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## SYMPOSIUM: The intercultural dimension of the processes of internationalization in higher education: working with criticality.

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### Context.

The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE, 2014) Accord on Internationalization addresses five areas of inter-related practice: experiences of International Mobility; international teaching partnerships; international research partnerships; the internationalization of Canadian curriculum; and the preparation of educators and leaders for schools, post-secondary educational systems and other locations of educational practice. This paper focuses on the first and third areas of practice, using as an example a University level partnership between Chengdu University of Technology, China and University of Regina, Saskatchewan, and a faculty level visiting scholar program that is a feature of the partnership. The accord also warns that: "Current economic imperatives of globalization have intensified the drive towards profit-seeking, standardizing, and potentially exploitative internationalization activities, often without full consideration of or particular attention paid to the vulnerability of marginalized communities".

A number of benefits of internationalization are noted in the accord: the potential for building partnerships based on reciprocity, social accountability, and sustainability; the potential for system change by expanding frames of reference and possibilities for rethinking, relationships and educational, economic, and social practice; and the potential for increased intercultural understanding and dialogue through a realization of interdependence. These are laudable aims, but how they are interpreted and achieved in practice is not well understood. This paper reports on research that focuses on the third – increased intercultural understanding – using the context of a visiting scholar program between Chengdu University of Technology, China and University of Regina, Canada.

> "How prepared is international education to take on the challenge of intercultural communications? To this end, a clear understanding of culture, language, and the intersections of these with a plethora of issues related to power, privilege, voice, silence, and free speech is essential." (Asgharzadeh, 2008: 357).

Asgharzadeh's proposal that a critical lens should be used when taking on the challenge of intercultural communications is one with which we agree. We are aware that internationalization also holds the risk of exploitative practices, such as an overemphasis on profit maximization, systemic exclusion, and neo-colonization.

## China and internationalization

According to statistics, more than 60% of the world's emails is written in English, over 50% of the newspapers and magazines is in English (He, 2004: 60), and there are 175 English speaking countries and regions all over the world, with more than 80 of them having English as their official language for international communication (He, 2004:61). English has truly become a global language. Students in China start learning English since kindergarten as English is a required course for them. There are also many important entrance examinations in China that take English as an essential measurement. Consequently, more focus is put on English other than Chinese which is taken for granted by its native speakers. English, as killer language (Guo, 2007:83), has replaced many native languages gradually. Some academics in China are concerned that the focus on English learning may destroy China's multicultural and deprive the students of the rights and chances to know more about the native language culture (Guo, 2007:81). As a result, the culture accumulated in language through thousands of years may finally disappear, as a result of which people may lose their ways of thinking generated and influenced by the native culture.

## Ontological and epistemological difference.

Law and Lin (2015), researching the nature of West-East relations in the field of Science, Technology and Society (STS), put forward two postcolonial 'stories' that provide different interpretations of the intersection of Western and Chinese medicine: the first is one of colonial and postcolonial power, which sees the West as a globalizing force that continues to dominate and control the 'Other'; the second is one of hybridity, which is 'a refusal of reductionist forms of explanation, an assumption that objects are relational, not given' (Law & Lin, 2015, p. 10). They state that in intercultural research, representation becomes relatively less important and sensibility to different ontological and epistemological positions becomes more important, and they call for scholars to be sensitive to alternative traditions to 'lever themselves out of the grip of the EuroAmerican analytical-institutional complex and its attendant epistemological foundationalism' (Law & Lin, 2015, p. 12).

We interpret this as a need to be attendant to and chart those differences, articulate and seek to understand how, through critical intercultural dialogue, they can become the site of new/emergent ideas and concepts. This project represents a refusal to be part of an either-or approach to differences in which one refutes the other, and a commitment to an also-and approach that investigates the productive potential of the tension between them. In the following section, we contest simplistic conceptions of intercultural understanding by including the dimensions of power, historical events, and ideology. In so doing, we use the work of Martin Buber (1958) to theorize the nature of the 'inter' relation, and follow with a brief

description of the concepts of invitation and hospitality as dimensions of these relations when applied to a visiting scholar program.

## Defining 'intercultural'.

In much of the literature on intercultural learning / communication / understanding there is an emphasis on how culture is conceptualized – often seen as a binary between culture as a category based on race, ethnicity and nationality; and culture as something that comes into being through the relation between self-other and self-environment. We subscribe to the second view, and thus view interculturality as a dynamic process that engages in interpersonal and group relations, but that at the same time needs to consider the macro. 'While [cultural] identity is formed in relation with others, it is also a political and structural recognition between state and citizens' (Jonathan Lear in conversation with Noel Pearson, 2015).

We argue that, as a process, there needs to be a clear articulation of the 'inter' or space between cultures and in this we draw on Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of "Third Space", the space that results from the meeting of the Self and the Other that leads to new understandings and knowledge. Thirdness is communicated in a "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 55). The Third Space, which could also be conceptualized as a de-colonial space, is affected by the position and power people hold in social structures. It "constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha, 1994, p.55).

## The 'inter' as a relation.

In attempting to more deeply theorize the relation between the political and personal, and the implications for decolonizing methods, we turned to the work of Martin Buber (1958). Buber's seminal work, "I and Thou" (1958) focuses on relationality. He proposes a three-part theory: a two-fold attitude, life at a societal level and life at a spiritual level. Buber theorizes that the "I" is always spoken in relation and that this relation is to either an "It" or a "Thou". The I-It relation is as a subject to object, in which the subject has an active seeking to know attitude towards the object and can therefore only ever be a partial relation. The I-Thou relation is felt as a mutual, present relationship. It is holistic, and the relation is approached without objective or agenda and thus does not seek to use.

Buber's thesis is that while both types of relation are needed, the I-It has come to dominate life at a societal level; we find evidence of this in the commodification of education and the language of accountability, targets, and objectives, the standardization of which is based on the mainstream. The I-Thou can be seen in life at a spiritual level where the relation is approached with humility, in a mindful way, with an attitude of 'being with' that can transcend language. In this form of relation, Buber uses the term 'encounter' which is an event or situation in which relation occurs. At its root is the idea that self-perfection is achievable only in dialogic relation *with* others.

### Invitation and hospitality.

Hospitality is already the focus of attention as a dimension of intercultural relations (Dervin & Layne, 2013). It is a concept that extends beyond 'food, beverage and accommodation' notions of hospitality, into political questions of citizenship and human rights. Invitational theory has been explored in education (Purkey & Novak, 1996) with consideration of its application to the education of diverse student populations (Schmidt, 2004). However, the two concepts have not, as far as we are aware, been brought together in dialogue with relational theory and explored as dimensions of *critical* intercultural understanding, explicitly questioning issues of power.

Invitational theory was developed within a counselling context, and applied to education (Purkey, 1992). It aims to develop self-confidence and self-esteem in learners, and invitational practitioners adhere to four fundamental beliefs: every person wants to be accepted and affirmed as valuable, capable, and responsible, and wants to be treated accordingly; every person has the power to create beneficial messages for themselves and others, and because they have this power, they have the responsibility; every person possesses relatively untapped potential in all areas of learning and human development; and human potential is best realized by creating places, programs, policies, and processes intentionally designed to invite optimal development and encourage people to realize this potential in themselves and others (Purkey & Novak, 1996).

Schmidt broadened the theory's application to 'the context of establishing helpful relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds' (2004, p. 27). Schmidt distinguishes between inviting and disinviting, intentional and unintentional behaviours and the ways in which these might be culturally specific. With intentionality Schmidt proposes an active relation in which an invitation can be sent or not sent, accepted or not accepted, making the relation more equal since agency is in the hands of both sender and receiver. It is important to note that the acts of not sending or not accepting are not necessarily negative. (e.g. timing of an invitation; acceptance requires trust as it represents an agreement to enter into a relationship). Invitational theory is about establishing a relationship, while hospitality helps us to theorize how that relationship might be maintained over time.

Hospitality, according to Derrida (2000), has an inherent tension between ownership of a bounded space and unconditional opening of this space to an unknown 'Other'. In order to be hospitable, there is an assumption of ownership that gives the power to host. It follows from this that the host will have control over the people being hosted – the spaces they have access to, what they might be able to do in the host's space. On the other hand, genuine hospitality requires the host to relinquish judgement and control in regard to those receiving the hospitality, *abandoning* all claims to property. Derrida refers to this aporia as unconditional, or impossible, hospitality and this resonates with the impossibility of Buber's I-Thou relation. Welcoming someone on one's own terms is conditional and therefore a hollow form of hospitality. Odin (2001 (cited in Burwell & Huyser, 2013:10) takes this further to suggest that, "hospitality is not so much a singular act of welcome as it is a way, an orientation that attends to otherness, listening and learning, valuing and honoring" (p. 14). Regarding the purpose of

providing hospitality, Oden goes on to say, "The host identifies with the stranger/guest and chooses not to live out of any privilege those resources offer, but rather to understand himself or herself as a recipient, too" (p. 26). This dialogic conceptualization of hospitality is central to our study.

## Motivations and experiences of visiting scholars from CDUT to URegina.

The research questions for the VS program from CDUT to URegina being investigated were:
1. What are some of the expectations of Chinese visiting scholars of a host university and faculty?
2. How do visiting scholars develop academic, cultural, and everyday knowledges as a result of their experiences in the host country/university?

## Participants.

Scholars from a Chinese Faculty of Foreign Languages and Cultures have visited a Canadian Faculty of Education since 2013.  Two scholars visit at a time and 12 have participated in this research project. Of these three are male and nine female, aged 30 – 52; they held posts from lecturers to associate professor and associate dean; they came from working class and middle class families, were single and married. Everyone had learnt English from non-native English teachers and have English IELTS scores between 6 – 7.5. The first four visiting scholars were hosted by different faculty at the University of Regina, but all scholars since then were hosted by Fatima Pirbhai-Illich, first author of this paper. The second author, Zheng Huan, was a visiting scholar in the Winter of 2015. As the VS program developed, reciprocal visits were made by Fatima in May-June 2015 and 2016, and for Fran Martin, third author, in May-June 2016. Although Fran is at the University of Exeter, UK, she has had a research partnership with Fatima since 2013 and was in Regina for three of the CDUT visiting scholar periods, hence an invitation was extended to her as part of this partnership for 2016. Data have also been gathered for the URegina to CDUT reciprocal visits, but for the purposes of this paper we are presenting on the CDUT-URegina visiting scholar program. A fuller paper including the reciprocal visits to China is being prepared for publication at a later date.

## Methodology

The overall methodology is a critical ethnography, informed by Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980; Delgado, 2012), Critical Literacy (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Luke, 1995), and Decolonizing Theory (Quijano, 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Mignolo, 2007). It is ethnographic in that the researchers are also participants in the study. For the VS program in which scholars went from CDUT to URegina (table 1), data were gathered using the following methods: written reflections guided by the significant life experience approach; semi-structured interviews using written reflections as a form of stimulated recall; focus groups; and researcher observations. The data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (Gee, 2011).

| 1a. Visiting scholars CDUT to Regina | Types of data gathered | Dates data gathered |
|---|---|---|
| 2013 to May 2015<br>N = 10 | Post visit written reflections<br>Post visit semi-structured interviews | May-June 2015 |
| September 2015 – May 2016<br>N = 2 | Pre-visit semi-structured interviews<br>Post visit written reflections<br>Post visit semi-structured interviews<br>Observations and research diaries | June 2015 - January 2016 |
| Visits planned for 2016-17<br>N = 2 | Pre-visit semi-structured interviews | June 2016 |

Table 1.

## Findings.

Pre-visit interviews with CDUT faculty asked participants to talk about their prior knowledge of Canada, why they wanted to take part in the VS program, and what they hoped to gain from it personally and professionally. Analysis of these data showed that the motivations for CDUT visiting scholars fell into four broad categories: processes of selection, professional development, research and country relations. There was an internal selection process within the faculty at CDUT. The main criteria were excellence in teaching, and proficiency in English. Having been selected it was possible to decline, but all said they wanted to go to Canada because 'these chances are very slim'. Professionally they hoped to learn new teaching methods, and new insights into how to teach reading and writing. They also hoped to develop fluency in English and a more 'standard' English accent. These were the prime reasons, with cooperation for research and academic writing being secondary apart from for those who were in senior management positions. At a personal level they were keen to travel, to experience another country, and hoped to find some time for sight-seeing.

The follow-up interviews were conducted in pairs and asked the participants to expand on their responses to the questions above. Focus group discussions were more open-ended, but framed by asking participants to reflect on their visiting scholar experiences as a whole and the ways in which they developed intercultural understanding relating to the academic, cultural and everyday domains. The findings are organized under three sub-headings representing the national, institutional and social scales at which intercultural relations were experienced. Our analyses relate to the concepts of the 'inter' or third space, relationality, invitation and hospitality; to this we used a critical lens to identify political-historical discourses and an explanatory narrative for these.

## Intercultural experiences at the national scale.

The visa system and border control as an uninviting experience was felt in two ways. In the first year of visits from CDUT, a mistake had been made on the visa, showing another Canadian University instead of URegina as the host university, and this was only discovered at passport

control on entering Canada. Immigration was reportedly very rude to the two visiting scholars who were refused entry until the mix-up had been sorted out. More recently, in 2015 a change in policy meant that visiting scholars to Canada had to come on a work, rather than tourist, visa and scholars who were due to visit in the winter semester of 2016 had a delay of six months before their visa was granted. Visa issues for visiting scholars and international students are not uncommon; however, the literature shows that visa policies lead to unequal access to countries in the Global North by those in the Global South (Mau et. al., 2012). The increasingly stringent measures being placed on visa processes and border security are at odds with policies that are encouraging universities to internationalize.

### Institutional intercultural experiences.

Whilst the faculty and the university had intentionally sent an invitation to CDUT visiting scholars to come to the University of Regina, it was then up to the visiting scholars to find a faculty member who would host their visit. In the first year, although many letters were sent to faculty, the Chinese scholars either did not get a reply, or were declined. Once in Regina, CDUT scholars experienced other forms of refusal, reporting that they did not have many interactions with staff or students apart from within the confines of the workplace. They also experienced incidences of uninviting behaviours on the part of faculty who refused to let them sit in on classes, and by white students in class who they found it very difficult to interact with. These experiences suggest a gap between institutional policy and individual practice at the University of Regina. In the early days of the partnership it does not appear to have been clear to the host faculty what the implications of hosting a visiting scholar might be. In the context of increasing workloads and expectations of faculty to perform to high levels in teaching, research and community service, it is possible that the time commitment may have been perceived to be too much. For example, the university's strategic plan, 2010-15, for research states that 'an institution with a century of strength in teaching and community service' there is the aim to build equal reputation for 'the pursuit of excellence in research across faculties and disciplines' (URegina, 2011, p.1). Although international research partnerships form part of the strategy for achieving this goal, they also add to faculty workloads which could be seen to mitigate against the time needed to meet the increasing demands for research income and outputs.

Visiting scholars took it upon themselves to display inviting behaviours such as attending weekly brown-bag seminars, and getting involved in the university's global centre. We interpret this as the scholars showing agency in the Bourdieuian (1977) sense.  For Bourdieu, agency is rooted in a series of values and expectations acquired through life activities and experiences, which come to structure the mind and guide one's lifestyle choices. The concept of agency helps to explain human creativity and to account for changes in social structure (Rapport & Overing, 2000, pp. 8-9). In this case, the visiting scholars were unhappy with the social structure as they experienced it, and acted in creative ways to change this – inviting people to engage with them who may not have done otherwise.

However, professionally, the unconditional hospitality was also bounded by the fact that the visiting scholar university program comes with a set of expectations and objectives to be met. Drawing on Fatima's journal reflections, the aporia Derrida speaks of was felt in the

unconditional opening up all of her classes, accompanied with the expectation that the scholars would fully participate and learn – including working with the students to prepare and give group presentations. On a weekly basis Fatima discussed the classes with the scholars, asking them to reflect on what they had learnt from these experiences. These expectations were connected to the fact that URegina required the visiting scholars to write a report at the end of their stay.

## Social and inter-personal intercultural experiences.

For the majority of CDUT scholars an ethos of promoting a feeling of 'being at home' was most successfully achieved at the individual-social level as Fatima opened up her home. As an immigrant to Canada who arrived in the 1970s from Tanganyika, her country of birth, Fatima understood the importance of showing hospitality in ways that were not bounded by the professional sphere. For the scholars, Fatima opening up her home and social space could be seen as a crossing the threshold into a space which is both 'home' and 'not home', perhaps because of cultural similarities around what it means to be hospitable, and because Fatima had her own lived experience of being immersed in a place where few of one's cultural referents are relevant. The shift from invitation to hospitality was shown in the consistent opening up of both professional (all classes) and personal (weekends in her home, cooking together, shopping together). For example, a space of both 'home' and 'not home' was experienced in Fatima's kitchen. It was Fatima's space, but the space was opened up unconditionally to CDUT scholars who 'took it over' as they prepared Sichuan dishes at weekends – thus enabling them to feel at home while also creating a space of reciprocal hospitality.

In contrast, the scholars found few opportunities to experience Canadian social life beyond those extended by Fatima. One visiting scholar observed that in Canada people separate life and work, and that it was difficult to make friends because close their doors and do not always invite people into their home. They also experienced racism through microagressions in academic, social and public settings. These were evident in the refusals by individual faculty for CDUT scholars to sit in their classes because it would be 'disruptive'; in the uninviting behaviours of white students in Fatima's classes; in the portrayals of Chinese in films they saw at the cinema; in the assumption that they would practice martial arts; in the rudeness of the border security officer and so on. However, there was also a discourse evident in the interviews that Canadian people are very nice, very friendly, and very tolerant about people from different culture backgrounds. This discourse could be seen to fit with the image Canada likes to portray, of itself as a nation of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious heritage that is open-minded and tolerant.

## Outcomes of the VS program.

The twelve CDUT visiting scholars have applied the teaching philosophies they have learned to their teaching to varying degrees. A combination of new teaching methods, how to engage the students' in learning, alternative approaches to class arrangement, and the scholars own improvement in English language have resulted in higher student satisfaction in course evaluations. On the basis of these improvements, teachers at CDUT Faculty of Foreign

Languages and Culture won the Second and First Awards in China's Multimedia Courseware Contest in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Capacity is also being developed through the development of a MOOC in collaboration with Fatima (first author), entitled 'Chinese Culture Exchange English' which is expected to have big influence in China.

In particular, CDUT has seen a shift in Chinese visiting scholars' perceptions of the life of an academic through their experiences in Canada: The teachers from both universities recognize that universities have three main functions – teaching, research and community service; research helps teaching and teaching helps research. However, for the Chinese scholars, how to realize this in their work when they are under the pressure of many hours teaching per week is a challenge. Visiting scholars from CDUT are seeking opportunities to change themselves. Their intention is to reposition themselves from teachers without systematic training in teaching to teachers with improved academic abilities in teaching and research. Viewed from this aspect, the visiting scholars from CDUT are struggling in their present identities. They do not want to remain the same after they have experienced a developed higher education system.

In this program, the visiting scholars play dual role: they are not only learners, but College English teachers in China. On one hand, they accept the western ways of systematic teaching, writing and reading. On the other hand, they consider the effects of the application of western teaching methods in Chinese class, their working environment. In this knowledge dissemination, scholars from CDUT are playing the role of "the other" (Bowell, 2015: 9), which is usually inevitable in communication between a dominant culture and a marginalized culture. Nevertheless, development of reciprocal exchange could counteract this concern and be of mutual benefit for the internationalization of both CDUT and the University of Regina.

## Discussion and conclusion.

In discussing the findings each author of this paper identified the differential effects of colonialism on the intercultural encounters and interactions. Although mainland China has not been colonized, it was oppressed by Britain, France, Germany and Spain during the mid 1800s as they fought to negotiate lucrative trade deals and increase their spheres of influence through various treaties. The legacy of colonialism can be seen in the positioning of China as a developing country, and in the positioning its efforts to internationalize as deficient in comparison to Canada. There is a discourse of inferiority in the scholars' accounts who position their abilities as speakers of English as inferior because they speak it with a Chinese accent and find it hard to make themselves understood, despite their achievements with regards to the context in which they learnt their English in the first place. The fact that English is compulsory for all university students is a direct result of the legacy of the imperialism; more than 60% of the world's emails are written in English, over 50% of the newspapers and magazines are in English (He, 2004: 60), and there are 175 English speaking countries and regions all over the world, with more than 80 of them having English as their official language for international communication (He, 2004:61). English has truly become a global language and speaking English as 'native' speakers do is high stakes for the visiting scholars professionally, given their roles as teachers of English for academic purposes across the whole university.

This same discourse was evident in how the scholars spoke about the pedagogies observed in literacy classes in Regina which were described as 'systematic' and valuable because they had not had 'systematic training in pedagogy' in China, where there was also a more stressful teaching environment due to large class sizes and lack of resources. Interviewing the scholars after their return to China and following their efforts to implement some of what they had learnt, it became clear that integrating what they had learnt into their practice was more complex than adapting the teaching methods to the working environments of CDUT classes. The cultural differences between the two education systems – from the materiality of classrooms and curriculum resources to the social norms that guide classroom relationships – are so profound that it is almost impossible to imagine how learning might be transferred.

In the literature China is often positioned as a 'developing' country in contrast to the 'developed' west (Wang, 2008, 2015). This is part of the binary, hierarchical discourse that is redolent of what Grosfoguel (2011) calls a Global Colonial Power Matrix. Despite the intended decolonial approach to practices within the university partnership and visiting scholar program, through which we aimed "to de-center grand narratives of social and political subjugation" (Martínez-Alemán 2015, p. 8), the binary colonial discourse is evident in much of the data. This is the case at national, institutional and social / interpersonal levels. We contend that the Canadian accord (ACDE, 2014) is not achievable without systemic changes and the provision of sufficient support for visiting scholars. A relational understanding of 'inter'-culturality, employing the concepts of invitation and hospitality, allows us to rethink what it means to be supportive. The data suggests that if the private sphere is not opened up (unconditional hospitality) in addition to the academic sphere, then meaningful, critical intercultural understanding is compromised. However, this requires a different kind of commitment on the part of hosting institutions and academics. Derrida (2000) shows how, if deep learning and understanding is to be enabled, the host has to allow themselves to be oppressed. That is, the guest becomes the oppressor *only* if the space is opened up unconditionally; it is in the space of tension between being oppressed and being hospitable that learning may take place. To undertake this challenge with humility and love requires a willingness to decolonize the mind on the part of both host and guest (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986). Racism, paternalism, and colonialism, locally and globally, can only be combatted if there is full investment in partnerships and visiting scholar programs – and unconditional hospitality is key to this. Anything else is tokenistic.

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