

Decolonizing Internationalization

The internationalization projects of higher education are haunted by and, to some extent, replicate the tendencies of the colonizer's model of the world.

Intentions vs. outcomes. Although we use language that signals high-minded ideals – such as 'building connections,' 'enhancing understanding,' and 'fostering global citizenship' – our work is often driven by motivations such as the economic success of our institutions (e.g., global rankings) and our graduates (e.g., employability claims about those who benefit from mobility), and we tend to rely on a mapping of the world that, consciously or subconsciously, reinscribes one-sided and exploitative patterns of the flow of information, knowledge, and other benefits.

What is decolonizing? A decolonizing mode of global engagement takes a critical look at these powerful undertows of exploitation and demands new approaches that acknowledge both historical colonization and contemporary neocolonial projects and begin to dismantle them through tactics such as collaborative and critically informed programming. These tactics are needed both at home and abroad:

Reconciliation. In what ways do our institutions benefit from long histories of oppression and settler colonialism, including genocide of indigenous peoples, internal slavery and trade with external nations that allowed slavery? What efforts have we made to acknowledge fully this legacy and how it continues to drive our decision-making? Who is in the room (who works for and with our institutions)? Who are our outgoing and incoming students, and why are we failing to serve those whom we are failing? Whose businesses benefit from the material and service needs of our programming?

Decolonizing. In what ways do our program's economic, ecological, and cultural 'footprints' follow in the easy treads of colonial and neocolonial relationships? What demands do we place on local residents in order to meet our own educational and institutional objectives? To what extent are all of the local residents involved (institutional partners, business partners, public actors, people who live in study sites, etc.) involved in shaping our programs that take place in their communities? Do we see sites (people, buildings, cultural events, etc.) as 'laboratories of learning' or as entities unto themselves? Where are we sending students, and where are we receiving them from, and why are we failing with other locations? How might our ESL/ELL programs fail to recognize and encourage valuable linguistic diversity? What is to be done about privileged monolinguals in the US, the UK, and elsewhere?

Sustainability. Given that those with the most power have traditionally used a vastly disproportionate percentage of the world's finite resources, in what ways do our internationalization projects either exacerbate or begin to address this problem? If mobility is a main objective, what is to be done about the environmental impact of air travel? How do the lifestyle demands of privileged travelers both affect the environment and magnify existing

inequities in some of our programming sites? Can our objective of expanding mobility ever be sustainable?

Let's map out some of the key areas that are problematic and discuss some possible approaches that might begin to mitigate the neocolonial, settler-colonial, and unsustainable tendencies of our work.

Suggested Readings

Chow, R. (1993). *Writing diaspora: Tactics of intervention in contemporary cultural studies*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.

Foster, S.W. (1982). [The exotic as a symbolic system](#). *Dialectical Anthropology*, 7, 21-30.

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Paris, D. & Alim, H.S. (Eds.) (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Sharpe, E.K. (2015). [Colonialist tendencies in education abroad](#). *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 27(2), 227-234.

Smith, D.S. (2017). [Reconciliation and the academy: Experience at a small institution in northern Manitoba](#). *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 183, 61-81.