

Towards sustainable internationalisation of higher education

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Abstract This article engages with the question: what does the internationalisation of higher education in times of globalisation sustain and what should it sustain? We first consider, through literature on globalisation and Stier's (Glob Soc Educ 2(1):1–28, 2004) work, limitations of currently prevalent perspectives on internationalisation in economic terms. We then offer a brief review of how sustainability is understood in higher education and articulate our own notion of educational sustainability. We flesh it out in reference to data reflecting ideas and activities constitutive of daily practices of internationalisation in one faculty of education. We contend that our sustainability frame of reference can expand opportunities to think critically about internationalisation and, more importantly, offers opportunities to see internationalisation in its complexity, and to re-think and reorder practices that are not in alignment with educational goals and values.

Keywords Internationalisation of higher education · Educational sustainability · Globalisation and higher education · Sustainable internationalisation

Introduction

Universities across the globe are participating more and more in the global/local flows of people, research, and capital, inflected by market relations that rank knowledge and status in the increasingly competitive “edubusiness” (Luke 2010) of higher education in times of globalisation. In Canada, national studies maintain a rhetoric of “strong academic rationales” (AUCC 2007, 5), such as developing intercultural competencies and global citizenship, as governing internationalisation in Canadian higher education institutions, while government policies view international education as a key driver in economic development (DFAIT Report 2012). In reviewing the critique of economic internationalisation,

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particularly in Canada, we realised that there has been no systematic work within Faculties of Education in relation to the *sustainability* of internationalisation and its educational ecologies of practice. We had an opportunity to explore and theorise connections between internationalisation and sustainability in a research project that undertook to conceptualise sustainability in *educational* terms (de Castell et al. 2011). This paper represents one aspect of our exploratory study on ‘sustainable internationalisation.’

Sustainable educational ecologies (SEE) was a research initiative based in a faculty of education at a Western Canadian university that sought to develop, research, and build theoretical and practical measures related to the concept of *educational* sustainability. As asserted by de Castell et al. (2011), “Most significant by its omission in ... “environmental” and “sustainability” inventories is any serious attention to the *educational* ecologies that must be sustained for the realization of worthwhile learning outcomes” (2). Thus, members of the SEE research team were interested in going beyond popular understandings of sustainability as conservation, resource management, and environmental education towards a framework that would allow us to consider the sustainability of *educational* domains (de Castell et al. 2011). This framework attempted to address the need for a sustainability analysis of the ideas and activities constitutive of daily institutional practices of teaching, learning, program and curriculum development. For this purpose, six teams investigated the following themes: Sustainable Internationalisation, Learning in Depth, Plants and People, Educational Delivery Systems, Place-based Pedagogy, and Learning Environments Research. We, the authors, set out to develop an approach that could assess the educational sustainability of internationalisation in relation to its human, institutional, and educational costs and benefits. Our interest was in bringing the experiences of participants in the internationalisation process, i.e. faculty, staff, students, and administrators, to guide us in fleshing out the notion of sustainable internationalisation.

If we apply the commonsense rules of *environmental* sustainability and energy consumption to international education, by every definition international education is unsustainable in terms of the academic mobility (and energy consumption) it promotes. And if, as we shall argue below, internationalisation is largely adopted as a measure to support the economic sustainability of the institution, we are left with a very limited notion of sustainability and a rather gloomy picture of internationalisation. We thus asked, what is internationalisation sustaining and why, and what should internationalisation sustain? What could viewing internationalisation through a sustainability perspective contribute to understanding practices and policies that guide internationalisation?

This paper provides some of the highlights of our investigation to answer some of these questions. We will first consider briefly, through some globalisation literature, the limitations of addressing internationalisation predominantly in economic terms. We next give a brief review of how sustainability is understood, specifically in higher education, primarily as a reference point to then articulate our own notion of sustainability in relation to educational practices in internationalisation as our focus is not on education for sustainable development. We draw on Stier’s (2004) critique of ideologies driving internationalisation in order to assess current internationalisation processes and practices. We contend that our sustainability frame of reference can expand opportunities to think critically about internationalisation and, more importantly, offers opportunities to see internationalisation in its complexity, and to re-think and re-order practices that are not in alignment with educational goals and values. We will illustrate the use of this sustainability lens with data from the study carried out as part of the SEE project.

Internationalisation of higher education: the problem of the market

The internationalisation of higher education is considered to be a response to, and even a product of, globalisation (Altbach and Knight 2007; Bhandari and Blumenthal 2011; Knight 2008; Montgomery 2010) resulting in an intensification of the global/local flows of people, ideas, and capital in higher education institutions, particularly in wealthier countries. Internationalisation has become a key institutional strategy for Canadian universities (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada 2007) seeking to brand and position themselves in a competitive market. The growth of transnational production characteristic of economic globalisation has precipitated intensification of the linkages between the purposes of economic globalisation ('the market') and higher education, supporting the argument that the economic dimensions of globalisation are leaving their mark on education (e.g. Bartell 2003; Burbules and Torres 2000; Edwards and Usher 2000; Häyriinen-Alestalo and Peltola 2006; Knight 2011; Marginson 2004, 2006; Montgomery 2010; Rizvi and Lingard 2000; Smith 2006; Unterhalter and Carpentier 2010). Many of the scholars above have argued that universities are becoming more corporate and less collegial, more consumer and market oriented and that higher education is becoming more aligned with serving economic globalisation rather than subverting or countering its more harmful impacts. This predominant focus on the *economic* sustainability of higher educational institutions, often hidden behind the rhetoric of maintaining and even encouraging academic and educational goals and purposes, has led, in our view, to some unintended consequences such as limited attention to the values of learning and teaching in international and intercultural contexts (Beck 2009; Beck et al. 2007). Hence, our rationale for employing sustainability as an organising principle emerges from our observations of current practices of internationalisation that have more to do with the commodification of education than with ethical principles and educational values. We now turn to the notion of sustainability.

What does sustainability mean?

The term "sustainability" commonly refers to environmental, social, and economic sustainable development first defined in the Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1983) notably with ethical commitments to equity being part of the notion from the beginning. In the Brundtland Report sustainable development can be seen as a two-pronged effort that seeks to preserve or improve the natural environment, and at the same time provide means to improve the conditions of the socially and economically disadvantaged in the world. An assumption within such a conceptualisation is the preservation or renewal of a set of resources on which social and economic development rests. A further assumption is that sustainability must be understood as a developmental process. Many theoretical formulations and applications of sustainability have been developed since with different emphases (Gibson 2001). Indigenous peoples have argued for cultural diversity as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, and the inextricable link between biological and cultural diversities (Bates et al. 2009). Their philosophies are based on respectful human and environmental interactions and the establishment of mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationships. Similarly, there is a growing trend among researchers to consider sustainability as a continuing process that requires recognition of context, histories, and relational elements, rather than as a set goal to be achieved (Faber et al. 2005; Wals 2012). We align ourselves to this notion of

sustainability as a process that is characterised by a complex web of relationships in interdependent and dynamic interactions.

More recently, in education, with the UN identifying the period 2005–2014 as the UN Decade for Education for sustainable development (ESD), ESD has sought “to enable citizens around the globe to deal with the complexities, controversies and inequities arising from issues relevant to the environment, natural heritage, culture, society and economy” (Wals 2012, 12). ESD aims to integrate values, activities, and principles inherently linked to SD in all forms of education and help realize a change in attitudes and behaviours to ensure a more sustainable future in social, environmental, and economic terms (Wals 2012, 10). Given that the focus of our theorising is not on education and learning within the context of sustainable development, but rather on what the internationalisation of higher education should sustain given the onslaught of economic globalisation on institutions of higher education, we have only borrowed from certain perspectives around sustainability (especially the focus on relational aspects of sustainability) and do not claim to engage with all aspects inherent in the concept of sustainable development (i.e., environment, society, and economics). We seek to understand how sustainability can be conceptualised in educational terms as a contribution towards a principled internationalisation of higher education.

Sustainability and higher education

Wals and Jickling (2002), who discuss sustainability specifically in the context of higher education, reiterate that the term is often problematic in that it has multiple meanings. More recently, Wals’ (2012) report on the UN Decade of ESD highlights current developments in higher education in relation to ESD. Wals observes that more universities engage in the challenge to reorient teaching, learning, and research activities to develop new mental models and competencies, which could contribute to sustainable living (48). At the same time Wals notes that within higher education there is a tendency to highlight or prioritise certain pillars of SD without duly exploring the influences and relationships among the environment, economy, and society. As mentioned, however, ESD is not the focus of our attention, but rather the notion of sustainability itself.

With reference to research on sustainable *education*, which we understand as related to, but different from education *for* sustainability, faculties of education have tended to focus on teacher-student ratios, physical environment, and the quality of teacher education. Much of this research has been conducted through measuring student achievement (van der Wende and Westerheijden 2001 cited in Nilson et al. 2011) and attention to the social factors of sustainability in education is more recent. More specifically, there seems to be little sustainability research that focuses on the experiences of those who learn, teach, and work in educational environments and “[a]ttempts to privilege the element of ‘sustainable relationships’ at an individual level ... are few” (de Castell et al. 2011, 5). As Sackney (2007) asserts, “We can no longer operate from a mechanistic model where students are viewed as deficits. Instead, we need to view the educational system fundamentally as an ecological place of and for connections, relationships, reciprocity, and mutuality” (cited in Nilson, Paterson and Menzies 2011, 2).

How we approach “sustainability”

Our approach is very much aligned to scholarship that favours ‘people’ factors, or the primacy of relationships and mutuality as being central to an understanding of

sustainability in settings of teaching and learning. Thus, as will be elaborated upon in this section, ecological principles of interconnectedness and dynamic interactions which involve the recognition of power relations and diverse understandings among students, faculty, and staff epitomise the approach towards sustainable internationalisation in higher education that we call for in this exploration.

As mentioned, sustainability has for long been understood as maintaining practices and processes that should be sustained. However, our approach does *not* assume that internationalisation, particularly as rationalised by economic or political imperatives, is a necessary good that must be sustained. According to Wals and Jickling (2002) sustainability can be viewed in multiple ways: as a dynamic concept, as a normative, ethical and moral imperative, and as a heuristic. We use it as a heuristic since our focus is not on what education for sustainable development entails, but rather on how viewing internationalisation through a prism of sustainability can enlighten us in understanding practices and directions of internationalisation. Two aspects of Wals and Jackling's views on sustainability within educational contexts are especially pertinent to our conceptualisation of the term here: namely, that sustainability requires a foundational appreciation of holistic principles and respect for differences. To further theorise sustainability in educational relationships within internationalisation, we refer to literature from the recent proliferation of ecological perspectives in language education, especially in the work of Kramsch (2002), MacPherson (2011) and van Lier (2004). Kramsch (2002) discusses the importance of relationality in language learning contexts. She takes an ecological approach to education because such an approach underscores the "complex, nonlinear and relational" (10) character of education. Relationality, she argues, involves interrelationships among hierarchical organizational levels, from individuals to professional communities and institutional structures. We adopt her notion of relationality as we believe it is a useful conceptual lens to see the complex nature of internationalisation, involving different agents in education enmeshed in an interconnected interdependent, sociocultural, political, and globalising context.

MacPherson (2011) discusses the impact of education on bio-linguistic and cultural sustainability, and argues that

public discourse is dominated by the question of material needs and technological solutions. What are overlooked are the deep interconnections between human material and cultural life and the corresponding crisis posed to the survival of languages and cultures, including knowledge, ways of life, and relationships (6).

Her work, drawing on indigenous understandings of sustainability, supports the development of our sustainability lens.

van Lier (2004) discusses ecology as the field that examines "the totality of relationships of an organism with all other organisms with which it comes in contact" (3) and is interested in the relations of possibility afforded by an environment to a person in tune with it. Useful for our work is his distinction between shallow and deep ecology: shallow ecology refers to attempts to "fix" an environment under stress whereas deep ecology adds a critical perspective, a sense of vision, and an overt ideology of transformation. van Lier suggests that a critical perspective "requires a constant evaluation of what is actually happening ... with what we think (in line with our principles, moral values and so on) *should* be happening" (6). This guides us in particular in what we discuss briefly below as unsustainable practices of internationalisation, and expand on elsewhere (Beck et al. 2011). Notions of power come to the fore within this perspective and critical ecology involves advocacy for sustaining diverse knowledges for future generations.

Analyses of power and diversity/difference as discussed in postcolonial thought also inform our work. Bhabha (1990, 1994) argues that there is a superficial celebration of diversity in the context of multicultural societies, where cultural differences are only understood in relation to dominant frameworks, thus reinstating them. Bhabha observes a *creation* of cultural diversity at the same time as *containment* of cultural differences. As such, his work allows us to understand how the goals of internationalisation, which supposedly value the creation of diversity, might be undermined by ways in which that diversity is contained.

Drawing on the scholarship outlined above, we use the term ‘sustainability’ in our research to denote possibilities for complex holistic interconnections and relations between students, teachers, and curriculum within which power relations are recognised and difference valued. When and if realised, these holistic interconnections represent a dialogic relationality between variously situated actors and educational resources within a given setting. The sustainability lens that we propose for analysing internationalisation in higher education espouses an ecological perspective on the concept of sustainability that draws attention to the actual experiences of human beings involved in internationalisation, the complex relations and potential mutual effects they may have on each other, as well as the dynamic nature of all these processes and interactions.

Ideologies of internationalisation

Stier’s (2004) framework for critiquing the ideologies that currently underpin internationalisation in higher education is useful for revealing some of these *relationships*, including issues of power and equity. Stier (2004) identifies three ideological assumptions behind the internationalisation of education, namely: idealism, instrumentalism and educationalism. Idealism refers to the notion that internationalisation is “good *per se*” (88, emphasis author’s) and that the outcome of internationalisation of education will *necessarily* be a more democratic and equitable world. Stier (2004) problematises the unconditional and uncritical acceptance of internationalisation of education as *inherently good*. Another critique of idealism is an ethnocentric view where internationalisation of education is good *only* according to the norms and standards of wealthy nations. Instrumentalism champions the perspective that education is a means towards other ends. Some of these ends include enriching the labour force and consolidating the economic prowess of a country, and maximising revenue for educational institutions. With regards to instrumentalism, Stier warns that it may result in exploitative behaviour from the wealthier countries that attract staff and students from the less wealthy countries for their own financial benefits and the economic sustainability of their own educational institutions. Lastly, educationalism promotes internationalisation of education for the purpose of deeper learning and human development. Educationalism is presented as the most equitable ideal for internationalisation but should not be endorsed uncritically. Stier cautions that in practice educationalism may result in “academicentrism” where “our” ways of teaching and learning are viewed as superior and wealthy nations as in a better position to offer solutions of structural and global problems at the expense of less developed countries.

Despite Stier’s critiques of ideologies of internationalisation, however, the assumption that internationalisation *must go on* is not questioned. Ultimately, the outcome of this position, we argue, tends to result in a one-size-fits-all model of higher education that potentially levels cultural diversity and undermines student learning and faculty engagement. If internationalisation is to go on, the question we address here is why should it go on, and how can it go on? We attempt to engage these questions by developing and

applying an educational sustainability lens to the internationalisation of higher education as experienced by faculty, students, and staff in their daily activities in one faculty of education. Stier's work helps clarify how internationalisation is currently approached in higher education in wealthy countries. Combining this critique with an ecological understanding of sustainability allows us to highlight what internationalisation of higher education could and should be in contrast to what it is overwhelmingly at present.

Moving towards sustainable internationalisation: an illustration

As noted above, we will attempt to illustrate how the view of sustainability discussed here as linked to a case study that focuses on the everyday experiences of those involved in internationalisation could advance us theoretically in arguing for what is worth sustaining in internationalisation activities.

A brief note on methodology

The setting for this study was a Western Canadian university that has been actively involved in international activities for the past nineteen years, and is explicitly internationally oriented in its identity. Within the faculty that was studied, international education is a key program area that offers various educational opportunities for domestic and international students in undergraduate and graduate programs, pre and in-service teacher education programs.

This study used a combination of two methods: an online survey, including forced choice (check-list, yes/no, ranking, and Likert scale) questions, as well as open-ended questions, and semi-structured qualitative interviews, to explore internationalisation within the faculty. Survey participants included 125 students (representing 5 % of students enrolled), 34 faculty members (42 % of the faculty), 11 staff members (19 % of staff), and one administrator (13 %). Among the 13 interview participants, there were seven students (four graduate and three undergraduate), four faculty members and two staff members.

We first revised and re-administered an instrument used by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) to survey the status of internationalisation of higher education in Canada. Given the fact that the findings of AUCC studies have been influential in justifying support for internationalisation activities and claims in Canadian higher education institutions, we wanted to have a point of comparison and reference to our own institution. We expanded the participant population from administrators to include students, faculty, and staff. We sought to collect data on participants' perceptions and experiences relating to the meaning of internationalisation, rationales and outcomes of internationalisation, and teaching and learning. In our qualitative interviews, we covered topics such as curriculum, pedagogy, personal/social outcomes, decision-making, participation in international activities, value of credentials and so on.

Analysis of the survey data was descriptive in nature, involving the calculation of frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data from the survey were organised according to thematic categories and frequencies were calculated. Common themes, as well as unique and insightful responses were identified. Interview data, subsequent to member checking, were coded according to emergent themes, as well as to generative and unique insights.

Informed by these rich and varied data sets, we discuss below some of our findings, as they help us flesh out the concept of sustainable internationalisation and illuminate the usefulness of considering internationalisation through the prism of educational

sustainability. Relying on Stier's analysis of ideologies driving and enacted in internationalisation, we first discuss briefly the main themes of what we call unsustainable practices reported by participants [elaborated upon elsewhere (Beck et al. 2011)], who identified harmful impacts of the internationalisation of education that were more in service of economic globalisation. We then turn to the practices that lead to more educational sustainability, as defined above.

Themes of unsustainability

Behind the institutional rhetoric of academic rationales for internationalisation, our participants identified aspects of internationalisation that undermined educational purposes. Drawing on Stier's account of ideologies of internationalisation and using the lens of educational sustainability, we were able to make more visible those aspects that contributed to unsustainable practices. We categorise these practices into three main themes: commercialisation, lack of awareness or understanding of internationalisation, and containment of diversity.

The first theme, commercialisation, was linked to the apparent coupling of internationalisation practices with what Stier calls economic/instrumental rationales that lead to the marketisation of educational activities and practices. The survey data appeared to confirm participants' preference for an academic rationale for internationalisation. For example, over 65 % of surveyed faculty endorsed as a primary rationale for internationalisation the preparation of graduates who are "internationally knowledgeable and intercultural sensitive". Yet, 17 % of faculty associated the term "internationalisation" with producing income for the institution. Moreover, participants' comments from the survey raised a serious challenge to whether the ideal of developing intercultural and international competence was being realised. Faculty members characterised internationalisation practices as "very uni-directional", where "marketing is a priority" together with "getting bums on seats." One comment referred to a study abroad program that seemed to be "mistaking cultural experience immersion" with a kind of "educational tourism" (Survey, Faculty). There were explicit comments across participants' surveys directly critiquing what some saw as irrefutable evidence of a corporatising university as in this example from a student survey: "to me, 'internationalization of education' means the globalization of a publicly funded educational institution.... It ...means 'a substantial source of revenue' for our increasingly privatized university system".

The second theme that emerged was a lack of awareness and understanding of processes and practices of international education among many students, faculty, and staff. For example, 32 % of faculty, 46 % of students and 17 % of staff did not provide a response as to what internationalisation of education means to them and many study participants who shared their understanding qualified it with comments like "I am not sure", "sounds like", "it's a guess", etc. This lack of understanding was coupled with the blind acceptance of internationalisation as a valuable educational currency to be perpetuated or sustained (or what Stier would term idealistic ideology of internationalisation as inherently good) as 96 % of surveyed faculty and 82 % of students were of the opinion that their faculty of education should endorse internationalisation in its policies and plans.

The third set of problematic practices we were able to discern referred to the containment of difference, the possible erosion of cultural diversity, and the inequitable relations of power that seemed to be operating within the context of internationalisation, reminiscent of Stier's conceptualisation of academicism in educationalism as evident in the ironic comment of a faculty member: "We know best ... get on board. You know

nothing ... get on board". Findings indicated that, rather than supporting diverse knowledges and traditions within programs and courses, too often the focus remained on North American content. International students were marginalised and their knowledges devalued; for example, a faculty member commented: "We just never make use of the resources those [international] students bring". Participants spoke of how the learning context remained monolingual and mono-cultural, and those with English as an additional language faced stigmatisation. In addition, student mobility and exchange programs for domestic students did not always result in increased cultural understanding, but rather, in some cases, in a reinforcement of stereotypes and over-simplified, essentialist views of cultures.

All these themes speak to a reductionist, unidirectional and binary focus in practices of internationalisation and thus we perceive them as unsustainable. They serve as a backdrop for our discussion in the next section of what we perceive as practices in internationalisation which could guide us in answering the question: what should the internationalisation of higher education sustain?

Sustainability themes: relations of possibility in existing and desired practices

As discussed above in connection to Stier's theorising, the sustainability lens that we employed made visible some of the harmful and unsustainable internationalisation practices in the faculty, the ones that, in our view, should not be allowed to go on. More importantly, as discussed below, our data revealed as well possibilities in internationalisation practices that could be considered sustainable in reference to teaching, learning, or curriculum.

Our sustainability perspective, drawing on van Lier's (2004) insistence on engaging in critical ecological work, requires that we ask the following question in order to counter the harms imposed by unsustainable practices: What "relations of possibility" or affordances are currently being enacted and what affordances *should be* there in practices of internationalisation in this context?

"Relations of possibility" direct us to think about positionality, relationality, and salient discourses in practices of internationalisation. While available possibilities are limited by conditions of space/place/history, they are not foreclosed. Attending to ruptures and gaps, liminal spaces and unsettling moments within dominant discourses opens up directions and options for unforeseen, generative trajectories into sustainable practices of internationalisation. We will discuss some current affordances in pockets of activities as well as what some of our study participants shared as their hopes and visions for a future of internationalisation that could be termed sustainable. These point to intangible but valued benefits in human relations and interconnections, and the material effects of certain practices, viewpoints, and attitudes on these relationships. They serve to illustrate the importance of viewing internationalisation through a sustainability lens. Keeping *educational* sustainability as our focus, two main themes emerging through our prism seem to summarise the relations of possibility in our data as aspects of what should go on in internationalisation: valuing diversity and mutuality/reciprocity.

Valuing diversity

Staff, students and faculty mentioned instances when diverse knowledges were valued, in classrooms, and in program design and curriculum. We see these as useful signposts to guide us in the direction of educational sustainability in internationalisation.

One pocket of activity was identified in a unique program designed to prepare internationally educated teachers for certification as teachers in British Columbia. Students attending this program are recent immigrants to Canada with ample experience teaching elsewhere. A staff person noted how instructors modify their curriculum in acknowledgement of the diverse experiences the students bring, and in an attempt to support these students:

The people that are working with [the internationally educated teachers] really try to understand their students ... I think our faculty gets a huge amount of credit for ... saying, “No, we are not going to do the cookie cutter thing ‘cause this isn’t working.” (Interview, Staff 1)

The transformation of the teacher education curriculum resulting from this engagement of different agents enmeshed in an interdependent educational endeavour can be seen as an example of valuing the resources international students bring and opening up to diversity while negotiating curriculum with more attention to global/local interactions. Such an approach counters instrumentalist and educationalist ideologies of doing internationalisation.

Another example of valuing diversity is evident in a faculty member’s suggestion for creative ways to acknowledge the multilingual resources that diverse students bring into our classrooms illustrating the agency of instructors in creating affordances for viewing “diversity as *knowledge*” (MacPherson 2011, 12, italics in original).

Every time I teach ... the undergraduate course [about ESL] ... [I would say], “What are the linguistic resources in this classroom?” I ... do ... the 5 min of a language lesson ... so that they see classmates as knowing [for example] Mandarin. (Interview, Faculty 4)

This valuing of diverse knowledges was also reflected in a student’s appreciation of engaging in academic settings with the diverse experiences that international students bring to the institution:

[In my PhD course] there was a student from Jordan ... It was so interesting hearing her perspective ... she had very different philosophies ...it makes it much more heterogeneous and benefits the university. (Interview, Student 7)

A sustainability lens allowed us to see instances pointing to what needs to be taken into consideration in curriculum and instructional practices. Several quotes offer practical examples of how to incorporate diverse knowledge or experiences in daily educational activities and thus engage in holistic interconnections (Kramsch 2002) in the internationalised university. Some examples are “acknowledg[ing] our students’ international background in general and infusing the teaching with a variety of teaching methods that are not ... traditional within the Canadian educational system” (Interview, Staff 2), or “modifying your curriculum so that ... the scholarship of the world is available to students [and where] on every reading list in every course in the [faculty] there [are] non-Western/European authors” (Interview, Faculty 4). These examples speak to how currently prevalent ideologies of internationalisation can be subverted in daily practices.

Our case study illustrates as well that equally important avenues for reducing a possible disconnect between teachers, students, and the curriculum would be to think outside the box, to be creative in engaging in collaborative curriculum with students from diverse backgrounds, as well as to be caring, as suggested below:

I haven't done this, but I would really like to ... [try] to get multilingual students to look in educational literature in their own language and bring that to class. (Interview, Faculty 4)

I think ... taking care of the international students locally so having enough resource[s] for them ... is ... important. (Interview, Student 2)

In other words, this case study offers examples of how a sustainability lens can be used and is useful for *noticing* curriculum/pedagogy. It suggests a vision of sustainability that entails a dialogic relationality between students, teachers, and curriculum (Kramsch 2002), as well as knowledge-building that reflects respect for and attendance to complex and holistic global/local interactions and interconnections (van Lier 2004).

Another example of what the valuing of diversity entails refers to expanding knowledge of different educational traditions. More specifically, of particular significance in our relations could be the conscious effort to expand our knowledge of “the Other” (Bhabha 1994), as attested in the following quote: “We have all these Chinese students go through our graduate programs and is there any increased understanding of Confucian ideas about education in the Faculty generally? No.” (Interview, Faculty 4). Such knowledge expansion can be fruitful in countering potential academicism in our practices where Western ideas dominate extensively the curriculum.

The examples above of the actual subjective experiences of internationalisation of students, staff, and faculty highlight relationships and power dynamics that they have been enmeshed in, as well as the possibilities that a sustainability frame of reference opens up for recognising the enormous benefits of valuing diversity within contexts of internationalisation.

Reciprocity/mutuality

Insights in our data could be very helpful in leading the way towards a more holistic and thus sustainable approach to internationalisation in contrast to its blind acceptance. Often, visions for intercultural/international education in the words of our study participants are based on principles of mutuality, inclusiveness, reciprocity, and/or mindfulness—directly resisting or countering an instrumental rationale (Stier 2004) and potentially inequitable power relations. Survey comments and interview data spoke to these visions:

[Internationalisation] should be done differently than the money-grab it seems to be. I have a recurring nightmare that we institutionalize procedures whereby we send a stream of privileged White men to Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. I would like for our [faculty] to challenge existing paradigms of internationalisation—develop creative and transgressive strategies that benefit all students and faculty involved (e.g. at host and visiting institutions) as well as the local communities in which these exchanges occur. (Survey, Faculty)

[Internationalisation is] more about respect than money ... It must be a genuine desire on the part of all of us to learn about ourselves and our neighbours and to widen our perspectives. (Interview, Student 7)

Thus, our data demonstrated powerful, even if not very common, examples of awareness of the need for mutual engagement that is respectful and collaborative. Such awareness is a useful signpost in moving beyond economic imperatives towards equitable reciprocal relations in internationalisation activities. One faculty member spoke to the importance of

not imposing curriculum or pedagogy within a project in South East Asia, but rather “allowing people in different cultures to communicate and learn from each other in a low pressure environment—[which] will foster ... more sustainable changes in beliefs about best educational practice” (Survey, Faculty).

Discussing a collaborative project with an African university, a student showed appreciation that

[I]t wasn't a one-way [interaction] where they came here to gather expertise from us, but they brought expertise. I think that it is critical that we need to respect the knowledge and skills that other countries and other cultures bring to the picture. (Interview, Student 7)

This highlights the importance of perceiving internationalisation as a partnership and not a one-way flow of expertise. Similarly, an undergraduate student participating in a field school

... felt very humbled [in Thailand]. I had never been international before so it was fantastic ... not necessarily to go and like ‘Oh, I have something to give you.’ It was just a learning experience. (Interview, Student 6).

As evidenced above, subverting what seem to have become naturalised relations of power, authority, and expertise between the West and the rest of the world guide the thoughts and actions of some members of this faculty. Such actions, representing the potential of dynamic relations of power, exist in opposition to the “academiccentrism” that Stier (2004) discusses which often involves “educated and enlightened people” from the West offering ‘solutions’ to the ‘problems’ of ‘less developed’ countries. All these quotes speak to possibilities that may go beyond containment of cultural difference (Bhabha 1990) in contexts of internationalisation.

Based on our data of subjective experiences of internationalisation we see the ability to listen with reciprocity in mind as an important first step towards countering unequal power relations in the internationalised university:

The biggest portion of teaching is all about listening, respecting, appreciating and providing opportunity And I think with international work it is very much like that. We have to be still, quiet, listen, watch, absorb, and then find the answer for what would actually be productive in terms of what we have to offer. (Interview, Faculty 1)

As the faculty member acknowledges above, it is necessary to be still and absorb as a first step as we engage in international work for it to be meaningful and productive. Likewise, as another faculty member points out, attending to the totality of relationships we develop and sustain is essential in international work.

A more ethical approach [to internationalisation] would be how much of a long-term relationship are we invested in? ... [And] being responsive to the needs that are there [in the local community] ... [Y]ou really need to pay attention to the basis of our relationships ... There is a reciprocity that needs to occur ... If we value internationalisation ... [we need to] hear in ways that reflect a consciousness and not just a slogan. (Interview, Faculty 2)

Reciprocity, as envisioned here, entails respect and responsibility for the other in attempting to understand histories and local contexts and striving for equitable power dynamics.

Overall, it seems that respectfully acknowledging the other and mutuality are powerful strategies to enact an educationally sustainable internationalisation. As these data suggest, analysing experiences of internationalisation through a sustainability lens allows one to begin to pinpoint aspects of what an educational system aiming to be “an ecological place of and for connections, relationships, reciprocity, and mutuality” (Sackney qtd. in Nilsson et al. 2011, 2) might entail.

Concluding remarks

The data discussed above illustrate some ways in which the internationalisation of higher education *could* be sustainable in nature. We suggest that viewing internationalisation through an educational sustainability lens offers expanded ways of understanding (1) relations, (2) discourses, and (3) current contexts of higher education in global times. The data also show ways to recognize and counter current ideologies driving internationalisation identified by Stier (2004): blind acceptance of internationalisation, economic imperatives for internationalisation, the ‘benign’ ideology of ‘educationalism’.

In line with an educational sustainability position, this case study illustrated relations of possibilities that speak to the importance of mutuality and relationality in valuing diversity. More specifically, relationality within internationalisation needs to be creative/non-linear/non-reductionistic/dialogical by inviting *reciprocity*, allowing diversity to emerge, giving voice to different perspectives, and engaging meaningfully with both “here and there” through attentive listening. Only then can a deep ecological stance, entailing transformation of power relations, become a real possibility.

When it is at its most powerful, international work can enhance all of us in different ways ... we each bring our strengths to that collaborative table but ... because our political/social/cultural contexts are so unique, the things we draw on and gain from those relationships are always amplified in ways that are unpredictable. (Interview, Faculty 2)

The above quote from a faculty member speaks eloquently about the unpredictable gains of internationalisation if it is practiced dialogically and ethically. This kind of sustainable internationalisation is what we should be aiming for because,

We have a moral obligation ... as an educational institution and as an academic and scholarly space, to model the kind of collaborative ... and creative thinking that can help us deal with some of the issues that are of relevance to the world beyond our own sphere. (Interview, Faculty 2)

One of our moral obligations is to be vigilant towards sustaining the diversity of human life on our planet. As MacPherson (2011) warns us, cultural and linguistic diversity “are of evolutionary and ecological significance” (9) and thus it is important for higher education in this era of globalisation to engage in internationalisation activities that do not reduce the world to a marketplace, but rather engage head on with the “massive diversity collapse currently underway” (245).

A sustainability perspective offers an entry point to and identification of actions that need to be taken in order to move towards a more ethical internationalisation within universities and points to the need to emphasise the role of research in guiding internationalisation. One question that we suggest needs to guide internationalisation activities is: what is it that is being sustained when we internationalise higher education?

In addition to interrogating how internationalisation is understood, it is important to expand in educational settings on theorising ‘sustainability’ of educational activities and not only education for sustainability. As suggested in this article, we view ecological perspectives as especially valuable in drawing attention to the “complex, nonlinear and relational” character (Kramsch 2002, 10) of education. In addition, they emphasise the dynamic interaction of contexts and people in ways similar to the interplay “between parts of a living organism” (3) and take into account the totality of relationships a learner enters into with all aspects of his/her environment. Thus, ecological perspectives offer a ‘relational way of seeing’ enabling us to account for phenomena that might otherwise go unnoticed in situations of teaching and learning. Viewed through this lens, individuals, professional communities, and larger institutions involved in processes and practices of internationalisation are all parts of a living organism intertwined in socio-cultural, economic and political relations affected by globalisation. Enactments of internationalisation must be viewed through an ethical and moral lens (Wals and Jickling 2002) with an awareness of the power relations in which international and intercultural relations are enmeshed. Yet we need to be constantly mindful that “it is easier to identify unsustainable activities than to imagine and prescribe those deemed sustainable. What is sustainable emerges with living” (MacPherson 2011, 262). We offer this educational sustainability lens as a tool for thinking about how to foster dynamic, ethical practices of internationalisation in which all participants can flourish. Sustainability, as linked to ecological frames of reference, provides an opportunity to explore internationalisation holistically in its complexity (Kramsch 2002; van Lier 2004) and with a sense of respect for and protection of diversity as a fundamental staple to sustain life (MacPherson 2011).

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