

## **Spiritual Dimensions in Co-Curricular Spaces as an Approach to Internationalization**

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**This essay is a response to Dr. Kalyani Unkule's essay "*Redesigning Internationalisation with Beginner's Mind*"**

Dr. Kalyani Unkule offers a creative way for educators to consider a spiritual dimension that is often missing from intercultural education and internationalization practice. In particular, Unkule offers insight into how including a spiritual approach can open a gateway to deeper engagement that focuses on knowledge creation, whose knowledge is valid and decolonization of knowledge. I assert similarly to Unkule that engaging a spiritual dimension offers an opportunity to hold space for onto-epistemological diversity that allows students to explore the borders of their beliefs and identity. I question however, where and how these explorations can happen when the modern university, which operates largely on neoliberal logics, focuses on competition and commodification of knowledge. The university can be imagined as a mechanistic system that functions and moves towards neoliberal goals. What types of spaces, however, can act as ruptures in this system?

While Unkule writes about various spaces and opportunities, such as study abroad programs and internationalizing curriculum, I think co-curricular spaces in higher education are uniquely placed to decolonize knowledge and our understanding of ourselves, including spiritual dimensions. As a practitioner in the higher education system, I have discovered small tears in the system where students can explore dimensions of experiences that are beyond any materialistic sense. Working with a multi-faith center within a secular university, the work I do offers an interruption to the frenzy of competition, rankings, publications and other activities of pursuing excellence as defined by our neo-liberal context. This is also a space where intercultural and interfaith activities can focus on personal learning and development rather than on competencies for graduates to compete in the global economy.

Similar to concepts presented in Unkule's chapter 5, Shoshin, holistic student development, negative capability and non-dichotomous thinking are taken up wholly in a co-curricular environment with the bringing together of students from various backgrounds, knowledge and experiences, including international students.

Spaces such as the one where I work are an important focus given COVID-19's impact on student mobility and learning abroad. Even before the pandemic, however, international study abroad programs were not accessible to many students. Furthermore, being situated in a diverse metropolitan area, the categorization of students as international or domestic sometimes makes little sense at my institution and lines become blurry when there are also high numbers of newcomer students. The co-curricular environment is an important space that can deeply support domestic and international students and all of the diversity of identities and experiences they bring. The question is, though, how can practitioners take up this task and find these tears in the neoliberal system to cultivate nurturing spaces? As a practitioner who tries to tap into these spaces, I have heard many comments from students expressing appreciation for the opportunity to learn more about themselves and also to think more deeply about how they relate to others and the world around them. There are various approaches to incorporate spirituality and epistemological diversity into internationalization practices. Exploring spiritual dimensions as part of the human experience can enrich learning and provide opportunities to think about the world and our ways of being in radically transformative ways.

## REFERENCES

Unkule, K. (2019). *Internationalising the University: A Spiritual Approach*. Springer.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Punita Lumb** is a PhD student in Higher Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Her primary research interests are international and comparative higher education, critical race, decolonial and postcolonial theories. She also coordinates programs rooted in decolonial thought, equity, diversity and inclusion for Student Life at the University of Toronto.

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