Internationalisation in Higher Education: Theorising Equity and Exclusions (0044)

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Abstract

Internationalisation is a dominant strand of thinking about the future of higher education, its success growth and sustainability. This paper argues that internationalisation is often presented as an ideologically neutral, coherent, knowledge-driven policy intervention but that this can mask its commercial and financial opportunities, with ethical and social implications. Its enlistment by the increasingly dominant discourse of neoliberalism would seem to see it as having negative consequences for equity and inclusivity. However, internationalisation is a polyvalent discourse and the paper argues for further research to consider how knowledge, as the New Capital can avoid the risks of commodification, and remain critical, creative and accessible to diverse communities. This will involve investigating the intersections between internationalisation and equity and associated epistemological, ontological, ethical and affective issues.

Paper

Internationalisation is a dominant strand of thinking about the future of higher education (HE)– linked to economic growth, prosperity and sustainability (Altbach, 2013; BIS, 2013; Bone, 2008; Streitwieser, 2014). Internationalisation disrupts the notion of borders and boundaries in HE and is one of the major forces shaping HE as it evolves to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Knight, 2008). Multilateralism, mobility and alliance strategies are thought to widen reach, extend brands and enhance innovation and employability (Knight & de Wit, 1995). The value of HE is seen to be increased via

international partnerships and collaborations (COM, 2013). Mobility plays a central role in internationalisation through which ideas and practices are spread. It is both a mechanism driving a shift towards a global knowledge economy and the fulfillment of personal aspirations. Mobility as a dominant policy discourse means that undergraduate and postgraduate students, programmes, providers and academics are on the move.

Internationalisation is a polyvalent discourse in HE. Stier (2004) suggests that three ideologies underpin internationalisation policy development: idealism e.g. creating a better world; instrumentalism e.g. competing in a global economy and the fear of being economically outflanked; and educationalism e.g. the desire to develop dialogic capacity within intercultural competencies. They are not mutually exclusive and often serve to reinforce and justify each other. However, internationalisation is often presented as an ideologically neutral, coherent, knowledge-driven policy intervention. This representation can mask especially the instrumental ideology with its commercial opportunities, financial, ethical and social implications (Haigh, 2008). In particular, forms of internationalisation are vital to the discourses and practices of neoliberalism that increasingly dominate higher education. In this way the recruitment of international students and mobile academics is directed at the opening up of an international market, and the internationalising of curriculum and knowledge to widen its global reach serve to normalise and commodify (Brown 2013) . Above all, internationalisation makes possible and intensifies on a global scale the competition which is the defining characteristic of neoliberalism (Foucault 2008). Competition serves to differentiate and despite the claim of neoliberal theorists that it works in the interests of all, creates losers as well as winners. In principle it is in tension with equity (Oksala 2011).

Different tendencies and effects are highlighted in the growing body of critical literature describing and analysing internationalisation in a global knowledge economy. Some of the key concerns include the need for students and academics to acquire planetary citizenship and global competences (Haigh, 2008); the drive for inclusion in the global

knowledge economy in terms of cognitive justice (Santos, 2007); the potency of new partnerships (Bone, 2008); ethical internationalisation – e.g. whether countries should enter into partnerships and export knowledge to countries with poor human rights; social and political arguments around the value of higher education (Grant, 2013); and issues arising with respect to mobility at doctoral level (Ackers, 2008; ECU 2010). There is interest in comparative policy analysis and what competitors in the knowledge economy are doing to internationalise their services and products (Luijten-Lub et al, 2005). There has been extensive interest in harmonisation procedures, credit transfer and mobility flows associated with the Bologna Process (Dale, 2007; Sweeney, 2012). Global flows are now posed in terms of brain circulation rather than brain drain. Cross-border provision and the rise of private higher education have also provided new opportunities and challenges globally (Morley, 2014).

Within these analyses a concern for equity and inclusion seems marginalised and there is a need for research which brings them to the centre. An overarching consideration will be how knowledge, as the New Capital can avoid the risks of commodification, and remain critical, creative and accessible to diverse communities. This might interrogate the dominant discourses that are informing visions of the future of higher education in relation to internationalisation and investigate critically how internationalisation interacts with current and emerging structures of inequality. However, it might also seek out counter discourses and spaces where internationalisation is enabling inclusion and equity.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of the new mobilities' paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006), which suggests a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than a totalising or reductive description of the contemporary world, we would argue that mobility can result in the empowerment of some and the inaudibility of others. While internationalisation is conceptualised as a form of desirable capital for institutions and individuals in terms of employability, marketability and powerful transnational coalitions and networks, there are spatial and social connotations of international mobility (Kauppinen,

2012; Shields, 2013).

The global circulation of epistemic currents disrupts traditional notions of space and place. This opens up new opportunities but can also reproduce longstanding social hierarchies. There are forms of social closure that mobility can uphold, and questions about hidden populations in internationalisation. Scott's (2005) criticism of the inequities inherent in academic mobility dynamics are rarely addressed in policy speeches or reports. While the Equality Challenge Unit in the UK has undertaken studies and produced briefings on the intersections between internationalisation and equity (e.g. ECU, 2009, 2013), we argue that epistemological, ontological or ethical issues associated with the new forms of international academic mobility remain marginal within policy discourses. Moreover, the affective dimension of internationalisation and mobility its costs, affordances and consequences for those who live it out is something that demands more critical attention (Kim 2010).

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