**Research and pedagogical notes:**

**The Educational Challenges of Imagining the World Differently**

Abstract

In this short article, I present some reflections on my observations of the dynamics, paradoxes, and gaps in academic discussions in the area of international development education, especially in initiatives related to international experiential service learning and global citizenship education. I focus on the difficulties of starting important conversations about social historical processes that systemically reproduce material, discursive and political inequalities and that expose the complicity of people in Canada in the reproduction of violence in local and global contexts. In the first part, I use the concepts of exceptionalism and coloniality to outline the limitations of an enduring dominant global imaginary largely reproduced, and sometimes contested, in education and development work. In the second part, I discuss key challenges of intelligibility I have faced as an educator and researcher in this field, and offer an example of the complexities of introducing a pedagogical tool to address the problems I have identified. I conclude with questions I believe are important for pushing the boundaries of international development education in Canada.

Key words: exceptionalism; coloniality; development education; complicity

Writing the double review for T*he World Is My Classroom: International learning and Canadian higher education'* and '*Globetrotting or Global Citizenship? The perils and potential of international experiential learning'*, published in this volume, prompted me to write this critical note to further explore educational challenges in international experiential service learning (IESL) and global citizenship education (GCE) based on my practice and research in this field. In many ways the two books reflect the dynamics, paradoxes, and gaps in academic discussions in these areas, and the difficulties of starting important critical conversations about social historical processes that systemically reproduce material, discursive and political inequalities.

One of the patterns I noted in the two reviewed books was that neo-colonialism was recognized as a pathway to be avoided, however analyses of the origins and mechanisms of neo-colonialism and strategies to interrupt it varied widely in depth and rigour. Resonating with tendencies I have observed in the field of international development education, while ethical conundrums were acknowledged, the solutions proposed tended to reproduce ideals of Canadian exceptionalism, often coupled with methodological nationalism, and based on a highly problematic modern/colonial global imaginary. Both Canadian exceptionalism and methodological nationalism present the concept of the modern nation state as a given (and benevolent) category and elevate it to a place beyond critique. These tendencies mobilize (in different ways and degrees) identities that dissociate the creation of the Canadian state and Canadian nationalism from the historical and systemic reproduction of injustices locally and abroad.

In the book 'Exalted subjects' (Thobani 2007), which I highly recommend for those interested in IESL and GCE in Canada, Thobani argues that the master narrative of the nation that prevails in Canada grounds an idealized Canadian identity of citizens who present and see themselves as law-abiding, caring, compassionate and committed to diversity and multiculturalism.  Drawing on the concept of communities of imagination (Anderson 2006), Thobani (2007) poses crucial questions to problematize Canadian nationalism in relation to both local and global imaginaries:

> What were the historical conditions that enabled the emergence and crystallization of these particular qualities? What impact have these articulations of national selfhood had on Native peoples, the original inhabitants of the national territory? How were colonizers, settlers and immigrants, who were the subjects and citizens of other states and societies in the first instance, (re)inscribed as Canadians? What disciplinary and regulatory practices enabled the reproduction of this particular kind of human subject? (5)

Thobani (2007) argues that the historical exaltation and inscription of Canadian subjects has normalized the elevation of these subjects' humanity and rights over and above other groups (both internally and externally) and naturalized a sense of individual moral goodness and organic superiority. She states that the recognition and cultivation of a shared ennobled nationality gives Canadian subjects a sense of worth and belonging, while concealing the social relations in which they are enmeshed and the mechanisms of governance they are subject to. In this sense, exaltation grants both ontological cohesion and coherence through nationality, grounding the sense of human existence in an idealized (and controlled) national identity that locates Canadians in the world and mediates their relationship with it. This idealized identity endows "worthiness in the form of existential capital to even those in the lowest echelons of the national community, to the most despised genders, and to the poorest classes among them." (21)

However, the inherently unstable national body can only be made to look coherent and unified when it is produced against an externalised (local or global) Other, constructed as the inverse image of Canadian exaltedness. Thobani (2007) asserts the image of nobility is upheld through an exaggeration of differences that divides those who fail to live up to the ideals of Canadian exceptionalism in two different camps. The failure of immigrants and refugees is perceived to be reflective of inadequacies of their culture, community or race, while the failure of those considered to be 'the same' are perceived as individual aberrations. This relational process of identity production is necessary for the production of the sense of national superiority and benevolence to be sustained.

The efficacy of the process in Canada, according to Thobani, relies on the concealment of the colonial violence at the core of the national project that also marks the origin of the national subject. In other words, for Canadians to be produced as naturally benevolently superior, the national master narrative necessarily needs to foreclose its own construction as well as the violence it engenders. While Thobani has focused on the implications of this phenomenon on racially exclusionary aspects of Canadian immigration and citizenship legislation in Canada, other scholars, like Heron (2007) and Cook (2008), have examined empirically the implications of exalted Canadian subjectivities and the

concealment of violence in the context of engagements with marginalised populations in international development work. In the context of international development education, adding to a small, but growing body of critical work in this area in Canada, Jefferess (2008; 2012; 2013) has analysed how educational enterprises like "Me to We" also rely on the elision of violence in order to produce exceptional Canadian identities.

Scholars drawing on postcolonial, post-development, decolonial and Indigenous studies have also emphasized that the concealment of historical and systemic violence is a defining feature of the longue durée of colonial modernity (see for example Kapoor 2004; Erickson-Baaz 2005; MacEwan 2009; Escobar 2011; Coulthard 2014). A useful strategy to make this visible has been the use of the concept of 'coloniality' in Latin American decolonial scholarship (Quijano 1999; Mignolo 2000; Maldonado-Torres 2004). Coloniality refers to what is forgotten in exalted accounts of modernity and modern subjectivities.  It highlights that the 'forgetting' of spaciality (expansionist control of lands), epistemic racism (elimination and subjugation of difference), and the geopolitics of knowledge production (epistemic violence) conceals the continuous epistemic, cognitive, structural, economic, cultural and military violences that subsidize modernity itself (Maldonado-Torres 2004). The concept of coloniality brings to the surface the 'darker side of modernity' (Mignolo 2011): the fact that modernity depends on coloniality for its existence, or, as Mignolo (2000) states, the fact that coloniality is "both the hidden face of modernity and the condition of its possibility" (772).

In the context of development studies, Kapoor (2014) argues that the *invention* of international development post-WW2 intensified an 'imperialist amnesia'. Kapoor states that, in the political context of the cold war the construction of an irreproachable West ready to 'aid' an underdeveloped 'Third World' was seen as vital to contain Soviet expansionism (ibid).  In this sense, to justify interventions and continuous exploitation (that benefitted the 'First' world), the 'Third World' was necessarily produced as "backward, irrational, poor, terroristic, weak, exotic, fundamentalist, passive, etc. [so that the West could be produced as] civilized, rational, scientific, rich, strong, secular, active, etc." (1127) (see also Said 1978; Bhabha 1994; Spivak 2004).

However, Kapoor shows that exposing the production of these historical hierarchical dichotomies is not enough to change them because our attachments to these hierarchies are not only cognitive or conscious. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Kapoor (2014) outlines how we are *libidinally bound* to the pleasures of this uneven global imaginary and its by-products (e.g. nationalism, exceptionalism, consumerism, materialism, individualism) as we enjoy the (false) sense of stability, fulfilment and satisfaction that they provide (e.g. the sense of belonging, community, togetherness, prestige, heroism, and pride). Echoing Thobani (2007), Kapoor (2014) reminds us that unconscious desires and (humanitarian) fantasies circumscribe the ways we think and act as modern subjects: we do not necessarily know our vested interests in IESL, global citizenship and/or international development.

If the darker side of modernity, nationalism and development are forgotten in our accounts of local and global belonging, the result is a modern subject who uncritically celebrates the progress and evolution that s/he represents, and who believes and affirms his/her own neutrality and innocence in the face of injustice. This neutral subject will tend to believe that s/he alone can "map the world and draw associations between thinking and space" (Maldonado-Torres 2004, 30) that are valid for all the rest of humanity. Modern subjects tend to imagine justice as a project where their own futurity is prioritized and to prescribe more modernity as a cure for the effects and evidence of coloniality (e.g. the idea that we can shop our way out of poverty illustrated in the Me to We initiative in WMC). In this case, even when violences are acknowledged, they are placed securely in the past, as collateral damage of modernity. This acknowledgement is often used to liberate the future for the heroic entrepreneurship and allegedly un-coercive leadership of "those neutral exceptional subjects who can head humanity towards its imagined destiny" (Inayatullah and Blaney 2012, 170).

The potential equality of the Other as well as the awareness of the dependency on and complicity in their material impoverishment (Spivak 2004) significantly threatens how modern subjects construct their self-image and perceived (pleasurable) entitlements to

intervene in the world as 'change makers' (Kapoor 2014). The irony is that the neutrality and universality at the core of this (Cartesian) subjectivity sustains the illusion of its unlimited capacity to know and apprehend reality, while hiding, precisely, how this capacity is severely limited. Maldonado-Torres (2004) and Sousa Santos (2007) have referred to this limitation as a form of epistemic blindness to ways of thinking and being outside of modern parameters of intelligibility. In this sense, epistemic blindness does not refer to what modern subjects do not imagine, but to what they *cannot* imagine.

Sousa Santos (2007) further explores the workings and implications of epistemic blindness through the metaphor of 'abyssal thinking'. He defines abyssal thinking as a logic that defines social reality as either on 'this side of the abyssal line' or on 'the other side of the abyssal line'. Sousa Santos (2007) explains:

> The division is such that —the other side of the line vanishes as reality becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as non-existent. Nonexistent means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line. To the extent that it prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, non−dialectical absence (2).

The fact that it is extremely difficult to think about human relations beyond (relatively recent) historical constructs like the modern nation state, and the anthropocentric Cartesian modern subject, and to think of international development or global change beyond the expansion of global capitalism (or socialism) illustrate the magnitude of the educational task of imagining other possible worlds.  I turn to my practice as an educator to explore this further.

**Educational challenges**

It is well documented in education that, overwhelmingly, educational initiatives related to global citizenship and international development still divide the world according to a single seamless notion of progress, development and human evolution, where those perceived to be 'heading humanity' see themselves as benevolent global leaders, experts and dispensers of aid, health, rights and education to the rest of the world (see for example Willinsky 1998; Battiste 2005; Spring 2008; Rizvi 2009; Rizvi and Lingard 2009; Andreotti 2006, 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Souza 2011; Ball 2012; Tallon and MacGregor 2014). Despite questions raised by critical scholars in the field, educational institutions across sectors, including supra-national institutions like UNESCO, have adopted the rhetoric of GCE in ways that still reinforce ethnocentric, paternalistic, ahistorical and depoliticized practices based on a single onto-epistemic grammar that naturalizes modern institutions, cognitive frames, structures of being, and economic models.

These practices tend to foreclose analyses of uneven power relations, the geo- and bio-politics of knowledge production and to conceal the complicity of modernity in the systemic reproduction of harm through historical and on-going forms of violence, exploitation, dispossession and destitution mobilized to protect specific interests, as I have described in the previous section. This constitutive disavowal of implication in systemic harm is arguably the greatest challenge of education about international development.  If the educational gap is not one of individual ignorance, but of a socially *sanctioned* ignorance, educational approaches that simply impart the knowledge that is foreclosed will likely be ineffective and create resistance, as Kapoor (2004, 2014) and Tobhani (2007) suggest.

*Intelligibility*

In my practice as an educator and educational researcher in this area, the greatest challenge I face is indeed one of intelligibility. This challenge has two dimensions. The first is a cognitive dimension related to what is legible within an audience's normalized

worldview, especially if this worldview sees itself as neutral, universal, benevolent and unlimited in its capacity to apprehend reality. Communicating dissenting perspectives (e.g. of Indigenous groups and social movements) proposing analyses that implicate the audience in on-going harm becomes a difficult task that requires the pedagogical reduction of complexity and the softening of edges if one wants to be effective in inviting people into conversations where their self-image and world views will likely not be affirmed.

This is often experienced as a type of education that produces 'discomfort' and that provokes different types of resistance, which takes me to the second dimension of the intelligibility challenge concerning affect and attachments. This dimension refers to what is perceived as desirable and what is demanded from the educational process (see for example Pitt and Britzman 2003; Todd 2009). The demands of this dimension get amplified in neoliberal educational contexts where learners are framed as clients seeking self-validation (see Biesta 2009). My attempts to address the two dimensions together have led me to map four audience-orientations of expectations and desires that reflect different levels of willingness to engage with issues in depth. These different audience-orientations illustrate some of the nuances of the challenge of intelligibility in international development education.

The first audience-orientation demands a surface-level overview of the issues that can inspire people to get involved in basic initiatives often related to charity or awareness raising. In the case of IESL and GCE, this means providing a basic rationale for why people should pay attention to these areas. When addressing an audience motivated by the desire to be convinced and inspired, if I want to be legible and effective, I have to use language and symbols that appeal to their worldview and their (instrumental) logic for further involvement in ways that are not perceived to be threatening to their existing investments or self-image. Therefore, there are strict limits to what can be said and problematized, including the extent to which the complexity and depth of issues can be addressed. I describe this orientation as one seeking 'awareness for inspiration'.

The second audience-orientation demands issues to be presented as problems to be solved where the focus should be on 'practical solutions' that can be easily implemented, monitored and evaluated. This is by far the area of most demand in IESL and GCE. Effective engagement with this audience also requires familiar symbols and narratives to be communicated and for narratives of innocent agency in 'making a difference' to others to be celebrated. WMC responds to this desire in its tile: the focus on making the world a classroom for Canadian students where they uphold an entitlement to feel, to look and to be seen as doing 'good'. The fear of paralyzing and alienating students is common in this orientation, therefore a balance of critical and self-celebratory pedagogical approaches that re-affirm students' benevolence is perceived as desirable. In this case critical approaches are often co-opted into un-self-reflexive critical-self-congratulatory frameworks where one is praised precisely for one's criticality. I describe this orientation as audience engagement in 'problem solving for personal affirmation.'

The third audience-orientation is one prepared to face the complexities of simplistic solutions, of uneven power relations and of the historicity and (geo-/bio-) political nature of knowledge production in terms of epistemological hegemony, and of self-implication in structural harms. This is exemplified in attempts to critique historical asymmetries and to create opportunities for better informed alliances and forms of solidarity. Although this orientation is open to more radical critiques of power relations and to the voices of marginalised communities, proposed ways forward tend to re-center the modern subject and modern institutions and alternative voices are still re-coded in vocabularies that make sense within the modern onto-epistemic grammar.  I describe this audience as one engaged in 'circular criticality'.

The fourth audience-orientation is driven by a critique of ontological hegemony geared towards the uncertain exploration of different possibilities of existence beyond the modern subject, modern institutions (including the modern nation state) and of global capitalism – beyond the modern onto-epistemic grammar and the (contested, but enduring) modern/colonial imaginary. Radically different forms of 'IESL' and of 'GCE' within this orientation are often perceived as 'impossible' (or unintelligible) to the other

three orientations and, therefore, are very seldom addressed in educational work. An illustration of this is an IESL project in Brazil seeking funding to bring Brazilian students to Canada to de-mystify the idea of the 'First World'. This group wants to work with Indigenous and homeless activists in Canada to learn about the contradictions and failed promises of modernity. Needless to say, this project is unintelligible for the vast majority of funding agencies. I describe the audience in this orientation as being engaged in a project of facing the (im)possibility of 'education for existence otherwise.'

The paradox here is that projects associated with the fourth position are largely unintelligible to Canadian audiences for precisely the same reasons that they represent an important possibility for unlearning the limits of our imaginary. That is, efforts to think IESL and GCE through the perspectives of social movements and communities invested in alternative frameworks may offer a means through which to expand our frames of reference, enable us to confront our implication in on-going systemic harm, and desire a way out of our current dominant imaginary of collective existence heavily dependent on and invested in markets and nation-states. If this is the case, then those professionals and professors engaged in IESL and GCE work may want to consider the implications and opportunities of this paradox, especially if the majority of our students are situated in audience two.

Having identified the second orientation of simple solutions as my general audience in education and wishing to move them to a third orientation of facing complexities, I have designed a few pedagogical devices that aim to re-orient the focus of 'making a difference' towards asking open-ended questions about power, privilege, re-distribution and the reproduction of complicity in systemic harm. These devices are performative, rather than representational and they aim to be problematized once they are made intelligible. In order to illustrate this process I describe next the process of creating and disseminating one of these tools, and how it relates to the different audience orientations described above.

*HEADS UP*

On the one hand, designing pedagogical devices that can work across educational contexts is virtually impossible as pedagogical possibilities are circumscribed by constraints of intelligibility, educational desires and investments, institutional mandates, and availability and attention of learners.  On the other hand, creative translation, flexibility and clarity can become extremely important design tools when one is trying to mobilize critiques and different imaginaries through pedagogical devices. However, the lessons that emerge from the failure and the limits of these devices are essential for deepening our understanding of educational contexts and of the process of pedagogical articulation itself.  I present one example below.

A couple of years ago a worried colleague asked me to write something 'short and sharp' about the problems with the Kony 2012 social media initiative for the arrest of Joseph Kony, launched in America. My colleague was concerned about the over-simplistic, mediatized, consumerist and celebrity focused appeal of the campaign, which was blindly celebrated by his university colleagues as a way of politicizing young people. He felt that the focus on the romantic celebration of students' enthusiastic engagement  in (unexamined) activism was shutting down possibilities for deeper analyses and self-implicated critiques.  My colleague knew that people would not have much time to listen to him if they were heavily invested in the desire to feel, look and do 'good' while 'making a difference' to children in Africa or supporting young people in North America to take action.

In response to my colleague's request. I played with the idea of communicating problematic ethical issues in '30 seconds'. The words formed the acronym HEADS UP (Andreotti 2012a), which lists the seven problematic historical tendencies in international engagements and representations represented in table 1 with accompanying pedagogical questions related to IESL and GCE.

Table 1: HEADS UP patterns and questions in IESL and GCE work

| Historical pattern of engagement and representation | Whose idea of development/ education / the way forward? | Whose template for knowledge production in IESL and GCE? |
|---|---|---|
| **H**egemony (justifying dominance and supporting domination) | What assumptions and imaginaries inform the ideal of development and education in this IESL/GCE initiative? | Whose knowledge is perceived to have universal value? How come? How can this imbalance be addressed? |
| **E**thnocentrism (projecting the views of one group as universal) | What is being projected as ideal, normal, good, moral, natural or desirable? Where do these assumptions come from? | How is dissent addressed? How are dissenting groups framed and engaged with? |
| **A**historicism (forgetting historical legacies and complicities) | How is history, and its ongoing effects on social/ political/ economic relations, addressed (or not) in the formulation of problems and solutions? | How is the historical connection between dispensers and receivers of knowledge framed and addressed? |
| **D**epoliticization (disregarding power inequalities and ideological roots of analyses and proposals) | What analysis of power relations has been performed? Are power imbalances recognized, and if so, how are they either critiqued or rationalized? How are they addressed? | Do educators and students recognize themselves as culturally situated, ideologically motivated and potentially incapable of grasping important alternative views? |
| **S**elf-congratulatory and **S**elf-serving attitude (oriented towards self-affirmation /CV building) | How are marginalized peoples represented? How are those students who intervene represented? How is the relationship between these groups two represented? | Is the epistemological and ontological violence of certain individuals being deemed dispensers of education, rights and help acknowledged as part of the problem? |
| **U**n-complicated solutions (ignoring the complexity of epistemological, ontological and metaphysical dominance) | Has the urge to 'make a difference' weighted more in decisions than critical systemic thinking about origins and implications of 'solutions'? | Are simplistic analyses offered and answered in ways that do not invite people to engage with complexity or recognize complicity in systemic harm? |
| **P**aternalism (seeking affirmation of superiority through the provision of help) | How are those at the receiving end of IESL or GCE efforts to 'make a difference' expected to respond to the 'help' they receive? | Does this IESL/GCE initiative promote the symmetry of less powerful groups and recognize these groups' legitimate right to disagree with the formulation of problems and solutions proposed? |

Different versions of the HEADS UP pedagogical tool have been adapted as analytical tools to assess assumptions in different initiatives and as starting points for critical conversations about the implications of different conceptualizations of ethics (including non-western ethics) (see for example Jefferess 2013; Tallon and Watson 2014; Schwittay and Boocock 2015). However, it has also been very common to see the tool used in simplistic ways to denounce problems and propose solutions that are oblivious to the problems that these very solutions generate. This illustrates the difficulties of the

educational task of reducing complexity to meet demands of intelligibility in contexts where instrumental solutions are called for, while inviting people to delve (beyond the learning object itself) into the realities of complex, paradoxical and uncertain engagements framed by local and global, historical, social and cultural contingencies in real life. In this sense, I later complemented the tool with a set of questions that re-direct discussions towards the third and fourth orientations:

How can we address:
- hegemony without creating new hegemonies through our own forms of resistance?
- ethnocentrism without falling into absolute relativism and forms of essentialism and anti-essentialism that reify elitism?
- ahistoricism without fixing a single perspective of history to simply reverse hierarchies and without being caught in a self-sustaining narrative of vilification and victimisation?
- depoliticization without high-jacking political agendas for self-serving ends and without engaging in self-empowering critical exercises of generalisation, homogenisation and dismissal of antagonistic positions?
- self-congratulatory tendencies without crushing generosity and altruism?
- people's tendency to want simplistic solutions without producing paralysis and hopelessness?
- paternalism without closing opportunities for short-term redistribution? (Andreotti 2012b)

### *Re-imagining the world*

The task of education within the fourth orientation could be defined, as an "un-coercive re-arrangements of desires" (Spivak 2004, 526) that takes modern subjects beyond the attachments to seamless notions of progress, innocent and heroic ideals of agency and totalizing forms of knowledge production (Andreotti 2014) that circumscribe their desires, with a view of enabling the possibility of an "ethical imperative towards the

Other (of Western humanism), before will" (Spivak 2004, 535). These ideals can be translated into simpler educational questions like: How can we disarm and de-center ourselves and displace our desires and cognitive obsessions to wake up to face a plural, undefined world without turning our back to the violences we have so far inflicted upon it? While keeping violences firmly in view, how can we think about global citizenship education with/out constructs like the nation state, the market, modern subjectivities and modern educational institutions? What does global citizenship education look like for those enchanted with modernity and invested in its continuation? What does it look like for those disenchanted with it and already looking for - or living - alternatives to it?

In terms of IESL and GCE in Canada, these questions can be reframed to address the particularities of the current state of the field exemplified in the double review published in this issue. Why does it seem natural for us (and for people in other places) to believe that people in poorer countries need the help of Canadians?  What ideals of knowledge and society are disseminated in these encounters if assumptions are left un-problematized? How is the implication of Canada and Canadians in unjust political and economic practices, both at home and abroad, rendered visible or invisible in IESL/GCE initiatives? How is Canadian benevolence framed in the narratives of IESL (and what does it say about Canada's national self-image)?  How is Canadian international benevolence mobilized in ways that deflect attention from (and responsibility for) local injustices that reproduce *here* similar violences, poverty and suffering to those experienced elsewhere? What are the implications of incorporating IESL/GCE into universities' corporate brands? How are the practices of IESL/GCE supporting or suppressing deeper education about global issues, and ethical solidarities with dissenting communities locally and globally? What global imaginaries and ideas of development are mobilized in IESL/GCE initiatives? How can we secure spaces for sober educational conversations in IESL/GCE beyond fears of confronting (white) privilege and (Canadian) exceptionalism or the wish for a quick exit/redemption from implication in harm? How can IESL and GCE foster connections based on our visceral interdependence, our vulnerability, our complicated histories and traumas, and our intimate complicity in a shared fate in a finite planet that our grandchildren's grandchildren should  (hopefully be

able to) inhabit? I hope these questions can help us delve deeper into discussions of IESL and GCE.

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