Chapter 1

Internationalisation and Identity: Identity Construction Through Australian University Student Mobility Program

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ABSTRACT

This chapter begins with exploring the concept of student mobility historically. Very few studies seek to address students’ existing identities and to trace the colonial impulses contained within discourses of internationalisation. Instead, much of the literature is premised on assumptions of the benefits of these programs. In particular, there is an oversimplification of student identities in explorations of student mobility programs. The authors critically synthesise the literature on discourses of internationalisation and develop a conceptual framework to extend present understandings of the impact of student mobility programs on student identity (re)formation. Also, the present New Colombo Plan will be analysed with particular focus on their construction of student identity. The chapter concludes with the argument that the acknowledgement of students’ already existing diverse identities could be utilized in internationalisation programs on home campuses and provides a possible roadmap for future directions for outbound student mobility programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Student mobility programs form a central feature of many internationalization programs in higher education around the globe and focus on questions of student identity construction and culture. This chapter highlights the importance of students’ cultural diversity and how identity is constructed through mobility programs. In particular, student mobility programs are designed to develop global-ready citizens (Deardroff, 2006) who have intercultural sensitivity, understanding and knowledge. Globally, there has been an increased attention to student mobility programs and how they may enhance student experience. In some countries, such as the US (e.g. Fulbright program) and Europe (e.g. ERASMUS program), there is a long history of intercultural student exchange programs (see Lewin, 2009). However, these programs have a far more recent history in countries like Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. While there is an emerging literature on student mobility programs in Australia, which will be explored in this section, very little of it critically addresses issues of students’ existing cultural identities. So too, few studies seek to trace the colonial impulses contained within discourses of internationalization. Instead, much of the literature is premised on assumptions of the inherent and obvious benefit of these programs. In particular, there is an oversimplification of student identities in explorations of student mobility programs.

This chapter critically synthesises the literature on discourses of internationalization, explores the history of student mobility and develops a conceptual framework to extend present understandings of the impact of student mobility programs on student identity [re]formation. This study draws upon postcolonial, Foucauldian and Southern theories in order to critique the colonial agenda that underpins student mobility programs. While Foucauldian theories offer useful tools for exploring the relationship between culture, power and knowledge, a postcolonial framework enables us to have an understanding of the ongoing effects of colonialism on individual and collective identities. Additionally, what could be considered to be relatively new, Southern theory draws attention to how knowledge is distributed and controlled by Northern paradigms.

The chapter then outlines the ways in which student mobility programs are posed as the ‘solution’ to the constructed ‘problem’ of Australian students lacking intercultural and globally-aware citizenship skills. This study explores why this particular policy problem has been constructed in this way by drawing upon Bacchi’s (2009) form of policy discourse analysis. One key Australian student mobility policy, including the present Abbott/Turnbull government’s New Colombo Plan, will be analysed with a particular focus on the policy’s construction of student identity. This analysis will especially investigate the key assumption underpinning these policies that Australian domestic students need to go overseas in order to gain and apply linguistic diversity, intercultural competence, and cultural sensitivity in a short period of study time. In particular, this chapter problematises the ways such policies overlook the cultural diversity of Australian domestic students and assume that all Australian higher education students are monolingual and belong to a White Anglo culture.

Australian students are already culturally, linguistically, ethnically, religiously and socio-economically diverse. Furthermore, there are also many local Australian students who are bilingual or even multilingual. Some students already function as intercultural communicators in their daily lives in their local communities. The chapter explores why government policies overlook such pre-existing, diverse students’ identities and do not provide a platform to utilise them and extend them. It is argued that the reasons for promoting and conducting mobility programs by institutions are conflicting and contradictory. The implications of educational policies in terms of [re]constructing students’ identities are then considered. Without a detailed analysis of student diversity and identity in Australian campuses, designing student
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