INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Special Issue: transnational and transcultural positionality in globalised higher education

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THE CONTEXT FOR THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Transnational higher education (TNE), where students study on a 'foreign' degree programme whilst remaining in their home country, is a rapidly developing phenomenon. Universities across the UK, for example, are now operating 1,395 TNE programmes and 73 overseas campuses have been established. There are 454,473 students involved in TNE and this excludes Distance Learning students (British Council 2013). The growth in transnational higher education in the last decade and the associated increase in the involvement of university teachers in transnational education represent huge potential for transformative experiences for teachers. Research has shown that experiencing a different community of practice can enable teachers to identify and question their (sometimes unconscious) assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning, with a crucial element in the transnational experience being the dissonance generated (Hepple 2012; Keay et al. this issue). Research into transnational education has doubled since 2006 (Caruana and Montgomery forthcoming) and the topic is attracting increasing attention with initiatives around EU programme collaboration and research begun by the British Council.

The growth in so-called 'glocal' students represents fundamental changes in the way disciplinary knowledge is communicated and constructed. These intercultural partnerships where curriculum is transported from one higher education learning context to another has mainly been one way traffic with the 'west' offering a form of non-geographic mobility which despite being 'at home' offers an intercultural learning experience. This approach to international higher education comes in a variety of different forms on a continuum from

transporting home staff, curriculum and assessment in their entirety to an overseas institution, to offering franchise models where the overseas institutions adopt and interpret the curriculum of the provider. All of these models engender different implications for intercultural learning and require university teachers to effectively negotiate a range of cultural contexts and communities, mediating the curriculum to reflect local context. Leask (2004) notes that transnational education is associated with learning that transforms 'mindsets', engenders personal growth, respect and tolerance for difference and educates responsible graduates committed to a sustainable world. However, it is not clear how university teachers may be prepared for this challenge as a paucity of research exists on transnational teacher education in contexts outside of North America (Howe 2013).

This special issue of JET explores the experience of teachers in transnational education, interrogating the ways in which university teachers negotiate cultural, linguistic and disciplinary contexts in order to provide transformative learning experiences for their students.

ALTERNATIVE PICTURES OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

The articles in this issue focus on developing rich, in-depth and contextualised pictures of what it means to be a teacher operating in transnational education contexts. They explore the

ways in which university teachers and their students position themselves in the social, cultural and educational spaces created by transnational education.

JET has a long history of publishing research which provides an international perspective on education and teaching from Education for Teachers of English in China (Boyle 2000) to the most recent issue of JET which features a piece on the conceptual and policy challenges of selecting teaching practice schools in South Africa (Robinson 2014). JET is also experienced in exploring alternative viewpoints and representing the non-western perspective. As far back as issue 28, issue 1 of the journal Su et al. (2002) present the perspectives of Tibetan teacher candidates against their Chinese counterparts, and in JET's special issue on Asian Perspectives on Teacher Education Ishii and Shiobara (2008) investigate the impact of globalisation on music teaching in Japan. This particular special issue also aims to present some views from the 'subalterns' whose voices are most often silenced through omission (Zanoni 2013). This issue aims to give an opportunity to those involved in teaching in transnational education to express alternative positions. The young researchers and non-western voices of this issue are therefore very important; the research presented here is not the sort derived from large, well-established and funded research projects but it is that which often lacks representation in the more traditional western journals. As special issue editor, I would like to acknowledge my appreciation of the willingness of your regular editor, Professor Peter Gilroy, to entertain these alternative and less well-established viewpoints. It is hoped that this issue contributes to developing new sorts of perspectives on TNE, or what Fabricius (this issue) terms *Ud-blik* (in Danish) which is etymologically 'out-gaze'.

Many of the articles in this issue argue contra to the common expectations or stereotypes of what TNE might represent. In the first article, Djerasimovic calls for a reconceptualisation of the idea that TNE is a form of cultural imperialism. She suggests, on the contrary, that host nations far from being the passive victims of TNE, may be adapting the discourses of TNE for their own purposes. Hou et al. (this issue) also present research that contradicts the common perception that TNE is entirely market or economy driven. Despite the dominance of perceptions of China being embedded in the context of its exponential economic rise, China has stated aims for the development of TNE as a public good. This stands in contrast to the dominant economic aims of the UK's involvement in TNE.

The diverse methodologies employed in the research presented in this issue aim to provide a much-needed diversity of constructions of TNE. The narrative inquiry articles included here (Trahar; Vu and Doyle; and Fabricius) are particularly important from the point of view of positionality as they question static positions, with Trahar (this issue) demonstrating the ebb and flow of cultural positions as being complex, changing and contradictory. The dynamism of student positions highlighted by Vu and Doyle underline that TNE contexts can engender space for repositioning in students' sense of themselves and in their relationships with their teachers. This special issue aims to paint more nuanced pictures of TNE and therefore includes a focus on national and international contexts beyond the larger TNE host nations of Malaysia and China. In Fabricius' article the Danish multilingual context which receives students and staff into a 'hybrid, internationalising context' demonstrates that internationalisation processes are ultimately personal and can result in conflicting feelings and attitudes towards internationalism.

POSITIONALITY AND 'THE WEST'

Many of the articles in this issue interrogate the precept of 'the west' and 'western' 'styles' of teaching and learning. Singh and Schresta (2008) see as problematic the hegemony of 'western world' universities that privilege certain forms of knowledge and learning in relation to the universities of the so-called 'developing world' especially when the latter are involved in transnational educational arrangements with 'western' universities (Reid and Hellsten 2008; Clifford and Montgomery 2014). Universities' positions in the 'west' are called into question by TNE, however, and geographical space is no longer a reliable position as noted in Djerasimovic (this issue). Positionality is a recurring theme running through the articles in this issue and the key question 'from whose perspective do we see transnational education?' is raised. TNE looks different when viewed from its diverse positions and these positions are not simple, static or straightforward but layered, complex and contradictory. Dixon refers to this positionality as 'the treacherous business of privileging knowledge and voices, multiple and conflicting realities of globalisation and International Higher Education' (2006, 319). Previous research in TNE has indeed tended to privilege the perspectives of the sending institutions (Caruana and Montgomery, forthcoming) and more research is needed that tells the story from the point of view of the host countries and their students. This issue aims to move in this direction with the narratives of Vietnamese and Malaysian students (Vu and Doyle; Trahar, this issue) being a case in point.

Higher education programmes and their concomitant constructions of knowledge cannot simply be transported and superimposed upon a new cultural context. As la Velle notes in the previous JET special issue to this one, 'to say that teaching, arguably one of the most multifaceted of human activities, can be reduced to a series of knowledge bases is to ignore the multiplicity of the effects of action' (la Velle 2013, 3). She goes on to emphasise the contextual nature of 'teacher wisdom' or professionalism and the importance of the 'complex social interactions' of the classroom (ibid.). This is echoed in Keevers et al.'s paper in this issue where they take the significant step of engaging in joint research and practice development between the sending and host institutions' transnational teaching teams in three different Australian, Malaysian and Vietnamese universities. They conclude that for professional development to be effective in transnational education it needs to be collaboratively designed and negotiated, thus moving away from the polarised positions of west and east, home and host. Keay et al. (this issue) ask whether the concept of the community of practice might offer a way forward in developing such collaborative environments in TNE. These sorts of intercultural partnerships could be a significant step forward in ways of thinking about TNE, although as Djerasimovic points out (this issue), the idea of partnership which is intended to imply a degree of equality, often hides a power hierarchy constructed by both sides and is tainted by the concept of partnership as business.

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue aims to create a selection of perspectives on and pictures of transnational education and so the articles benefit from being read together as a collection. Having said this, each article can stand alone and has links beyond the special issue to the themes and issues in the field of research on TNE more widely.

The special issue begins with a discussion piece which aims to recast our ways of thinking about the discourses of TNE, challenging the conceptual polarities that often circulate in TNE scholarship. Drawing on the ideas of Fairclough and Bourdieu, Djerasimovic suggests a different way of viewing the intercultural dynamics of TNE partnership, developing a perspective which recognises the agency of the host partners in transnational education. This perspective enables a rethinking of the often rigidly conceptualised relationships of power between the exporter and importer institutions.

In the second article in this collection, Trahar presents narratives from Malaysian students and academics and places herself in the context of both these narratives and the Malaysian higher education policy landscape in order to juxtapose the intercultural perspectives of the people involved in TNE. In addition to underlining the complexities and contradictions in the individual positions of people in TNE contexts, Trahar argues that it is crucial to understand the extent to which stated visions or strategies of local and institutional values are borne out in the lived experiences of the individuals who populate internationalised institutions because only in this way can an effective and genuine intercultural partnership develop.

A detailed focus on practice and professional development is brought to the fore in the third contribution to the special issue as Keevers et al. argue for transnational professional development to be situated in the everyday work of the teaching teams. The article suggests that transnational teams of staff will be able to extend the scope and depth of their practice through interactions with multiple new peers who bring different perspectives to intercultural partnership. It is only in this way that transnational teaching teams can be 'learning-conducive sites' of new transnational pedagogies. This research practises what it preaches in the sense that it is a collaborative joint publication between the home and host institutions.

In the central article of the special issue Keay et al. argue that the concept of the community of practice may illuminate and improve TNE processes through the development of joint enterprise and mutual engagement. This echoes and develops the ideas of Keevers et al. as both articles aim to promote an acceptance of shared responsibility for developing the TNE community. Keay et al. advocate the idea of shared repertoire, which highlights the importance of working collaboratively for the benefit of the quality of both the staff and student experience.

The fifth article of the special issue also models an important form of TNE partnership as Vu and Doyle write together as student and teacher, highlighting the fluid cultural positions taken up by students and staff in TNE. The lens of positioning theory is used to shed light on perceptions of teachers and teaching as students experience the transition from the off-shore to the source university component of a transnational degree programme. The students' narratives underline that positions are not fixed and may alter with

time and context revealing changing assumptions about the challenges involved in crossing cultural and pedagogical borders.

The role of language in TNE is an issue which is implicit in many of the articles of the special issue but it is brought to the fore by the perspective presented by Fabricius in the sixth article. Using data that was part of a large Danish research project focusing on the linguistic and cultural practices of the internationalised university, Fabricius argues that internationalisation is a personal as well as institutional and transnational phenomenon that occurs in the lives and personalities of academics, not simply in the transnational context of the university.

In the seventh and final article of the special issue Hou et al. focus on the stated aims and purposes of higher education, focusing on China with a contextualisation in the UK. It is suggested that distinctions between positions in TNE will become less polarised and in future many countries may act as both suppliers and receivers. Hou et al. note that developments in China underline the fact that TNE is not solely an economic operation. There are strong social and political drivers in China which relate to the role of higher education as a public good aiming for the social and economic development of regions across the country.

Although this special issue focuses on teaching in transnational contexts there are many parallels with local and national teaching contexts. In particular the complex notion of partnership is relevant to many school and university contexts. La Velle (2013) points out that the quality of partnerships between schools and higher education institutions is of global

significance in terms of developing teachers' professionalism. In the English context, partnerships between schools and universities are currently part of a political and ideological conflict, demonstrating that these local partnerships are as culturally complex and contradictory as the transnational partnerships outlined in this special issue. It is hoped that the reader will find many parallels in these transnational examples with positions in their own local and national contexts.

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