations, learning institutions and settler locales to respect and get more acquainted with various Indigenous knowledge theories or beliefs from their geographical areas. *That* is what best practices in Aboriginal education within an international approach is!

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## ***THEME 4 - ENGLISH LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY IN TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS***

### **Contextualizing “Best Practices”**

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While some scholars contend that there is no specific definition to the term “best practices” (Newmann and Meadows, 2011), this term is generally known as representing pedagogies that most effectively produce desirable educational outcomes. However, teachers in southern or low-income contexts see the work they do differently and respond to their own contexts differently than do teachers in economically developed contexts (Johnson, Monk & Hodges, 2000). Local analysis should identify contextual constraints before assuming effective transfer of pedagogies between contexts. Contextual factors that affect implementation of “best practices” relate to:

- Teachers own educational experiences,
- Teacher preparation program differences,
- Access to academic literature and research that informs new ideologies
- Cultural differences in teaching and learning,
- Linguistic diversity in society and school,
- Available classroom resources,
- Student-teacher ratio

Northern teachers who develop “best practices” in high-income countries typically have experienced education in their home languages resulting in different ideologies about education than teachers in southern contexts whose education was delivered through the second language(s) without use of second language pedagogies. This often results in teachers understanding transmission-oriented and recitation-based education as the norm, whereas “best practices” are generally based on principals of constructivism or critical pedagogy.

In addition teacher education programs in southern contexts typically do not develop knowledge of second language pedagogy or the importance of the first language in learning. Teacher training programs rather reproduce systems of submersion education where learners are exposed to massive amounts of (incomprehensible) input in the second languages for the purpose of learning those languages. Both the lack of second language pedagogies and the lack of

understanding the value of the first language in learning is often a result of having little access to the academic literature that exists in costly databases.

Teachers in high-income contexts have access to extensive classroom resources and abundant professional development (PD) opportunities that southern teachers do not have access to. When southern teachers are able to avail of PD opportunities, they are often expected to “echo” their training immediately to their colleagues through the cascade model. The cascade model reproduces training through layers of training the trainers tickling down to classroom teachers. This model of teacher PD is typically ineffective (Burns, 2014 A, 2014 B) in developing contexts for several reasons: 1) training often turns into a one shot event at each level in which too many educators are crammed into crowded rooms listening to back-to-back lectures for two days without opportunity to discuss the presentations, observe model teaching, or try these ideas in mini-teaching situations; 2) teachers cannot “echo” what they have not yet put into practice and developed a sound understanding of. Yet, after such workshops educators are expected to immediately teach what they learned to the next layer of educators. This typically results in watered down content at each level until it is unrecognizable in the end, if it even occurs (Burns 2014 A). Thus teachers often request (personal conversations with southern teachers) a school-based model that provides learning opportunities that allow for manageable amounts of new information to be processed in small groups, tried out in demonstration lessons followed by use in their own classrooms before attempting to train other colleagues.

### **Language Education**

With the global demand for English language development, best practices continue to emanate from northern contexts where English is the dominant societal language and assimilation is the desired outcome. Immigrants in an English speaking country have significantly greater access to English than those in southern contexts where English is only dominant in school while other languages remain societally dominant. In all situations but particularly where English is not the dominant social language, teaching for linguistic plurality by developing the social and home-languages in school benefits learning English more effectively than teaching through English alone. However, northern “best practices” traditionally ignore or outright reject incorporation of the first language in English teaching.

Recent research challenges the historically dominant principal of teaching English monolingually (Butzkamm, 2003; Cook, V. 2001; Hall and Cook, 2012; Halsá & Al-Manaseer, 2012; Swain, Kirkpatrick and Cummins, 2011; Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009; Walter & Dekker, 2011). The basic principal of starting with and building on what the learner already knows is generally accepted *except* in teaching languages. English language education traditionally calls for avoidance of the learners’ first language or other languages in the learning process. When English language education ignores the language the child brings to the classroom the dominant principal of starting with what the learner knows is completely disregarded under the false assumption that English should be taught monolingually in order to avoid interference of the first language. However, effective, equitable and inclusive education builds on what the child brings to the classroom allowing for language and literacy development in the first language, which then supports cognitive development, critical literacy and more effective language and literacy development in all languages.

The English-only paradigm has further resulted in the common view that English is the only language appropriate for academic studies. The dearth of scientific and academic terms in local languages contributes to this perspective. Such a high view of English ignores the power of local languages toward academic achievement, literacy development and second language learning. The dominant English only perspective also overlooks the realities of teacher practice in using local languages to explain curriculum content in order to support comprehension even when directed to use English as the language of instruction.

English dominance results in a socialization of practice that either ignores or denies the power of local languages in education. Such discrimination against local languages actually supports English dominance and perpetuates linguistic and cultural hierarchies that often result in economic disadvantages.

Research that reveals significant advantages of first language based multilingual education over second language submersion education is typically ignored in favor of the seeming simplicity of immersion in the second language. While second language immersion programs may have been successful for some learners in Southern contexts, shadow education, or private supplementary tutoring to strengthen classroom teaching, may be the key to those instances of success (Bray & Kwo, 2013). If shadow education is required for success in second language education, it would appear that other solutions would be more appropriate for



strengthening educational success for all students. The inequities and social injustices of education that require the expense of shadow education perpetuates classism as only the elite can afford the extra costs required to succeed in English language education.

National discourses often blame teachers for low achievement in education among the general population who do not have access to shadow education. When national discourses disparage teachers on a regular basis, teachers are disempowered and may respond by passing on the blame to students and parents.

Teachers in southern contexts generally have limited access to training in second language education pedagogies. Teacher growth and development may be limited in many Southern contexts because institutions of higher education do not have the resources to support subscriptions to academic research databases nor do they always have well-resourced libraries. These institutions often rely on whatever resources are available through Google (personal conversation with Teacher Educators in southern contexts). Thus the limiting factor of access to information at the tertiary level has an impact on effective practices and updating for professional development, resulting in a perpetuation of common practices that are often outdated, such as monolingual teaching of English or grammar translation methods.

In addition, tertiary education is seen as the primary domain of English. No other languages are well supported at that level, propagating the notion that English is the only language capable of facilitating higher-level academic work. Furthermore, English-only education often supports transmission education as teachers and students may not be well prepared to use English for exploratory inquiry. This then often results in a focus on mastery of concepts rather than development of student inquiry. Student questions may be seen as a threat to the teacher who may not feel confident in providing correct responses, particularly in English. It becomes safer for the teacher to follow certain practices and prescribed teacher patten than to encourage grappling with open questions. Thus the educational system contributes powerfully to notions of unquestioning memorization and repetition over creativity and critique.

Finally, established “best practices” that come out of Northern contexts usually are developed within well-resourced classrooms. Many teachers in Southern contexts have limited resources for teaching and spend a great deal of time creating their own devices from raw materials for each lesson. They may have large classes in small spaces with competing noises all around them. Some students come to school hungry or malnourished leading to learning

difficulties. Students also may come from homes where parents do not speak English and therefore cannot contribute to their children's education. Coming from an impoverished home also affects the child's confidence in participation in classroom activities. While poverty and nutrition are problematic around the world, it may be that "best practices" were developed in well-resourced circumstances where greater potential exists for alleviation of poverty. Therefore for many reasons the suggestion that "best practices" are applicable in all situations denies the realities teachers face and experience in their own local situation.

### **Recommendations**

The implication that "best practices" will be equally effective in spite of contextual differences is a misleading notion. While best practices aim toward teacher development through replication of valuable researched information, teachers need opportunity to critique, contextualize and adjust new pedagogies to their particular contexts (Metilla, Pradilla & Williams, 2014). Inquiry based professional development allows teachers' to grapple with underlying philosophical changes that significantly affect their application of pedagogies. For example, moving from a linear curriculum to a spiral curriculum means shifting from concept mastery to concept development approaches. But teachers lack information on the underlying philosophical difference and rationale for the shift. Thus they are frustrated with continually dealing with the same concept in new, spiral curriculums.

The underlying assumption that teachers need to be told what to do and should follow *prescribed* pedagogies emanates from hierarchical thinking which disempowers teachers while reducing their motivation and self-respect. Teachers acknowledge that they need and desire pedagogical updating and *regular* professional development. However, they are asking for school-based training events that allow contextualization and critique of new pedagogies. I suggest that educational consultants frame best practices most helpfully when they encourage local critique and research, allowing development of locally situated best practices that acknowledge and mediate local realities. Such contextualization of best practices would encourage local knowledge production in southern contexts as a valuable contribution to global academics.

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## **English Language Pedagogy as ‘Best Practice’: The case study of one Chinese college**

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In recent years, globalization has given particular visibility to education, which is linked into the flow of knowledge, technology, and cultures (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). In this process, developing countries in the third world prefer to assimilate Western worldview(s), values, and knowledge as best practices (Yang, Zhang & Wang, 2006). Many thousands of teachers and students in higher education in China have been affected by the adoption of Western English language pedagogy, with insufficient research into how such practices are and might be re-contextualized in order to optimize student learning. If careful considerations are not given to the local context in English language teaching, some undesirable learning effects may be generated, such as students’ confusion in knowledge understanding and their resistance to participate because of anxiety and the lack of interests (Ouyang, 2004). This paper draws on a larger study, which examined how Western pedagogical practices could deliver more desirable results to meet local college students’ complex English language learning needs (Wu, 2014). The purposes of my study were: 1) to understand the main representations of Western pedagogy; and 2) to explore limits and possibilities of Western pedagogy adoption and adaptation in supporting Chinese university and college students’ English language learning.

### **Theoretical framework**

My examination about how Western pedagogical practices could deliver more desirable results is guided by postcolonial theory and constructivism. Post-colonial theory examines the after-effects, or continuation of ideologies and discourses of imperialism, the domination of Western values and their effects on the daily experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 45). With a postcolonial lens, I am careful to examine how Western pedagogies are influencing the local curriculum. Constructivists “such as Piaget (1954), Dewey (1929), and Vygotsky (1978) all maintained that students arrive in any learning situation with a range of prior knowledge and experience that influence how they respond to new information” (as cited in Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2008, p. 78). According to constructivism, the extent and effect of Western educational transfer may always change according to the developing local contexts and dynamics of external flows.

## **Methods/Methodology**

A case study method was used in my research as it “provides a unique example of real people in real situations” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 289). I implemented my research in a technical and vocational college. Students from this college may be somewhat different from their counterparts in the highest-ranking academic universities. Students are recruited from rural, distant and urban regions in different provinces in China. The college I chose is located in Suzhou, a highly developed internationalized city in the southeast China. Although teachers and students of the college are from different parts of China, my research may still not capture some of the complexities among teachers and learners from rural areas. In order to graduate, students need to pass Practical English Test for Colleges or College English Test Band 4 according to the requirements of different majors. My unit of analysis of this case is the English department at this college. First, I interviewed six experienced English language teachers about how Western pedagogy is adopted and adapted in Chinese higher education. In the second place, a small-scale survey was carried on within all teachers of English Department who did not participate in interviews to triangulate the source of data and to verify or further qualify the findings in the qualitative interview. Based on the first round of interviews and the survey, I conducted a follow-up set of interviews to explore the pertinent issues more deeply and to member check on first round interviews where necessary.

## **Discussion of findings and implications**

In the process of educational transfer from the West to China, there exist divergent conceptions for Western pedagogy. I will review the main representations of Western pedagogy as a form of ‘best practices’ so as to further analyze some tensions in the use of Western pedagogy.

Regarding the main representations of Western pedagogy, four main aspects are drawn from my research: first, Western pedagogies are student-centered, which signifies that students’ learning needs, motivations and interest are highly emphasized. Second, in Western class modes, teachers use their professionalism and observation to choose the appropriate curriculum content and classroom activities rather than stick to the fixed syllabus and lesson plan. Third, equal relations between teachers and students have been emphasized in Western pedagogy. Fourth, Western pedagogy focuses on the students’ learning responsibilities, knowledge application abilities and practical English competencies.

Based on the representations of Western pedagogy, five main paradoxes can be found regarding Western pedagogy's fundamental purposes in my research. The first significant paradox relates to whether or not Western pedagogy is regarded as a real way to learn that contributes to language acquisition. On the one hand, some teachers believed that progressive modes are seen as a relaxing bridge to 'real' learning, which will be accomplished by more direct, traditional lecturing methods. On the other hand, other interviewees and survey participants stressed that using Western pedagogy facilitates students' deep learning of the English language through a large amount of knowledge application activities and helps internalize what they have learned. Second, most of the participants claimed that the main pressures for using Western pedagogy come from their students and the changing nature of society rather than from institutions. University and college students can get access to Western pedagogies through Internet so that many students have expanded expectations for language classes. Additionally, after suffering so many years of boring and tedious teacher dominant instructions, students prefer Western relaxing class atmospheres. Although the main push for the use of Western pedagogy may originate from students, there are also top-down institutional pressures. For example, most interviewees said that if they do not use Western flexible and entertaining class activities in school inspections, their teaching performance might be deemed unsuccessful by school administrators. Third, many interviewees asserted that Western pedagogy is used as an incentive for students' participation and initiative. However, in real class activities, only highly motivated students with desirable English foundations participate actively. Some students with weak English foundations and from disadvantaged backgrounds keep silent in class activities because of anxiety and uneasiness. In this way, Western pedagogy can ironically amplify gaps between more competent and less competent language users. Fourth, my research participants mentioned that Western pedagogy *both* requires and is used to cultivate students' independent English learning abilities. Western class modes require students' preparations before classes, critical thinking and active discussions in classes, and reflections after classes. In comparison, in traditional Chinese pedagogy, students rely on teachers' knowledge transmission and seldom learn on their own. A few teachers said some students might just drop the course if they are required to learn independently. Besides, almost all research participants complained about students' lack of self-discipline due to the past learning experiences. Teachers explained that in China, it is impossible to keep a totally equal relationship with students in big classes. Teachers' dominance in class and role as "commander

in the army” are also informed by the large class sizes. With teachers’ serious role, tight control and care and protection, students’ independent learning abilities are restricted. Fifth, almost all interviewees indicated that flexible, liberal, communicative and interactive Western ‘best’ or ‘advanced’ practices run counter to a dominant culture of testing. In China, test results are closely tied to students’ academic and career development. In test-oriented training, Western pedagogy is not deemed as efficient as teacher-dominant vocabulary, syntax and grammar instruction. Nevertheless, many interviewees were opposed to the ‘teaching to the test,’ given that, after passing the exams, some students may totally lose interest in English learning.

These paradoxical positions emerging from my research reflect that Western pedagogy is a double-edged sword. Progressive Western practices have brought both possibilities and problems to the English language curriculum. What are the implications or recommendations for ‘recontextualized best practices’ given my case findings?

First, a non-coercive relationship between East and West—adoption of Western pedagogy as choice rather than imposition—needs to be emphasized in the English language curriculum. International educational transfer is a sensitive and ongoing process that prioritizes students’ learning motivations, interest and capabilities. This means good teaching strategies can only be constructed through constant teachers’ observations and teacher-student(s) communications. However, almost all interviewees claimed that in staff meetings and professional development programs, school administrators always introduce ‘advanced’ and ‘best’ practices as coming from the West. Actually it is teachers’ voices that reflect the real situations that can best inform how Western pedagogies can be adapted to the local context. Teachers’ voices need to be heard. The first concern for educators to choose pedagogies and curriculum should not be based on origins but on their suitability for students with different learning motivations, habits, and interests. Furthermore, many teachers think that disadvantaged students have limited accesses to Western knowledge and flexible pedagogies. They need more resources and support from their school and teachers. However, these students are usually more sensitive than their counterparts from urban regions. More support can be given in discreet ways to help them catch up with other students so that they can gain more equal linguistic opportunities in the future. As mentioned above, undesirable learning effects could be generated due to the use of Western English language pedagogy as the ‘best practice’ in the complex local context. The adoption and adaptation of Western pedagogy demands careful considerations of



students' English language competencies, learning habits, learning preferences, class sizes, and other real issues in the classrooms.

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## Globalizing Best Practices in EFL: Identity and Pedagogy in the EAP Experience

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### Context

In recent decades, the policies of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms have prioritized practical communication skills such as oral interaction to complement traditional methods such as grammar-translation. The interest in high-quality EFL programs and teachers comes not only from top-down national initiatives, but also from the bottom-up expectations from parents and students. Throughout the Global South, young people dream of studying abroad in World Class universities, most of which require facility in English. They must pass international tests such as the IELTS in order to demonstrate their language ability.

However, many academically qualified students do not meet the minimum cut-off scores for entry into the target universities. In order to benefit otherwise qualified students, and to enable receiving universities to accept these students, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs are of particular importance to the internationalization of Higher Education objectives. Those objectives include intercultural and academic knowledge that benefits both students and the institutions they attend. In this article I will highlight certain aspects of practice that strongly support the transfer of intercultural and academic knowledge.

### Theoretical framework

The purpose of the research was to gain a better understanding of the relationships between intercultural learning, identity among international students in an EAP program. Learner identity is not singular: it is complex. (Norton, 2000) Not only do psychological processes of learner motivation (Dörnyei, 2008) drive second language identity, but also sociocultural processes, in which multiple and changing roles and relationships transform the learner's understanding of self and others (Norton, 2000; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Taylor, 2013).

In EFL research, validation of learner identity was found to be essential to successful learner outcomes among the adolescent foreign language learners (Taylor, 2013). Taylor theorized that identity is made up of the multiple roles and relationships in which individuals display different "selves." Of significance to best practices in the classroom, Taylor found that *"unless students are allowed to be themselves – real people, with real hopes, fears, worries,*

*joys, disappointments, thrills, and mistakes – and **appreciated** for what they are as real people, they are unlikely to engage genuinely in class and develop as language learners and social persons” (p.126. italics in source).*

Intercultural identities and the development of agency are significant to the construct of intercultural learning as self-formation as presented in Marginson and Sawir’s (2011) meta-analysis of international student intercultural learning in Australia. In plain words, agency is the ability of individuals to set and achieve goals that enable them to become who and what they wish to be, that is, to build on current identities in order to assume desired identities and gain access to desired communities.

Therefore, best practices in intercultural language teaching require sufficient knowledge of the learners that validation of current and desired identities may take place. The objective of this study was to understand the complex identities of EAP international undergraduates in a Canadian context, and to explore the significance of intercultural experience in positive learning outcomes. I proposed a study that would explore, document and offer interpretation of:

the types of cultural experiences that happen during the first year of international education, the ways in which learners make sense of their intercultural experiences, and the ways in which identity in the classroom and community grants opportunities and sets limitations on intercultural and language learning.

Ten volunteers from three nations were interviewed six times over an eight week period of time. Participants were made up of two groups: a group of four students who were in the final month of their three semester EAP program, and a group of six students who were in the middle of their first semester. Participants (n=10) came from China (n=6), Angola (n=3) and Brazil (n=1). The method of sequential interviews was chosen in order to document how, over time, volunteers interpreted and responded to their new social and educational context. Part of the method was to engage in a conversation in which volunteers became at ease with sharing their accounts of intercultural, interpersonal, and language experiences with the researcher.

### **Preliminary Findings**

Preliminary analysis of the data indicates a two-way flow between identity and intercultural learning. The root assumptions students bring to the study-abroad experience are challenged or sustained by new experiences. The combination of assumptions and early

experiences predicated how students reflect on their lives, and how they resist or embrace change. The data made clear that participation in the EAP program significantly enabled intercultural experience. Learners are challenged to reshape their attitudes towards unfamiliar social and educational contexts such as EAP pedagogical practices, and interaction with the culturally different on a daily basis.

Although there was individual variation in the interpretation of intercultural experience, there were some striking commonalities. For example, every participant from China discussed the importance of becoming independent, of making foreign friends, and of escaping the traditional lecture and memorization format of Chinese Higher Education pedagogy. With one exception, these students found it very difficult to enter into friendships with people who did not speak Mandarin. Students from Angola and Brazil also encountered obstacles to joining intercultural networks.

Although it has been argued that cultural distance is behind this difficulty (Hofstede, 1980), this study locates the problem in the continuity of conditioned social habits from the past into the new context. Participants who had limited experience initiating new friendships in the home country found it proportionately difficult to initiate new friendships abroad. Those who were open to new friendships and forging new bonds prior to arrival in Canada found it very easy to relate to others and expand friendships *within their own cultural group*, but to a lesser degree with peers from other cultural groups.

Participants who demonstrated high levels of autonomy prior to arriving in Canada demonstrated the highest levels of autonomy in Canada. In this study, however, autonomous agency correlated with isolation from opportunities for intercultural friendships in students living off-campus.

The main advantage enjoyed by all of the participants from Angola was living in residence. Among both Angolan and Chinese EAP learners, residence life brought intercultural learning opportunities not experienced—and sometimes actively avoided—by participants living off-campus in apartments or home stays.

Participants universally spoke of the ambiguity of cross-cultural behaviours, and their ambivalence towards forging new networks. It is important that EAP educators recognize that their students may need training in initiating and sustaining intercultural relationships.

### **Pedagogy Attuned to Identity**

The preliminary findings of this study affirm the importance of EAP educators as intercultural teacher-learners. As teachers, we may engage in our own intercultural learning in order to develop a repertoire of practices responsive to the identities of our learners; for example, the fear of breaking cultural rules of behavior. In the case of EAP classroom, it is important that teachers display sincere interest in the personal and cultural realities of our students. By doing so, by acknowledging the “selves” that learners bring with them, it is possible for teachers to give them the exact skill set needed to move toward their goals of connecting with the community of English speakers. “Best Practices” give the students opportunities to position their own voices first in the dialogue of the classroom, and then in the community. The teacher becomes a mediator for intercultural dialogue, creating space for students to develop confident agency in the face of unprecedented life changes.

While teaching in Foreign Language institutes in Korea and Canada, I discovered that English language learning was driven by discourses of social, political and economic development. As I became familiar with the personal circumstances of my students, with their life histories, and with their cultural norms and expectations, I found myself becoming more effective in my classroom. I had the advantage of small class sizes, and months of daily contact with individual students to support my free time efforts as an intercultural language learner.

In terms of best practices, it remains clear that language pedagogy attuned to the identities of learners contributes to positive outcomes in student well-being and academic progress (Taylor, 2013). When teachers and staff provide affirmation of the real and desired identities learners bring to the classroom, they provide a platform for students to experiment with the new roles and relationships expected of them. Such pedagogy, in terms of course planning and delivery, requires teachers to have more than a superficial knowledge of their students’ identity discourses which may be rooted in complex identities of nationality, ethnicity, religion, past experience and future plans (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Norton, & Toohey, 2004). When the teacher is open to, and sets an example of, a two-way flow of intercultural learning, student voices, both literally and symbolically, have space to be heard.

Such flows also reinforce mutual positive regard among students from different cultural backgrounds within the classroom. By modeling desired attitudes and by teaching specific language skills for initiating and sustaining new relationship, teachers support the development

of satisfying English-using intercultural relationships. Additionally, what teachers learn from the identity texts of one class of learners, he or she can apply to the next, building up a flexible intercultural repertoire.

### Conclusion

With the rapid expansion of international enrolment in EFL in the Global South and in EAP in the West there it is important that educators in both locations develop the intercultural competencies we expect of our students. This article provided a brief introduction to the broader tapestry of the identities of the current generation of globally mobile language learners arriving at our internationalizing universities and recommends that intercultural learning be a joint venture of mutual benefit to all parties.

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## **SEAL versus NNEST: Towards a better practice of naming professionals**

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My intention in this paper is to highlight one practice that is quite ubiquitous in the realm of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), i.e. the labeling of the teaching professionals as either native English speaking teachers (NESTs) or non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs). I will problematize the negative NNEST label, show the disservice that it does to a large number of TESOL professionals, and propose a more just nomenclature that could hopefully be viewed as a step in the right direction towards professional best practices.

The role that NESTs and NNESTs play in the TESOL profession has been the subject of heated debate for several decades, particularly in the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century. It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a historical account of this topic and the different ways it has been treated since the second half of the twentieth century. However, from a historical point of view, it is important to indicate that the current power differential between both groups of professionals is believed to be due to Chomsky's idealization of the native speaker as the ideal speaker-hearer and the one with the ultimate authority over his/her language (Canagarajah, 1999). It was this notion that bolstered the superiority of NESTs over their NNEST colleagues and warranted them the advantage of being the models for foreign language learners. This Chomskyan notion is problematic because it basically highlighted who one is at the expense of qualifications, expertise, and skill. It created what Walelign (1986, as cited in Thomas, 1999, p. 6) called "the birthright mentality", i.e. native speakers basically own their language and consequently have the patent-right to teach it.

One consequence of this Chomskyan argument is that the phrase "native speakers only" became so widespread in TESOL job ads, particularly the high-paying jobs. Another consequence is that a stigma became attached to NNESTs, which had a negative impact on their employment opportunities regardless of their qualifications and experience. These consequences prompted two kinds of reactions. First, the organization of TESOL International issued a statement in 1991 that considered hiring second language teachers on the basis of their first language as discriminatory, and in 1998 the NNEST Caucus in TESOL was established (Braine, 1999; LIurda, 2004; Clark & Paran, 2007). Even though these initiatives were positive developments, they nevertheless had a limited impact on the practices of TESOL employers

because the phrase ‘native-like proficiency’ soon replaced ‘native speakers only’. Indeed, native speakers remained the point of reference in the TESOL profession, and employers had the right to wonder why they should hire teachers with native-like proficiency when they could recruit native speakers. Why get the copy, when one can get the original?

The other reaction to this power differential between NESTs and NNESTs was that several scholars started to critique the sheer label ‘NNEST’ and recommended more equitable alternatives such as expertise, inheritance, and affiliation (Rampton, 1990); multicompetence and multicompetent speakers (Cook, 1999); intercultural speakers (Kramersch, 1998); and bilingual English speakers (Jenkins, 2000). All these suggestions were believed to be more reflective of the strengths of this group of professionals by capitalizing on their bilingual and bicultural advantages rather than advancing a deficiency point of view, as the word ‘non-native’ may suggest.

It is this revolt against the label ‘NNEST’ that is of particular interest to this paper because the negativity of this label does not constitute best practices in TESOL. First of all, it is extremely rare to describe humans by who they are *not* versus who they are. It is inconceivable, for example, to describe basketball players as the non-hockey players. The fact that hockey is the national sport in Canada would never justify making hockey the single point of reference for all other sports and attaching this negative prefix ‘non’ to other athletes. Similarly, I believe ‘NNEST’ is an unfair label, as it describes a group of professionals from a negative (rather than positive) perspective. Instead of highlighting the advantages that someone has achieved by learning an additional language (a process that usually requires long-time commitment and significant labour), this label practically detracts from this achievement by presenting teachers negatively and from a deficiency point of view. In addition, this negative label highlights an issue that is non performative. In other words, there is absolutely nothing that this group of teachers can do in order to get out of this negative classification. They are, therefore, professionally doomed because there is no degree, work, skill, or expertise that can change their non-native speakership status.

Even though the other suggested alternative descriptions such as multicompetent speakers (Cook, 1999), intercultural speakers (Kramersch, 1998), and bilingual English speakers (Jenkins, 2000) seem to be a better replacement for the negative NNEST, I think they are not the ideal alternatives because they could equally be unfair towards NESTs. In other words, there is no



reason why NESTs should not be viewed as multicompetent speakers, bilingual speakers, and/or intercultural speakers as well. Being a native speaker of English does not necessarily mean that this person does not speak more than one language or at least more than one accent. In addition, a native speaker of English could also be well versed in two or more cultures and, therefore, could also be described as multicompetent whether from a linguistic point of view, a cultural point of view, or both.

Accordingly, I would like to propose a different nomenclature that is fair to the group it intends to describe without being unfair to others. I therefore propose the use of ‘speakers of English as an additional language’ (SEAL) to replace NNEST.

I believe SEAL is a fair and objective description because it simply describes a fact and from a positive perspective. Rather than describing a group of TESOL professionals as non-native speakers of English, I think it is fair to get rid of the negative prefix ‘non’ and highlight the positive attribute that they have. Also, I prefer the phrase ‘additional language’ versus ‘second language’ to avoid any inaccurate ordering assumptions, as some of these TESOL instructors may actually use English as their third or even fourth language. My suggested description, thus, presents the SEAL instructors positively by highlighting the concept of bilingualism / multilingualism, which is something they should feel proud of (versus something that should be held against them).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to end this paper by highlighting two important facts. The first fact is that everybody in the world is a native speaker of some language. Accordingly, being a native speaker of a specific language should not be viewed as a qualification for getting a job. In fact, it is more of a biological and/or geographical coincidence that should not carry too much weight in the hiring process. Being a native speaker of a specific language is quintessentially something that happens to us and not something that we achieve. With this in mind, it does not seem to be ‘best practices’ in TESOL to make the ‘native speaker’ construct a point of reference in language teaching and in job ads. Nor does it seem ‘best practices’ to depict NNESTs negatively as if they are lacking qualifications for their job.

The second fact that I would like to highlight is that the lingua franca status of the English language has led to an interesting phenomenon that is quite unprecedented in the history of mankind, i.e. “non-native speakers” of the English language outnumber its “native speakers” (Crystal, 2003). With this fact in mind, it behooves TESOL professionals to get rid of the

negative NNEST label as a way to describe the *majority* of English language speakers all over the world.

Based on the argument presented in this paper, I call upon TESOL professionals to refrain from using the negative acronym NNEST in TESOL literature (e.g. publications and job ads) and to use, instead, SEAL as a positive and fair description of the majority of TESOL instructors all over the world. I believe that my suggested alternative, i.e. SEAL, is an objective description that is fair to the group of professionals that it intends to describe but without being unfair to others. I also hope that the positivity that is highlighted in my proposed description could end the power differential that has been perpetuated by the negative label NNEST. I strongly believe that my recommendation would be a step in the right direction towards better professional practices in TESOL.

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## **THEME 6 - PEACE AND CONFLICT EDUCATION**

### **Political History, Political Violence: Peacebuilding Citizenship Education Interventions**

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Peacebuilding means democratizing society through citizens' sociopolitical interactions (Bickmore, 2005). Similar understandings frame 'justice-oriented' citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Hence, by peacebuilding citizenship, I mean active citizenship toward eliminating social practices that are fundamentally undemocratic and perpetuate sociopolitical problems. Schools have potential to (re-)shape – both constructively and destructively – societies (Shor, 1993); education can promote peace by cultivating – but it can also promote violence by thwarting – equity and justice (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). This concept applies in many European, African, and South Asian contexts (ibid), including Pakistan and Afghanistan (Novelli & Lopes-Cardozo, 2008). In this paper, I briefly reflect on a Bangladeshi textbook, 'Bangladesh and Global Studies Class 9-10' (Harun-or-Rashid, 2012) (BGS-9&10), to explore how history education can contribute to both (re)producing and mitigating political violence.

Independence from Pakistan in 1971 has supposedly ended intractable *ethnic* conflicts – e.g. those that involve violent responses to religious/cultural identity disputes in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – in Bangladesh. However, political violence has become a common phenomenon in post-independence Bangladesh (Datta, 2005); young-citizens either engage in politics as patronized violent activists, or remain disengaged from politics in fear of violence (Riaz & Raji, 2011). Political elites have often contrasted religious cultural issues with nationalism, e.g. Islamic codes-of-life with democratic governance and independence, and used violent activists to fulfill political agendas (Islam, 2011). Such political practices have putrefied democracy and often legitimized violent responses to sociopolitical problems, making Bangladesh a case of political violence and disengagement.

### **Challenges for Peacebuilding Citizenship**

Textbooks like BGS-9&10 are (re-)created when governments change. Thus, history in BGS-9&10 does not communicate neutral, objective truths: people in power control textbooks to privilege certain groups and oppress 'others' (Apple, 2004). In some conflict zones, such

practices have contributed to violence by ‘factifying’ certain narratives of ‘enmity’ and ‘heroism.’ For example, representation of the Sinhalese as evils contributes to Tamil-Sinhalese violence in Sri Lanka (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000); and narratives of hatred and enmity encourage violent responses to Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India and Pakistan (Dean, 2005; Lall, 2008). Similarly, BGS-9&10 may contribute to violence in Bangladesh by producing hatred among certain political groups. Among some Bangladeshi ‘heroes’ in BGS-9&10 are: (1) Sheikh Mujibuur Rahman, who is venerated as the father of the Bengali nation, (2) the freedom fighters, and (3) the young/student citizens, who *always* played key roles in enhancing democracy and justice in Bangladesh. In contrast, among the ‘enemies’ and/or the ‘peace-breakers’ of Bangladesh are: (1) the war criminals, especially those who opposed Pakistan’s partition on grounds of Muslim unity, (2) those who combine Islam and politics in Bangladesh, (3) Ziaur Rahman, who became president after Mujibur Rahman was killed, and (4) Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who became president after Ziaur Rahman was killed. Such hero-villain binaries create a ‘hate curriculum’, dividing citizens into opposing groups (Davies, 2005) who hate each other and can violently respond to problems between them.

A key theme in BGS-9&10 is young citizens’ historical involvement in enhancing democracy and secularism in Bangladesh. BGS-9&10 represents student-citizens as *always* the largest activist population to achieve and protect democracy and justice by violently resisting oppressions. Thus, from my experience, many student-citizens feel that they inherently and historically own the politics of sociopolitical change in Bangladesh. This can encourage students-citizens to be ‘tough’ to protect democracy. Such presentation of history has several destructive ramifications. To save space for peacebuilding citizenship learning opportunities in BGS-9&10, I will mention only two. First, it (re)produces cultural violence – attitudes and beliefs that violence is legitimate for promoting/protecting democracy and justice (Galtung, 1990); and second, it manipulates student-citizens’ understandings of history, democracy and citizenship, a key factor influencing their political engagement (Selman & Kwok, 2010). Such learning opportunities, whereby many young citizens may learn to fundamentally own the country’s politics and engage in activism towards democratization, can bring positive lessons to those contexts where engaging young citizens in politics is a challenge. However, if student-citizens are taught that their violent political engagement has been the key to democracy, Bangladesh may never be violence-free. In other words, in the sociopolitical context of

Bangladesh, cultural violence can be understood as a tool for the elites to manipulate individuals' and groups' political sense-making of democracy, justice, and democratization.

In terms of alternative approaches to history teaching, briefly put, some research in ethnically and/or politically stratified violent conflict zones suggest that encouraging discussion and critical thinking of history can cultivate democracy, equal rights to diversities, and improve relationships (Barton & McCully, 2012; Funk & Said, 2004; Hess & Avery, 2008). Such discussions and critical thinking need to include multiple perspectives of sensitive sociopolitical, historical, national and international issues, including widely accepted narratives about friendship, enmity, oppression and liberation, and be able to build tolerance for differences (ibid). I call this element of peacebuilding '*liberality*', prefer *liberality* over tolerance, and argue that tolerance is created externally through laws and other impositions while *liberality* is an internal attitude that fundamentally builds on accommodating equality for all. I also argue that in contexts where many students are actively involved in politics, such as Bangladesh, such teaching-learning opportunities need to include critical understandings of – and not mere romanticization like BGS-9&10 often does – the character and benefits of violent responses to personal, social, political, local, national, international, and other conflicts. Moreover, many scholars have advocated a balanced or more comprehensive focus on histories of solidarity and violence (e.g., Funk & Said, 2004). If revising the entire BGS-9&10 curriculum is too political, classroom implementation of the curriculum can make this balance towards building sociopolitical justice and liberality. For example, the history of Akbar the Great demonstrated in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century that diverse groups can socially and politically live together as a mixed and shared culture that promotes liberality and solves problems through direct and non-violent social interactions (Choudhury, 1952/1985). Such accounts can be juxtaposed with other past problems. Such contrasts can democratize history education in BGS-9&10 and thus contribute to peacebuilding at some levels.

### **Opportunities for Peacebuilding Citizenship**

Young-citizens' political disengagement is also a global challenge: education has largely failed to engage young Mexicans in politics beyond voting (Reimers & Cardenas, 2010); Canadian young-citizens' political engagement, even in voting, is gradually declining (Blais & Loewen, 2011). In such a global context, as hinted above, BGS-9&10 has elements that may contribute to

young citizens' active political engagement. Curricular and pedagogical practices, which can transform violent activism into peacebuilding citizenship, have to complement these elements.

Balancing narratives of conflicts and war with solidarity and cooperation is one approach to democratizing history education. Narratives educate citizens about citizenship contexts, and influence their citizenship engagement (Ross, 2002). Hence, focusing on moments of co-existence can educate citizens about how diverse identity groups complement each other as one social/national group, instead of framing each other as enemies. This can help reconcile conflicting political groups (Funk & Said, 2004), especially when students from diverse sociopolitical groups are brought to work together and write their own history of complementarity (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). This also helps student-citizens to understand and question history-writing processes (ibid). However, cultivating stories of complementarity among Bangladeshi student-citizens from contrasting political backgrounds requires critical examination of dominant historical narratives.

Providing students with opportunities to critically analyze historical narratives, such as those about oppression and liberation, can further democratize history education. Presenting narratives as unquestionable facts suggests that student-citizens uncritically accept some historical stories as 'truths', a practice called indoctrination (Sears & Hughes, 2006). Teaching history as a fallible human construct enables students to critically question history, and guide young-citizens' democratic decision-making about their political engagement (Barton & Levstik, 2008). Thus, democratizing history education essentially means cultivating peacebuilding citizenship.

## **Conclusion**

Political versions of war history can contribute to (re)producing violence by indoctrinating citizens about national 'heroes' and enemies, and the role of violence. Curriculum mandates, that represent the dominant groups' narratives of historical crisis moments, may never describe violent responses (that they have executed and/or patronized) to problems as violence. Generally, they describe their responses in romantic languages, framing their selves as 'correctors' of 'wrongs', such as revolution, jihad, and freedom-fight. BGS-9&10 is no exception: it romanticizes violent activisms, of the freedom-fighters and protectors of democracy, in response to problems as ways of democratizing Bangladesh. However, focusing on stories of war as well

as complementarity, and critically analyzing history, which of course requires pedagogical practices that allow for dialogue, discussion, multiple perspectives and so on, can mitigate the conflict escalating impacts of education. These practices can democratize Social Studies and Humanities curricula in general, which suggests that educating citizens for peacebuilding is possible under any curricular, structural and/or political circumstance.

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## **AFTERWORD by Professor Gita Steiner Khamsi**

### **Crossing the Thin Line between a “Best Practice” and an International Standard**

Several authors in this book skillfully dismantle the universal claim implied in the notion of “best practices.” They examine the question of whose practices are regarded as “best” and whose, in contrast, are considered as worse or irrelevant practices, respectively. What they find is the discursive power held by a few and imposed on many. The question becomes: what features of “best practices” make them *seem* universally valid? Arguably, there is a thin line between a “best practice” and an international standard in education. Indeed, many best practices are elevated into international standards in education, especially when resourceful and influential international organizations support them and fund their dissemination.

In this concluding chapter, I join intellectual forces with others in this book who dissect the “camouflage” of specific practices that come across as universal standards. I scratch at three façades that help to cover up the specificity of practices and make them seem universally valid: the façade of rationality, the façade of precision, and the façade of universality. By dismantling these three façades, this last chapter is an invitation to cross the line between “best practices” and international standards and reflect on the prescriptive nature of “best practices.”

#### **The Façades of Rationality, Precision and Universality**

The *façade of rationality* has been thoroughly deconstructed in policy studies, and includes critics who shed doubts on whether “governance by numbers” (Fenwick, Mangez, and Ozga, 2014) is less political or more rationale than other modes of regulation. Skeptics scrutinize evaluations of charter schools, vouchers, and other controversial reforms to demonstrate convincingly that such studies are agenda-driven, in that researchers often “spin” their interpretation to please the architects and financiers of the reforms (Gewirtz, Dickson, and Power, 2007; Henig, 2008). The assertion that, despite the claims of its advocates, evidence-based policy planning is deeply political, is premised upon the analysis that political manipulation has operated under the guise of scientific rationality.

Relatively less known in the field of educational policy studies are a second group of researchers who demystify statistics, illuminate the “*façade of precision*” (Samoff, 1999), and

problematize the uncontested authority attached to numbers. In my studies on educational reform in Mongolia, I noticed a “statistical eradication” of pressing social issues through these methods. For example, I noticed vast discrepancies in reports on dropout statistics, even among departments within the same ministry (Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe, 2006, p. 181f.). Whereas the Nonformal Education Department reported 40,000 dropouts, the department in charge of educational statistics at the Ministry of Education reported only 11,953—i.e., nearly three-quarters fewer.

Given that governments in developing countries are forced to wear the veil of statistical precision in order to present baseline data and subscribe to measurable benchmarks when they seek external financial assistance, the second critique is by no means inconsequential. “Managing for results” is considered paramount for education planners in developing countries, yet their measures are often deeply flawed.

Some of these “errors” are predictable. Ministries of finance and education periodically contradict one another on issues like student enrollment. The problem is particularly acute in educational systems that use per-capita financing, where the head-count of students determines the amount of the allocated budget. In developing countries ministries of education systematically over-report enrollment statistics, whereas finance ministries under-report them as a matter of principle. Similarly, it is not uncommon for national statistical offices to receive a mandate to change the “calculation method” of poverty, or measures related to other controversial issues, shortly before an election. In Mongolia, for example, household income was replaced with household expenditures as a poverty measure at a politically critical period during the first years of the new millennium.

Government offices in developing countries are by no means the only ones who construct indicators strategically. In *Far-Fetched Facts*, Richard Rottenburg describes how international development experts help manipulate data in sophisticated ways, consolidating them in elaborate knowledge banks to justify the need for urgent and immediate action (Rottenburg, 2009). Similarly, it would be wrong to assume that policy makers in developing countries are alone in relying on unreliable data. The *Charter School Dust-Up* (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, and Rothstein, 2005) is just one of numerous works in policy studies that demonstrate the poor quality of the data enlisted to make important decisions in school reform.

In contrast to the first two fallacies of (the façade of rationality and the façade of precision), the third—the *façade of universality*—is seriously under-examined. The *Handbook of Global Policy and Policy-Making in Education* (Mundy, Green, Lingard, Verger, 2015) is likely to remedy the shortfall in studies on the topic. Until now the critique has been primarily voiced among comparative education researchers who are sensitized to the detrimental effects of universal claims. The false claim of universality is epitomized by the what-went-right approach, and will be explained in greater detail in the next section. For now it is simply worth pointing out that it provides legitimacy for the uncritical import of policies from elsewhere, or the export of reform packages from one country to another. Traveling reforms are themselves a compelling phenomenon, and become even more so when actively promoted by funding agencies and international donors, pushing their portfolios of “best practices”—packaged and framed as “international standards”—from one country to another.

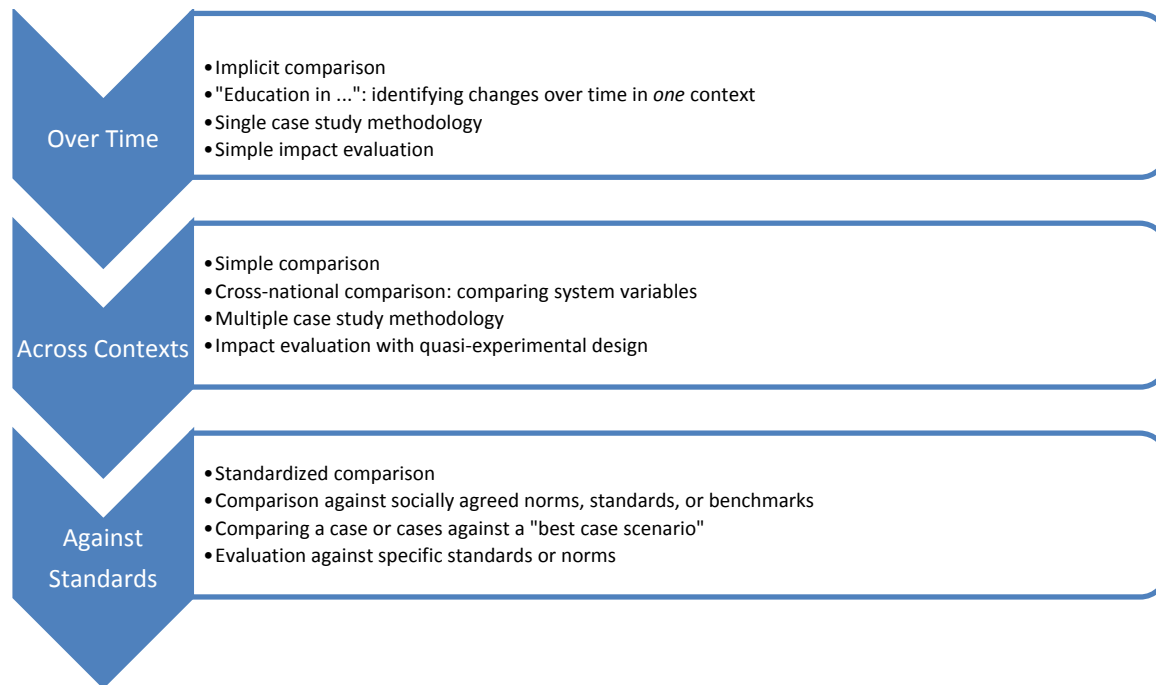
What methods are used to make such claims appear legitimate? To answer this question I will focus on two major methodological tools that proponents of “best practices” often use in order to elevate a local solution to the realm of universal applicability: One, standardization of comparison; two, retroactive establishment of case similarity.

### **Standardizing Comparison**

The method of comparison has undergone a fundamental transformation over the past few decades. A glance at the adjacent comparative social sciences—comparative sociology, comparative political science, comparative economics—reveals the rapid pace with which standardized or normative comparison has permeated social analyses. Similarly in education, global monitoring of national developments, as reflected in OECD, UNESCO or World Bank studies, has taken on monumental significance as a tool for education planning. Today this tool is routinized, and now more than ever before national education systems are monitored in terms of how they perform on popular benchmarks (e.g., Millennium Development Goals), or broadly defined international standards.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the three types of comparison. They are listed in order of increased de-contextualization.

Figure 1: Methods of Comparison



The first type of comparison—*comparison over time*—qualifies as the most contextualized form of comparison. The emphasis is on a particular case. Case study researchers typically analyze changes over time *in* a particular bounded system. Such single country case studies operate with a research design that draws on a sample size of one ( $N=1$ ), and include many variables, i.e., they follow a design of *one N and many variables*. This particular type of comparison is more sensitive to culture, context or system, as compared to the other two types of comparison.

This approach, consisting of “thick” description and dense historical analysis, is typical in historiography and ethnography. Naturally there exists a broad range of methods of inquiry—drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data—that use case study methodology. For an extensive period in the history of comparative education, implicit comparison leading to “*Education in...*” studies (documentation of national educational systems) was the preferred type of inquiry. The comparison was implicit because the focus was on particular variables or features of other educational systems that were deemed relevant to learn or borrow from. Ranging from the well documented 19<sup>th</sup> century British interest in the German educational system (see Phillips 2004) to policy tourism between the UK and the US (Whitty, 2012), the

meliorist approach was based on an implicit rather than explicit comparison of the two systems. Nowadays, simple impact evaluations follow the same design: baseline data is collected and then compared with information gathered months or years later. The focus of simple impact evaluations is on changes over time; even though they are by far more quantitative than the early comparative education studies.

The second type of comparison deals with *comparison across space or contexts*. Any study that compares two and more systems potentially serves as an entry point to understanding culture and structure. It is important to point out that simple comparisons are not always simplistic. In fact, there are many promising methodological approaches that compare countries, cases, or systems in a contextualized manner. An example is the method of “video-cued multi-vocal ethnography,” presented by Tobin et al. (1989 and 2009). Tobin examined whether preschools in the United States, Japan, and China have converged—rhetorically, practically, or both—towards a shared international understanding of education for young children. Rather than analyzing video-recorded sequences of preschool practices, he asked preschool educators to interpret their own practices, and compare them with what they saw recorded in preschools in the other two countries. In doing so he exposed one of the main challenges of country comparison: the tendency to unnecessarily contrast, stereotype, and overemphasize differences.

Finally, the third type of comparative research—*standardized comparison*—has experienced unprecedented popularity over the past few years. Of the three types of comparison, standardized comparison represents the method of inquiry that is most prescriptive and normative, and least sensitive to context, culture, or system. It measures outcomes in relation to a norm as expressed, for example, in the format of an index (0-1), ratio (0-100 percent), or average.

Standardized comparison privileges international over local developments, in that globalization is presented as a pervasive external force overwhelming local influences, which somehow renders the nation-state motionless by paralyzing policy actors. Unsurprisingly, indicator research is at the core of this type of comparison. Much emphasis is placed on how a system scores on a range of socially agreed upon global indicators in a given supranational setting, or “educational space” (see Nóvoa and Lawn 2002). Researchers identify, in the case of a

what-went-wrong analysis, the reasons why the system failed to perform better or, in the case of a what-went-right analysis, why it has been “on track” in achieving international benchmarks.

The third type of comparison is a normalization technique that is well-analyzed in history and philosophy by Michel Foucault, and in critical curriculum studies by authors such as Thomas Popkewitz. However, standardization or normalization is somewhat less discussed in policy studies. Arguably, it should be seen as a new policy tool or technique that makes use of comparison to either generate, or alleviate, reform pressure on a system. It is important to note that standardized comparison has by no means replaced other types of comparison. More often than not, the three methods of comparison are used in combination with one another. In fact, many comparative studies include begin or end up with an in-depth analysis of what went right in a particular case, context, or system.

### **Generating Comparability**

Naturally, the act of lesson-drawing provokes the expectation that the transfer of “best practices” only occurs between educational systems that are alike. This is due to strongly held beliefs that only educational systems with similar challenges are receptive to the same solutions, i.e., open to importing “best practices” from each other. In reality, however, this is not the case. What if the challenges differ and yet the same solutions—“best practices” or reforms—are imported anyway? In other words, how is the legitimacy problem resolved? How is a transfer justified or, acknowledging agency in the policy process, how do policy makers explain to their constituents that they imported “best practices” from a system that is completely different from their own?

One way of solving this dilemma is to deny that policy borrowing actually occurred. Carol-Anne Spreen presented an early study of this phenomenon in her dissertation on the import of outcomes-based education (OBE) from Australia and North America to South Africa (see Spreen, 2004). As Spreen described, once opponents of OBE argued that the educational systems were incompatible, local policy actors who favored the reform claimed it was designed and initiated in South Africa, rather than imported from elsewhere. Even though such retroactive indigenization or reframing techniques are frequently put to work *a posteriori* to appease critics, the issue at hand is still the legitimacy of policy attraction across dissimilar contexts. How do



policy analysts and makers justify their interest in educational systems—whether located in Finland, Singapore or Shanghai—that are so different from their own?

Another way of downplaying difference is to use uniform measurement that make systems *appear* comparable. As explained above, standardized comparison does indeed generate the appearance of commensurability of educational systems, but this does not mean they are comparable. Even if the same indicators are used to measure certain concepts, the concepts still have—depending on the context, case, or system—a different meaning. This applies not only to broad concepts such as “quality education,” but also to more narrow notions such as “teacher shortage” (see Steiner-Khamsi, 2015).

### **Coping with “Best Practices” and International Standards**

Sociologically inclined researchers assert that standardization is an inevitable consequence of rationalization, routinization, and bureaucratization (see Chabbott, 2015). In the field of international and comparative education, the standardization of development work—in the form of internationally agreed development agendas (Education for All in 1990, Millennium Development Goals in 2000, and Sustainable Development Goals in 2015) or aid effectiveness protocols—reflects the professionalization and expansion of development work. Nevertheless, the questions remain: in whose direction is the standardization taking shape; which policy actors do the standards empower and whom do they disempower?

Another important question is the adoption of international standards: how much room for manoeuver is there? In policy borrowing and lending research, we recognize that every act of policy transfer is selective. There is no wholesale policy borrowing and lending. In the same vein, there is no wholesale adoption of international standards. What is adopted, what is not adopted, and how, and why, international standards or “best practices” are locally reinterpreted are topics of great academic interest and professional curiosity.

This edited volume on *Working with, against and despite global “best practices”* examines fascinating conceptual questions as well as professional concerns. Whereas several authors dismantle the “camouflage” of particular practices as universally valid best practices, others analyze how teachers, administrators, and community leaders deal and might best deal with the coercive power of best practices.

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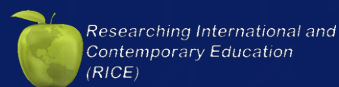
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