



Student mobility, connectedness and identity

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International Student Connectedness and Identity: Transnational Perspectives

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This edited volume focuses on the interrelationship between international student connectedness and identity from transnational and trans-disciplinary perspectives. It addresses the core issues around international students' physical and virtual connectedness to people, places and organisations as well as the conditions that shape their transnational connectedness and identity formation. It aims to analyse the nature, diversity and complexity of international student connectedness and identity development across different national, social and cultural boundaries. Based on empirical research, theoretical knowledge and experiences drawn from researchers from the Asia-Pacific region, Europe and America, this edited book aims to:

- analyse the interrelationship between international students' connectedness and their identity development from transnational and trans-disciplinary perspectives
- examine the motivations, forms and manners in which international students establish and maintain connectedness to the spatial, social, cultural and intellectual environments associated with their transnational mobility
- clarify and discuss the factors that influence their connectedness in the transnational social fields
- examine whether and in what ways international students' connectedness to people and places have changed due to their mobility experience
- analyse key concepts from contemporary theories about connectedness and identity in transnational social fields and advance empirical and theoretical insights needed by institutions and systems to build effective policies and practices for supporting international students' experiences and wellbeing.

The macro context

There are over 4.5 million students moving across their national border for tertiary education not only in English speaking countries and Europe but also in the Asia Pacific region (OECD, 2014). Global student mobility and international education are framed by divergent social, economic and political factors. These phenomena are shaped and reshaped by current changes in tertiary education policy including neoliberal marketization of education, fee deregulation/reregulation, migration policies and the emergence of offshore online international education. While international education has been the staple of well-known international education hubs of Australia-New Zealand, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, the traditional concept, nature and practices of international education in these countries are changing. In the eighteenth century, the British, French and European colonisers regarded international education and student mobility as a tool to serve the political and economic imperatives of the provider countries (Rizvi, 2009). This was followed by post-colonial decades which characterised international education as a form of aid to produce human resources for home nations while at the same time increasing their dependence on provider countries. The past thirty years however have witnessed the shift from education as aid to education as trade. This has been accompanied by the commercialisation of education and the mass recruitment of international students to fill in revenue gaps created by decreasing government funding for tertiary education in host countries. International education, in other words, has been re-positioned as a service export industry.

The nature and practice of student mobility and international education also coincide with a rapidly changing policy environment with potential fee deregulation in countries such as Australia. If universities have the freedom to determine tuition fees for both domestic and international students, what will be the fee difference for these distinctive groups? In addition, would fee deregulation then prompt domestic students into pursuing their education overseas? The end result of these shifts in student mobility might well impact tradition (international) education service providers such as Australia.

International education and student mobility in countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK and the US are also influenced by migration policies. Recent migration policies in these countries have been framed with a focus on retaining international student graduates from domestic universities rather than attracting migrants from off-shore (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012; Hawthorn, 2013; Robertson, 2011). In Australia, the education-migration nexus has been seen as a win-win policy for host institutions and the nation. This skilled migration policy that accords advantage for international student graduates from Australian universities has accelerated the lucrative education export market. This is because international education is the biggest service export industry in this country, generating 16.6 billion dollar for the national economy in 2014 alone (Hare, 2015). At the same time, the policy attracts and retains skilled locally trained human capital. However, the question of whether and to what extent this education-migration policy has effectively capitalised on the pool of domestically trained international graduates and thus addressed the current labour and skill shortages remains debatable. The sheer volume of international student mobility has had an impact, in other words, on receiver and home nations in terms of migration and employment. Receiver nations for instance have had to rethink their policies on skilled labour while home nations have had to resort to creative ways in addressing the brain-drain their nations face with their students remaining in the host nation or going elsewhere other than the country of birth and/or citizenship.

With the arrival of multinational and commercial companies onto the scene, no more are state institutions the only education providers. Education providers are now not limited by place or by space with offshore campuses erupting globally and with online courses made available regardless of national boundaries. In addition, other countries such as those in Asia such as Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and China are now engaging in the lucrative international education market. However, these new markets have different ambitions to their established English-speaking competitors. In the early 2000s, the Singapore government, for instance, began to imagine itself as a global education hub host to diverse public and private institutions of higher learning from local and foreign education providers attracting international students from the region and elsewhere (Sidhu, Ho & Yeoh, 2014; Ziguas & Gribble, 2014). Turning Singapore into a global education hub where Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans benefit from local and foreign institutions is a key strategy the government relied upon to make Singapore into a knowledge-based economy which would see the city-state strengthen its position as a regional services hub and manufacturing base for multinational companies (Sanderson, 2002). International students in Singapore in other words are a valued investment not for the money they bring in but for the future labour they provide Singapore since the government provides generous scholarships and subsidises international student fees.

Student mobility and international student connectedness and identity

The process of mobility and intersections with new socio-cultural environments as a result of transnational movements affect international students' identity and connectedness to space,

family, friendship networks, communities as well as cultural and academic practices. Mobility therefore represents as both challenges and potential for international students' self-formation and connectedness to the world around them. Connectedness plays an important role in shaping international students' wellbeing, resilience and success in the host country as well as their future trajectories (Cheung & Yue, 2013; Marginson et al., 2010; Rosenthal et al., 2007; Tran, 2011; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Connectedness can involve a range of social, cultural, interpersonal and intellectual engagement and learning. It is also interrelated to individual students' being and becoming.

The social capital deprived from connectedness with the local host community fosters international students' normative and legitimate participation in the mainstream culture (Cheung and Yue 2013). Disconnectedness often results in a status of marginalisation that affects students' physical and mental wellbeing. At the same time, maintaining the ties with family and home culture helps international students sustain 'the continuity of self' (Marginson et al., 2010:360). Despite various research that indicates the interrelationship between connectedness and welfare of international students (Rosenthal et al, 2007; Cheung & Yue, 2013), connectedness in transnational spaces remains an ill-defined concept in the literature. Notably, the relationship between connectedness, disconnectedness and self-formation is largely ignored in scholarly research.

International student identity, moreover, is often understood and theorised in the existing literature as being connected to the home nation and ethnic culture (for example, Kashima & Loh, 2006; Soon, 2011). Such assumptions are unsurprising since international students are transient and thus often seen to have very less investment socially in their host country. The increasing use and connectivity provided by advancements in communication media and digital technologies have meant that international students more so than ever before, are connected to their homelands (Hjorth, 2011; Hjorth & Arnold, 2012). As a mobile dynamic group of sojourners, their identity is, however, complex and evolving. First of all, many international students do not consider themselves to possess a singular national home-based identity because they are influenced by the transnational circulation of people and ideas. Locating themselves in transnational and transcultural fields has resulted in the emergence of their multiple and changing identities. These identities are based not solely on the place of their birth but on heritage connected to the broad categories of race, ethnic culture, national culture and religion, as well as to other categories such as general interests and aspirations. Secondly, emerging studies are showing that international students redefine and create identities for themselves which are based on their circumstance as transient and their aspirations for global mobility (Singh 2011; Gomes 2015). So rather than solely linking themselves to any home nation identity, many consider themselves cosmopolitan and international.

Transnational social field as a conceptual frame

This book brings together key researchers from across Europe, the Asia Pacific region and the USA to *provide a comprehensive view of the forms, meanings and effects of international student connectedness and identity*. We draw on the theoretical framing of transnational social fields (Fouron & Schiller, 2001; Gargano; 2009) to conceptualise international student mobility and to create an internal coherence for this volume. A transnational social field is defined as 'an unbounded terrain of interlocking egocentric networks that extend across the borders of two or more nations-states and that incorporates its participants in the day-today activities of social reproduction in these various locations' (Fouron & Schiller, 2001:544). The conceptual

notion of transnational social fields (Fouon & Schiller, 2001; Gargano, 2009) allows us to examine how the flow of ideas, practice and social networks associated with transnational student mobility is embedded within evolving relationships. In light of this conceptual frame, we analyse how international students ‘construct identities and negotiate social spaces, physical locales and the geography of the mind’ (Gargano, 2009:331). Viewing international student mobility from the lens of transnational social fields not only helps us capture the lived realities of this mobile student cohort but also allows us to imagine more for student mobility.

The chapters in this book will generate nuanced insights into students’ experiences and the dynamic ways in which cultural flows and processes affect students’ identity construction and reconstruction, social and transnational spaces, physical locales and online/offline networks. In particular, transnational social fields are spaces for the negotiation and evolution of relationships but also for the enactment agency for this mobile student cohort who can be conceptualised as ‘self-forming agents’ (Marginson, 2014). The advancement of digital technologies, digital culture and the online world significantly affects student-inhabited transnational spaces and forms of locality and belonging which transcend home/host country binaries (Martin & Rizvi 2014). This book brings together all these emerging complex dimensions which currently reside outside the mainstream discourse of international education research to frame international students’ negotiation and formation of transnational social spaces, connectedness and identities.

Transnational social fields as a conceptual framework is useful and relevant for our collection because it locates and describes the identities and connectedness of international students as dynamic and fluid due to their mobility. Furthermore it provides us with a conceptual lens to see how different policies including the neoliberal marketization of education, the emergence of offshore online international education, migration policy and changes to education policies in both host and home countries as mentioned above impact student mobility and transnational education. We thus move away from the nation-centred approach to viewing student mobility since it oversimplifies the interrelated nature of this phenomenon and ignores the ways in which student mobility intersects with multiple and transnational logics of social and economic practices. The concept of transnational social fields instead provides a broader lenses for addressing how student mobility is grounded in the contexts of original and new spaces (Gargano, 2009), home and host spaces and physical and virtual spaces.

Within the context of this collection, the key terms are defined as follows:

1. Connectedness refers to the multiple avenues of belonging to different communities in the home and host nations international students use in order to create a meaningful existence for themselves while in transience.
2. Disconnectedness refers to the communities and places which international students feel they do not or no longer feel a sense of belonging to
3. Transience is defined as being in a state of temporariness in countries other than where they hold citizenship or permanent residence
4. Cosmopolitan identity refers to the self-perceived and aspirational metropolitan and well travelled identity international students believe they have
5. Imagined community is the physical or virtual space or place that international students imagine they would belong to.

Most scholarship in the field of international student research focuses on *onshore international students* in one particular national context (for example Glass et al., 2014; Cheung & Yue,

2013; Rosenthal et al., 2007; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003) and concentrates exclusively on *the higher education sector*. Thus, this collection represents the first volume in the world that addresses the motivations and manners in which international students establish and maintain connectedness to the spatial, social, cultural and academic environment in *both the higher education (HE) and the vocational education and training (VET) sectors*. Also existing discussions on international student engagement focus largely on undergraduate and Masters students. International doctoral students as well as returnees are important but often-neglected groups in current scholarly discussions and debates on connectedness and identity in international education. This edited volume will be a unique collection in the world that addresses a range of connectedness dimensions in both the *onshore* and *offshore* mode of delivery, across different education programs (*VET, undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and doctoral students*), both *current students* and the *returnee groups* and in both *face to face* and *online environment*.

This book is a distinctive contribution to the field of international education and cultural studies and to current debates about enhancing international student experience as it brings together a wide range of identity and connectedness dimensions. The chapters in this book discuss international student connectedness to *peers, teachers and academic environment, the host communities, cultural practices, workplaces, religious organisations, offshore campus, homeland, virtual world, returnees' re-engagement* and issues associated with *disconnectedness*. Currently there is an absence in the literature and published work on issues related to international students from a wide range of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Many chapters included in this volume address both conceptual frameworks and practical tools on cultivating international students' connectedness and wellbeing from not only education lens but also sociology, anthropology, humanities, cultural studies, language studies and communication studies that bring fresh insights and significant implications for education studies of international student mobility. Thus, in contrast to many existing titles, this book can engage with readers from multiple disciplinary vantages. The insights into these crucial aspects of identity and connectedness from a variety of cultural and disciplinary perspectives presented in this book will attract dialogue about the critical issues related to the burgeoning global phenomenon of young people's transnational experience in international education. The chapters in this book in other words show that international students are not passive actors but rather create effective strategies that allow them to cope with both life as international students and thereafter.

Overarching structure

The volume is organised into three main parts: Part 1 on *international student connectedness in the host country*, Part 2 on *international student and returnee connectedness in the home country* and Part 3 on *connectedness/disconnectedness and identity development*. By working with the overarching and interrelated themes of connectedness and identity, the chapters in this volume represent cutting edge work that maps both current and emerging trends taking place in international student mobility. Some of the authors in this collection emphasize that while improvements in digital communication (e.g. Wong; Zheng) and aspirations for global mobility (Gomes) have allowed international students to stay connected to the home nation (Wong), others observe that international students struggle with notions of identity as they strive to be cosmopolitan and international (Haines & Rosenblum) and at the same time seek a sense of

belonging in transience (Tran & Pham; Yang; Soong; Valentin; Marchant; Killick). However, some of the chapters provide us with strategies international students adopt in order to create a sense of belonging whether through on campus social networks (Tran & Pham) or through off-campus communities such as religious organisations (Stevenson).

The quest for cosmopolitanism has led to new trends in international student post-graduation mobility with authors (Gribble; Delicado; Pham) pointing out that while some students return to the home nation to work, others may stay in the host country or go elsewhere. Addressing an under-researched area of international student education and mobility, these authors highlight the possibilities and challenges former international students face when fitting into their 'new' environment regardless of destination.

In order to unpack and analyse the umbrella themes of connectedness and identity, the authors in this collection creatively make use of conceptual frameworks and methodologies that are trans-disciplinary or multidisciplinary. For example Killick adopts a phenomenological when examining the lived experiences of international students while Marchant analyses identity by using the theory of mixed intersubjectivity. Tran and Pham draw on Bourdieu's notions of 'capital' and 'habitus' to conceptualise the effects of the structural conditions that influence international students' connectedness to social and academic environments. In so doing, this volume is dedicated to highlighting areas of international student connectedness, well-being and identity that have significant implications for stakeholders working in the global international education sector while contributing to conceptual discussions of student mobility.

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