

**Reframing Internationalization in a (Post) Colonial and
Diasporic Context:
Two Initiatives at York University**

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CANADA'S UNIVERSITIES GO GLOBAL

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Reframing Internationalization in a (Post)Colonial and Diasporic Context: Two Initiatives at York University

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[The] general liberal consensus that “true” knowledge is fundamentally non-political (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not “true” knowledge) obscures the highly organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced.¹

I was born in the US at the end of World War II, when the term *international* was used to promote a more hopeful vision of world peace (at least in the “free world”) as the United Nations was formed by the victorious world powers to foster collective security, and the Bretton Woods international institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) were crafted to rebuild the international economic system and to facilitate post-war reconstruction. These institutions were integral to the promulgation of a particular economic model of “development,” one which Arturo

Escobar, in deconstructing development, suggests turned peasants, women and nature into objects of knowledge and targets of power under the gaze of western experts.²

I, too, was shaped by and participated in the dissemination of this ideology as a graduate student at Michigan State University (MSU) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. MSU had become a centre for international education, with Everett Rogers, author of the classic *Diffusion of Innovations*, part of a pioneering department of development communications. I was invited to join the staff of a series of communications workshops, a service that MSU had been contracted by the Agency for International Development (AID) to offer for foreign scholars before they returned home. These were the élites of the “third world,” as we called it then in the context of the Cold War, whose education had been financed by the US government. They were required to complete this training in communications, to consider how they would apply the ideas and technologies they had learned in the US to their own contexts. We tried to move them in the direction of Rogers’ “diffusion of innovations” — offering communications techniques for propagating ideas formed in US universities.

Around the same time, I was also involved in cross-cultural communications training developed at the University of Pennsylvania and promoted by a network of scholars and practitioners in the Society for International Development preparing US students to go “overseas,” as we described it then. We developed activities to help them deal with “culture shock” and adapt to different value systems.

By 1972, I was living in Canada and found myself once again involved in cross-cultural training — developing materials and activities for international cooperants³ of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) who were taking up posts of “technical assistance.” I also worked with Canada World Youth in its infancy to apply the pedagogical principles of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire to its educational programs.

All of these experiences would have fit under the rubric of international education at the time and reflected close and complex links among governments, universities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Even though, in the Cold War context, *international* referred to the US-dominated free world, in that period we used the term with a pretension of neutrality and universality. In the past decade, however, post-colonial theory has offered me a useful tool of critical analysis for revisiting the context, meaning and impact of these early internationalizing experiences. The words of Edward Said, pre-eminent post-colonial scholar, that knowledge is always produced under "highly organized political circumstances" resonate as I consider the political, economic and ideological climate within which foreign élites were being educated in Western knowledges, some of which might contradict or devalue the local knowledges of their people and context.

Post-colonial scholars argue that, despite the decolonization and national liberation of colonized nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, these nations remain in positions of economic inequality and subordination to Europe and North America. One of the consequences of the restructured global economy, seen by many as a continuation of colonialism, is the increasing displacement of people from their lands and countries of origin; there are over twenty million refugees in the world today. In the context of corporate globalization, internationalization is often conflated with the economic, political and cultural integration promoted by neo-liberalism, free trade and greater movement — not only of goods and services but also of labour, of bodies compelled or coerced to leave their countries of origin for reasons of war, famine, poverty or repression.

Toronto as a global city of the twenty-first century epitomizes this increasing movement, as its diasporic population makes it perhaps the most multicultural city in the world, with almost half of its residents considered visible minorities. York University was

founded in 1959 in part to respond to the expanding diversity and proclaimed its commitment to social justice values. Its mission statement emphasizes its multicultural context:

York University is part of Toronto: we are dynamic, metropolitan, and multi-cultural. York University is part of Canada: we encourage bilingual study, we value tolerance and diversity. York University is open to the world: we explore global concerns.

One only needs to walk through York's main entrance hall to witness the presence of the diaspora in our midst. We do not need to go anywhere to have intercultural experiences and encounters with difference. This has been recognized by the York International Internship Program, which includes not only locations abroad but Canadian NGOs in its placements. It was also evident in the orientation for those students chosen for international internships and being prepared for the "culture shock" they might expect to encounter. When I asked them how many of them had been born outside of Canada, or had had experiences in a cultural context very different from the dominant Canadian culture, everyone raised a hand. "Diversity" is not only a moniker for York University but a source of pride.

Yet what difference does this diversity make in what and how we teach and learn at York? If we were to reframe internationalization as post-colonial and intercultural, our classrooms would be seen as sites for intercultural learning, for probing the richness of an internationalized university. Yet if we apply a post-colonial analysis to Western academic institutions, then we must also recognize how they have been shaped by Eurocentric world views, notions of knowledge, and of what it means to learn, to know, to act.

As post-colonial scholar Robert Young suggests, "Most of the

writing that has dominated what the world calls knowledge has been produced by people living in western countries in the past three or more centuries, and it is this kind of knowledge that is elaborated within and sanctioned by the academy, the institutional knowledge corporation."⁴

Just as international development theorists and practitioners have been challenged to rethink the value of local knowledges "so long rejected as primitive" yet essential to questions of sustainable development, for example, so too we can offer broader and deeper learning experiences to our students if we tap into the diverse epistemologies present in our midst. And there is also a scholarly literature which we can draw upon, as "feminists and other holders of subjugated knowledges such as Indigenous scholars and critical race theorists have for some time been delineating 'ways of knowing' and of researching that challenge Enlightenment epistemologies and methodologies."⁵ Yet we must also be open to the challenges of these "insurgent knowledges that come from the subaltern, the dispossessed, and seek to change the terms and values under which we all live."⁶

With this reframed notion of the international as post-colonial and intercultural, I would like to reflect on two recent experiments at York University, two initiatives that are still very much in process. One is the consideration of the use of Aboriginal languages in postgraduate work; the other is the transformation of university curriculum through an intersecting analysis of power, as articulated by Patricia Hill Collins and Eglá Martínez Salazar, that addresses diversity and equity in both the content and process of our teaching.⁷

These two initiatives suggest a couple of complementary and perhaps challenging processes towards internationalizing the university, what we might call *Aboriginalizing* and *Diasporicizing* the university as part of a process of decolonizing Western academic practice. They offer an implicit critique of a notion of internation-

alization that focuses only on exchanges between universities in the North and South, programs that privilege mainly elite students and that are aimed primarily at furthering global economic integration, ultimately benefiting corporate interests and maintaining Western cultural hegemony.

Aboriginalizing Postgraduate Work

A post-colonial analysis would first of all acknowledge the European origins of the university and would probe, for example, the indigenous history of the land on which we stand, teach, learn and research. It would ask, what is the historical relationship between First Nations communities and Canadian universities? And how can we move towards a relationship of greater respect?

It is one of the tragic consequences of European colonization of North America that universities have been neither accessible nor culturally appropriate for First Nations young people, for the original peoples of this land. In recent decades, as Aboriginal communities in Canada have claimed more control over their own educational processes, as part of a broader movement for self-determination and sovereignty, there are more Aboriginal students and faculty in Canadian universities. York University established an Aboriginal Education Council in 2001 and hired its first Aboriginal counsellor in 2003. Beyond providing support for Aboriginal students in university, the council has also undertaken an audit of programs and courses offered that address Aboriginal history, ideas and practices. At a deeper level, Aboriginal faculty and students have compelled us to consider how Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning can be acknowledged and allowed to coexist with Western epistemologies and pedagogies within the academy.

Within the Faculty of Environmental Studies, there has been a steady stream of Aboriginal students, particularly in our master's and Ph.D. programs, due in part to the individualized nature of our graduate program, its interdisciplinary orientation and holistic

pedagogy. Recently our regulations were challenged by two graduate students, both Mi'gmaq, one completing a Master of Environmental Science (M.E.S.) degree on the promotion of the Mi'gmaq language through new technologies such as the Internet, the other in a doctoral program on the history and politics of his community in the Gaspé. Both students offered compelling arguments for completing the culminating work of their degree programs in their mother tongue.

Like many Aboriginal students, these two graduate students see their primary loyalty as being to their communities, many of which have sent their young adults to university precisely to be able to better serve the needs of First Nations communities. Being accountable to the community means being accountable to one's view of and relationship with all of creation.

The issue of language is not only a matter of communications, even though it is important that the results of their research be accessible to people in the community who may not speak English. The loss of indigenous languages is one of the great concerns in Aboriginal communities, because as these languages disappear, so too do cultural world views, ways of thinking and being. The loss of linguistic and cultural diversity is a global crisis.

Cultural cosmovisions⁸ and ways of knowing are embedded in language. One of the shameful legacies of the government and church-sponsored residential schools that took an entire generation of First Nations children away from their families and communities and prohibited them from speaking their native language was their contribution not only to a cultural but also to a linguistic genocide. The healing processes and resurgence of Aboriginal communities claiming self-determination include addressing the loss and recovery of native languages. As Peter Cole, an Aboriginal professor at York University, has expressed:

Aboriginal/indigenous languages are inseparable

from their respective cultures; they are part of Aboriginal/indigenous ways of knowing. Consequently, recovery of traditional cultures and languages is a project of renewal and revitalization. It is an educational and self-empowerment project. It is — rather than a process of decolonization — one of Aboriginalization.⁹

Thus, to use one's own Aboriginal language in graduate work is to contribute not only to the sharing of knowledge with one's community but also to the continued viability of the language and culture itself. Indeed these goals were central to the graduate programs of these two students.

For many Aboriginal students, the community is considered the source of the curriculum, and students are often accountable to community elders who are guiding them in their studies. At the same time, the Western academy has its own system of accountability: at the graduate level, this involves academic advisers, supervisors and Ph.D. committees, all governed by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. As a result, Aboriginal graduate students have a double accountability — to their communities and to their universities and respective faculties.

In 2005, the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES) took up the challenge to address this double accountability and to recognize Aboriginal students' primary accountability to the Aboriginal community. Because FES pedagogy is built around an individual plan of study through which both the content of the curriculum and the process of learning are elaborated by the student, there was receptiveness in principle to the integration of Aboriginal languages and community advisers into the plan. A small committee worked to draft a proposal that would change our regulations to allow the M.E.S. major paper, thesis, or project report as well as the Ph.D. dissertation to be submitted in an Aboriginal/indigenous language,

"if so indicated in the statement of requirements for the Major Project or Major Paper or in the Thesis Proposal or in the Dissertation Research Proposal, and if relevant supervision and sufficient support can be provided."¹⁰

It is important to note that this process was also the result of ongoing mutual learning between non-native faculty supervisors and Aboriginal students. In defence of the proposal, for example, Anders Sandberg, the non-native dissertation supervisor of an Aboriginal doctoral student proposing to complete his dissertation in Mi'gmaq, articulated his growing understanding of the distinct epistemologies in tension in this effort to change the regulations:

The motion goes some way in supporting and recognizing what I have come to learn to be a unique First Nations academic discourse that is distinct from the colonial discourse that dominates in Canada today (in different manifestations). The Western discourse is typically based on "rights" that are attached to individuals in the form of the protection of private property, freedom of speech and expression, and universal suffrage in a representative liberal democracy.

The Mi'gmaq discourse, by contrast, is deeply rooted in a collective belonging and responsibility towards the land and territory of Mi'gmagi, where the Mi'gmaq scholar senses a deep bond and responsibility towards his or her subjects or objects of study. I have come to think about this as a "responsibilities discourse" where an ethic of responsibility and connectedness exists between the scholar, the land that he or she belongs to, and the people, animals, flora, and spirits of that land.

Scholarly pursuit here becomes an interaction with the community where negotiation and respect need to exist and prevail at every turn.¹¹

It is important not to homogenize the Aboriginal practices, either, and the term *First Nations* emphasizes not only the original inhabitants but also their diversity. In this particular case, Sandberg goes on to argue:

There is a unique form of Mi'gmaq scholarship, stories and knowledge holders (academics) along with Mi'gmaq archives, classrooms and universities (the land). This Mi'gmaq "academic complex" pre-dates the so-called "contact" and needs to be recognized, valued, and further developed. It has never been replaced or displaced by colonialism (though repressed) and many First Nations students now point to this complex as a place where they would like to place their studies. Aboriginal languages are often an intricate part of that process.¹²

Indeed, as Sandberg points out, there is pan-global indigenous scholarship,¹³ and Canada's own Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) has consulted extensively with Aboriginal people about how their knowledge traditions can be more respected, how their research can benefit Aboriginal communities, and how they can have more control over intellectual and cultural property.¹⁴

While the new regulation was approved by the FES Faculty Council in the spring of 2005, we are still elaborating the ways in which it can be operationalized. The major conditions that must be met include "relevant supervision" and "sufficient support." The

issue of supervision, as already indicated, is a complex one. There need to be sympathetic, supportive and "relevant" academic supervisors in the Faculty and academy. There are unfortunately very few Aboriginal faculty members at York, and familiarity with any particular First Nation and language is not assured. Faculty members can, however, offer strengths in certain aspects of the thesis process, while community members can serve as advisers when it comes to the particularity of Mi'gmaq history, politics and language. This means creating a structure of dual accountability and giving equal consideration to the community advisers, their research ethics and cultural protocol.

How does an Aboriginal student get assessed, then, at the stage of the thesis reading and defence? Ideally, an Aboriginal scholar is on the dissertation committee, and the community advisers are also represented at the defence. They can offer their assessment to the committee as a whole. There may be a need for infrastructural support that allows the defence to be conducted in part in the Aboriginal language with simultaneous translation facilitating the process, if the candidate and community members agree this would be useful. Fortunately, in 2004, York University's vice-president research and innovation purchased fifty sets of wireless simultaneous interpretation equipment; resources are needed, however, to hire translators capable of mediating this linguistic interchange.

While the protocols, logistics and financial dimensions still need to be spelled out in more detail, we believe that the long-term benefits of this innovative approach will ensure not only that the work of Aboriginal graduate students is relevant and immediately useful to their communities but also that the interchange between academic supervisors and community advisers will enrich the dialogue that is so necessary to a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship between Aboriginal communities and universities.

The so-called international programs of universities such as York can also be enriched by Aboriginalization. Exchange programs

between universities in the North and the South could offer specific opportunities to indigenous students, linking them to Aboriginal scholars, communities and practices in their host countries. There is a growing pan-hemispheric movement of indigenous groups in the Americas, for example, which have joined forces in efforts to preserve biodiversity and cultural diversity threatened by the industrial agricultural and exploitative resource extractive practices of corporate globalization. International students with indigenous roots can contribute to these coalitional efforts, a form of continental integration more based on social and environmental justice.

Diasporicizing the Curriculum

I chose to discuss the initiative around Aboriginalizing our curriculum first because I think it is the most marginalized discussion, even more so than the debate about how the curriculum could better tap the rich diversity of the international or diasporic population that make up the majority of our students. More has been done on this latter front, though it is still a relatively new and contested sphere.

At one level, most Canadians historically are part of the diasporic, or what earlier was called the settler, population. Yet the term has most often been used to apply to recent arrivals to Canada as well as to other global cities that have deep colonial roots. In a recent publication based on a York University conference on "Diaspora, Memory, and Identity" in 2004, Anh Hua offers her definition of diaspora as:

A historical term used to refer to communities that have been dispersed reluctantly, dislocated by slavery, pogroms, genocide, coercion and expulsion, war in conflict zones, indentured labour, economic migration, political exile, or refugee exodus. Diasporic members frequently feel a sense of alienation

in the host country because of systemic racism, sexism, heterosexism, and socio-economic exclusion. To resist assimilation into the host country, and to avoid social amnesia about their collective histories, diasporic people attempt to revive, recreate, and invent their artistic, linguistic, economic, religious, cultural and political practices and productions.¹⁵

While countering an assimilationist position, Hua also reminds us that "it is crucial to remember that diasporic identities and communities are not fixed, rigid, or homogeneous, but are instead fluid, always changing, and heterogeneous."¹⁶ She also states that diasporic groups are "differentiated along gender and class lines, generational difference, sexual orientation, language access, historical experiences, geographical location, and so on. [So] Diaspora needs to be understood as embedded within 'a multi-axial understanding of power'."¹⁷

In 2002-03, the Faculty of Environmental Studies, in collaboration with York's Centre for the Support of Teaching, initiated a series of six workshops to examine our curriculum through the lens of different areas of diversity: not only race and ethnicity but also disabilities, sexual and gender diversity, Aboriginal perspectives, class and poverty, and women. While each workshop focused on one aspect of equity, it promoted an interlocking analysis of power that acknowledged the ways in which these identities are always intersecting, one shaping another.

To ensure that this process would engage both students and faculty, we involved all student associations and both the undergraduate and graduate curriculum committees, as well as seeking advice from the Centre for Human Rights and Equity along with the Equity Committee of the York University Faculty Association.

The workshop series had multiple objectives: to educate our-

selves, to build a more inclusive community, to develop curriculum diversity guidelines and to propose policy directions. Perhaps most importantly, the six monthly workshops that drew thirty to fifty people for three hours of panel presentations, small group discussions and syntheses of strategic directions broke many silences, creating spaces that legitimized these difficult and self-reflexive conversations about how our curriculum and teaching/learning methods are imbued with the same dynamics of power that permeate the society as a whole.

Among the outcomes of this six-month workshop series was a set of "Curriculum Diversity and Equity Guidelines" for teaching faculty that provide questions about the content, resources and teaching/learning methods to be considered in developing new courses or transforming existing ones. As the workshops had been videotaped, we also edited a series of eighteen short video clips, from two to eight minutes in length, that represent interesting moments, provocative debates and critical questions that emerged in our discussions.

From "Perfect Stranger" to "Creating a New Imaginary"

Two of those moments perhaps best epitomize where we start when we engage in this work and where we hope to move with it. They offer us useful metaphors for the challenge of transforming curriculum in a way that deeply respects the different world views, experiences and knowledges that are represented in our diverse internationalized or diasporicized classrooms. The first framed the workshop presentation by Susan Dion, an Aboriginal professor in the Faculty of Education, who has worked closely with teachers around the integration of First Nations history and reality into the public school curriculum:

When I started working with teachers, one of the

first things I noticed was this — this ease and almost this desire that teachers have. And recently, being involved in the university community, it's not just elementary and secondary school teachers, but it's university course directors and I would argue many Canadians, have this desire and this ease with which to claim a position of being perfect stranger to Aboriginal people.

When I talked to teachers they would say, "Oh, I know nothing, I have no friends who are Aboriginal people, I didn't grow up near a reserve, I didn't learn anything in school. You know I am perfect stranger to Aboriginal people." And there's a way in which this position as perfect stranger allows a kind of innocence and a kind of not being responsible, because that's out there. I am perfect stranger, therefore, I don't need to worry about it ... I don't have a responsibility to do it.

... This is something that as educators we need to think about and to recognize that in fact we're not perfect strangers to one another and that we cannot claim innocence on the basis of that relationship because in fact we do have a relationship. Interestingly enough in the work I did for my dissertation project when asking teachers to think more deeply about their experiences with Aboriginal people there comes to the surface key events, stories, experiences that have influenced one's understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

... If we want to contribute to a new and better relationship, we in fact need to recognize ourselves in relationship to that history and in relationship to each other.

While Susan was referring to Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships in particular, there are ways in which we tend to deny our relationship to other equity areas as well: I'm white so I can't speak to the issue of racism, I'm heterosexual so I don't have to be concerned about sexual and gender diversity, I'm a man so I have no relationship to gender issues and so forth. Thus, the first step in engaging the diversity within our classrooms in an equitable fashion is to acknowledge that we all have a history of relationships to all of these areas; we have been raised in social contexts that have taught us certain stereotypes, behaviours and prejudices that we have internalized, even if we are not always conscious of them. This is to recognize the systemic nature of discrimination and inequities of all kinds.

The curriculum diversity and equity kit¹⁸ challenges us all to consider our curriculum content and our teaching and learning practices as though we were not perfect strangers; in fact, it asks us to question our own personal experiences as they reflect deeper historical social inequities, and to find new ways to tap the differences that can enrich the learning of students and professors alike.

The DVD with fourteen different video clips can be used in classrooms, professional development workshops and meetings of administrators, to generate dialogue about how we address diversity and equity in the content of what we teach and how we teach as well as at the policy level: how we rethink disciplinary frameworks, hiring policies, and so forth. The accompanying user's guide offers a series of questions that can be discussed following the viewing of the videos. In the section focusing on race and ethnicity, for example, the question is raised, "What classroom ethics can help

students and faculty deal with issues of racism?" In the section on disabilities, a discussion question is, "As a student or faculty member with a disability, how can you make your needs known?"

The intersecting analysis of power that framed the workshops and, it is hoped, frames the discussion of the video clips, reminds us that internationalization is not only predicated on differences of national identity, ethnicity and race but also shaped by other elements such as class and poverty, gender, sexual diversity and Aboriginal status.

The curriculum diversity and equity project and kit were meant not only to develop a more critical analysis of our curriculum and teaching/learning practices but also to promote the visioning of positive alternatives. The second metaphor, then, that I would like to leave readers with — "Creating a New Imaginary" — represents where we would like this deep questioning to lead us. In the workshop on sexual and gender diversity, York alumna Sharmini Fernando challenged us to consider how we move outside of and beyond the categories that reflect these historical inequities. She asked:

How do you address somebody who's racialized and a lesbian or homosexual...? How do we address diversity from within heteronormativity and Eurocentrism? Because both of those areas are areas that I grapple with everyday. I deal with Eurocentrism as an everyday thing. I don't see anything of my life ever being reflected anywhere. I deal with heteronormativity as an everyday reality, because being a lesbian, a dyke, a homosexual is not reflected anywhere either ... How does that get addressed?

Fernando then answered her own question:

How do we construct a "new imaginary"? How do

we construct a new imaginary and a new grammar that can address [York's] mission statement?

Because that's what we're asking everyone to do — to imagine something different from heteronormativity and something different from Eurocentrism — that requires not just reading differently or writing against the grain but actually imagining against the grain.

We have all the elements present at York to engage in the construction of a *new imaginary* that draws on the diverse histories, identities, experiences, knowledges and ways of knowing we find among our colleagues and students, if we only listen and open ourselves to dialogue that moves us beyond our own boundaries, beyond the pretense of being *perfect strangers*. Universities are sites of creative knowledge production and have the potential to embrace this challenge in a post-colonial polycultural world.

As Leslie Sanders, a professor in the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies, concluded in our workshop on race and ethnicity:

Curriculum reform is about starting from scratch again Often these discussions break pedagogy into one basket and knowledge into another and so the questions becomes how do we make sure that all the students in our classroom feel that they are represented, feel free to speak, feel comfortable to enter into dialogue, but what I've rarely heard said is — how about free to make knowledge?

Critically, Sanders brings us back to the question of the purpose of the university, or what might more accurately be called the "multiversity." Is internationalization about creating new knowledge

that opens us up to the diversity of epistemologies, cosmovisions and practices that are not just *out there*, but are, in fact, *in here*...in our diasporic academic institution? And is it about recognizing the First Nations on this land, on this very land where we now teach and learn, about recognizing their right to frame their own educational practice in a way that serves their communities and also keeps alive their languages and cultural practices, even as they are constantly changing, as are ours, in a diasporic context? Can the internationalization process include Aboriginizing and diasporicizing our curriculum and our pedagogies? And can we extend these notions of decolonizing education into programs of international exchange that integrate Aboriginal students and practices so that multiple ways of knowing are honoured?