

## **“You Don’t Build Bridges to Safe and Familiar Territories”: Study Abroad Practice Based in Reconciliation as Falling Apart**

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### **Part II**

This three-part article series aims to relate a new understanding of reconciliation with higher education internationalization practice, particularly study abroad, drawing on Anzaldúa and Keating’s (2002, p. 3) imagination of bridging as “the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without.” Part I discussed some of the challenges that reconciliation as a modality of transitional justice shares with higher education internationalization. Prominent critiques of standard practices deployed to achieve post-conflict reconciliation point to the need for embracing in-between-ness as the liminal space between discord and harmony, rather than an effort to arrive at standardized narratives in service of moving on, while leaving unexamined the dominant paradigms and systems linked to conflict. Part II will draw out specific interventions that stem from positing reconciliation as in-betweenness and study abroad as building bridges back to ourselves.

### **Study Abroad and Reconciliation**

Over a decade’s worth of scholarship has diagnosed the lopsided growth of International Higher Education using a variety of frameworks including globalization studies, political economy, migration and mobility, cosmopolitanism, and neo-liberalism and its discontents. Yet, despite the systemic shock dealt by COVID-19, we see little evidence of this scholarship permeating state and institutional policies – an indication of the need to build that bridge between critical discourse and practice. Study Abroad remains a mainstay of the higher education internationalization portfolio and in the sections that follow, I revisit experiential learning and cultural competence – key concerns of study

abroad – in light of foregoing engagement with the concept of reconciliation.

### **Truth-seeking/Learning With**

To adequately address the gap between nominal cultural diversity and genuine expression of cultural difference in learning spaces is to raise the question: What are the hidden curricula or tacit protocols or internalized expectations about presenting, re-presenting and suppressing embodied knowledges? Such probing invites rethinking into the role of program design in influencing student beliefs about worthy learning outcomes and may entail scrutiny of our program evaluation practices which, intentionally or not, set expectations around terms of engagement among collaborating institutions. At the heart of this inquiry is the question whether study abroad is meant for “learning about,” “learning from” or “learning with.”

The idea of two-eyed seeing (Bartlett et al., 2012) helps us reconceptualize peer-to-peer learning during study abroad. Two-eyed seeing refers not only to combining Indigenous ways of knowing with modern science but is at the same time a profound acknowledgement that both our intellectual and our spiritual nature must be invested in knowledge seeking. The instrumental conception of study abroad concerns itself solely with learning about. A more engaged view emphasizes learning from, but this ultimately risks hierarchizing worldviews. Learning with is a way of formulating study abroad that makes room for intentional peer-to-peer engagement. Unfortunately, contemporary institutional practices of organizing study abroad seldom include home students as an integral element of learning journeys of the visiting student. In addition, the deficit view of international students – especially those pursuing degree studies at western institutions – have entrenched paternalism in international educational practice.

### **Ways of Being/Experiential Learning, Meet Experiential Ontologies**

Citing Sherene Razack, Robin DiAngelo spotlights the “knowability” of colonized peoples as an essential feature of progressive liberal attempts to contend with racism. In response, she proclaims that the need of the hour is not to teach white people about black people but “to teach White people about ourselves in relation to Black and other people of color” (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 4). In DiAngelo’s insistence on personal transformation, there is a recognition that systemic transformation often places the burden of fighting for change disproportionately on the emotional labor of the disadvantaged. The ascription of “knowability” should not be confused with a desire to understand the other in their context. Intended here is an instrumentalized knowing which seeks to turn the barbarian into a “reformed recognisable other” as Dei and Doyle-Wood (2014, p. 160) put it. This “knowing” for the sake of first denying and ultimately expunging other ways of being is the grounds on which the education by mimicry project has thrived.

Elaborating on the concept of education in pre-colonial Sierra Leone,

Yatta Kanu (2014, p. 208) recalls that “because every education is for entering adulthood, [...] Objective or abstract knowledge is not imparted as such because it is not believed that people first develop theoretical understanding of things and events and then apply this knowledge in making judgments and decisions; rather, the quest for understanding is conditioned and constituted by reflection upon how to act wisely in concrete situations.” The de-emphasizing of “objective” and “abstract” knowledge here is first and foremost an unmasking of the pretense of objectivity that often accompanies abstract knowledge. In study abroad, we have hastily instated “experiential learning” as the panacea, without adequate attention to the constructs and prejudices through which new experience is filtered. Here, I propose learning by flâneurship, a wandering which is “casual but not aimless” (Unkule, 2019, p. 147). A wandering which permits the novel to be novel rather than a superior/inferior version of the known, thereby freeing up the flâneur’s wanderings from the baggage of experience. The flâneurship model is the surrender of obsession with categories before an openness to content. If there is an ultimate aim for such a process, it is that of emancipation from one’s own conditioning.

In Part III of the series, we will conclude our exploration of the links between higher education internationalization and transitional justice by imagining international higher education as a just institution.

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