Introduction: Critical Engagements with the Internationalization of Higher Education

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For the academic with a taste for adventure, an insatiable desire to know and experience a wide range of exotic ‘others’, a willingness to board the entrepreneurial bandwagon, a hankering after airport departure lounges, and an immunity to the effects of long term exposure to radiation at 10,000 metres above sea level, the internationalization of higher education is an enticing and intoxicating cocktail of possibilities. From teaching intensive residential schools off-shore in the ‘glitz and glamour’ of Hong Kong, to educational consultancies in remote Kingdoms ‘lost in time’, to the mad cap intellectual menagerie of massive academic conferences in Montréal, to the exquisite pleasure of witnessing the graduation of one’s on-shore international students, the internationalization of higher education appears to provide increasing opportunities for academics to become global travellers, makers of difference, effectors of personal change, and facilitators of social progress. Indeed, if some programs are to be believed, it provides elusive opportunities to be peddlers of poverty alleviation practices and dispensers of sustainable development. Under internationalization, the world is our oyster, or perhaps, our garden, in which we sow the seeds from the fruits of our academic labours: powerful knowledges, proven (best) practices, and established systems of scholarship, administration and inquiry. Of course, the preceding description is only one reading of the internationalization of higher education, and the main purpose of this volume is to trouble such unproblematized notions and to provide more critical readings and explorations of the process.

Internationalization has been the subject of study and comment in a range of academic fields, including comparative education. The relationship between internationalization and comparative education is both complex and dynamic. For decades, comparative educators have been concerned that the field of comparative education
should contribute to international understanding, peace, and global interconnectedness. Demiashkevich (1931: 45), for example, expressed a desire that the field would contribute to the enhancement of intercultural relations and the sound conduct of international relations, and would contribute to the avoidance of war as nations learned about each other. Kandel (1933: xxv) hoped the field would contribute to a rational internationalism that would enhance “the work and progress of the world”. Similar sentiments have been expressed by Moehlman (1951), Ulich (1954), Schneider (1955), Woody (1955), Paplauskas-Ramunas (1955), and Butts (1973).

As well as debates over the role of comparative education in promoting internationalism, the field of comparative education has at various times tried to differentiate itself from international education. Kandel (1956: 2), for example, argued that comparative education should not be confused with the aim of international education, which seeks to promote a common aim – good-will, friendship, brotherhood, peace and so on – among the peoples of the world. The study of comparative education may have a contribution to make towards this aim by showing where and how it may be implemented but it is not itself international education.

In a similar vein, Bereday (1964: ix-x) argued that because of the unique combination of methods and concepts that comparative education employed, it “cannot simply be a part of history of education or of sociology of education or of international education”, although he did suggest that it could contribute to “international understanding” (Bereday 1964: 9). In a later work, Bereday (1967) suggested that there was some overlap between comparative education and international education. Noah and Eckstein (1969: 185-186) suggested that while the early aims of comparative education such as promoting international brotherhood and cooperation [were] “highly laudable” they were “inadequate bases to sustain a field of study”. Later authors, such as Lawson (1975) and Wilson (1994), also sought to strictly differentiate comparative education from international education. Yet other writers, such as Collings (1956: 126) argued that one of the relevant issues for comparative education was “international cooperation for economic and social development, particularly through technical assistance”. Much of this technical assistance occurred through student exchanges such as the Colombo Plan (Auletta 2001), which are often considered a component of international education. Others argued that international education is a subset of comparative education (see, for example, Fletcher 1974), while Arno’s (1980: 62), in introducing world systems theory into comparative education, argued that such a move restored the international element to comparative education. It could also be argued that Arno’s (1980) introduction of world systems theory into the field of comparative education presaged the later emphasis on globalization. More recently, Rust (2002) has editorialized that articles on international education have a proper place in comparative education.