

## *The World in My Classroom: Postsecondary Teachers' Beliefs about International Students and Internationalization*

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### ABSTRACT

The burgeoning and ubiquitous process of internationalization of higher education has greatly contributed to the increasing presence of international students in Canadian universities. In the midst of a transforming academic scenario, many benefits arise, but also challenges. While much has been written about teachers' beliefs towards culturally diverse students, there is a paucity of studies on how postsecondary teachers perceive the booming population of international students and how internationalization has been affecting them. Based on Gloria Ladson-Billings'<sup>1</sup> theoretical framework, this critical phenomenological study aims to depict university teachers' beliefs about international graduate students, how they experience internationalization and the impact of this process on their practices. Additionally, findings will inform the extent to which internationalized universities have been a hospitable place for international students, allowing critiques to emerge towards a more welcoming and democratic education.

*Keywords:* Internationalization, Higher Education, Professors' Beliefs, International Students

### INTRODUCTION

The last centuries in the history of Canada have been marked by an increasing cultural diversity emerging from the multiple nationalities in its territory. But especially in the last decades, as a by-product of the internationalization of higher education in a globalized era, traveling overseas to pursue a degree in a foreign university has become increasingly more popular among students around the world. The population of sojourner students in Canadian universities increased more than 99% between 2000 and 2011,<sup>2</sup> and according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, there were 205,428 international students in that country in 2014, coming from more than 180 different nations.<sup>3</sup> The term *international student* in this study is defined as an individual who was not born in Canada and who came, primarily, with the purpose of studying at a university, either for the whole academic program or a shorter period.

There are innumerable benefits of having a culturally diverse campus. It can “create opportunities for collaborative knowledge production, exposure to different

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (1995): 465-491.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Anderson, “Seeking internationalization: The state of Canadian Higher Education,” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 45, no. 4 (2015): 167.

<sup>3</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Open Government Licence – Canada: International students by citizenship and year (Recent Quarters)*, <http://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/b813dcb6-cc08-4e06-97d4-85b7e4daa822>

contexts and worldviews, more complex and nuanced analyses, and improved capacity to respond to change and diversity,”<sup>4</sup> promote ethical partnerships globally, enhance the curriculum, and empower individuals with a more critical view of the world. Nonetheless, there are also many risks involved in this constantly evolving process. Exploitative practices emerging from an unbalanced focus on profit maximization, systemic exclusion, and the consequent emergence of a neo-colonization of epistemologies are some of the potential threats involved in the internationalization of higher education,<sup>5</sup> which must be considered.

A commonly claimed main rationale for internationalization is to prepare graduates to become “internationally knowledgeable and interculturally competent.”<sup>6</sup> However, for internationalization to achieve its goal, educators must firstly be interculturally competent themselves,<sup>7</sup> which means having the “abilities to communicate effectively with a variety of different people.”<sup>8</sup> The problem is that while “good communication – intercultural or intracultural – requires a healthy respect for the forms and varieties of communication styles that people use to express themselves .... there is scant evidence that teachers appreciate the many ways that students different from them use language and other forms of communication.”<sup>9</sup>

Jenks, Lee and Kanpol share the stance affirming that “unless educators are themselves cross-culturally competent, students will not become so, at least not as the result of their schooling.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore in order for teachers to respond to a culturally diverse classroom in a democratic and responsive way, the first step is to recognize their own underlying assumptions, the lenses through which they make sense of the world,

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<sup>4</sup> Association of Canadian Deans of Education, “Accord on the internationalization of education,” 5.

<https://www.trentu.ca/education/sites/trentu.ca.education/files/ACDE%20Accord%20on%20the%20Internationalization%20of%20Education.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Jane Knight, “A shared vision? Stakeholders’ perspective on the internationalization of Higher Education in Canada,” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 1, no 1 (1997): 30.

<sup>7</sup> Sabine Schuerholz-Lehr, “Teaching for global literacy in Higher Education: How prepared are the educators?” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 11, no. 2 (2007): 180-204.

<sup>8</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective,” *Review of Research in Education* 24 (1999): 224-225.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Jenks, James Lee, and Barry Kanpol, “Approaches to multicultural education in preservice teacher education: Philosophical frameworks and models for teaching,” *Urban Review* 33, no.2 (2001): 88.

before beginning the process of understanding the “other.”<sup>11</sup>

Although many aspects are interlaced with how teachers’ practices unfold in the classroom, what the literature review demonstrates is that one’s beliefs do play a major role when teaching a culturally diverse classroom. However, while a plethora of studies have been conducted in different educational settings showing how teachers’ beliefs towards cultural diversity are key elements in the learning and teaching process, not much has been written about higher education teachers’ beliefs regarding graduate international students and internationalization in the Canadian context. The Government may claim to hold a welcoming and valuing perspective of diversity, but it is not yet clear whether or how that takes place in postsecondary classrooms shaped by the cultural diversity brought by international students.

Therefore, based on Gloria Ladson-Billings’ culturally relevant pedagogy,<sup>12</sup> the purpose of this study is to understand the essence of being a higher education professor of international students and how the modern process of internationalization is perceived and affecting their practices. The main questions to be answered are:

1. What are postsecondary teachers’ beliefs about internationalization, with special attention to their work with international students?
2. To what extent have their teaching philosophies and practices been impacted as they encounter more international students?
3. To what extent is Ladson-Billings’ framework pertinent for understanding postsecondary teachers’ work with international students?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Committed to promoting social justice and equity in culturally diverse classrooms, Ladson-Billings sought to develop an effective pedagogical practice that “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate.”<sup>13</sup> Based on her observations of considered successful

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<sup>11</sup> McAllister and Irvine, “The role of empathy in teaching culturally diverse students. A qualitative study of teachers’ beliefs,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 53, no.5 (2002): 433-443.

<sup>12</sup> Ladson-Billings, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 469.

teachers of African-American children, she developed a culturally relevant pedagogy as a guide to “produce students who can achieve academically, ... demonstrate cultural competence, and ... both understand and critique the existing social order.”<sup>14</sup> She outlines that teachers who succeeded in implementing a culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms did not teach the same subjects nor share the same strategies. Rather, what they had in common were their beliefs and ideologies towards diversity in three major tenets: a) teachers’ conceptions of self and others, b) social relations, and c) teachers’ conceptions of knowledge. These three spheres, intertwined with professors’ perception of internationalization, guided this research, informing the essence of being a professor of international students in higher education.

Notwithstanding its original context, a culturally relevant pedagogy has been successfully applied in many different educational settings, including higher education.<sup>15</sup> In fact, Ladson-Billings herself has declared that “any notion of culturally relevant pedagogy has to change and evolve in order to meet the needs of each generation of studies.”<sup>16</sup> The question that remains, though, is the extent to which it can also be applied to understand how postsecondary teachers across areas perceive and react to their classrooms comprised of so many international students. The present research will rely on this theoretical lens while offering critical insights into its applicability.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Internationalization of Higher Education*

Not only is the concept of *universe* already embedded in what turned out to be called university, but studying in a different country or continent can be dated even from medieval times.<sup>17</sup> Although not a new phenomenon, the modern process of internationalization of Higher Education has been standing out for its complexity and development.

Besides the previously mentioned main rationale for this process, the idea of

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<sup>14</sup> Ladson-Billings, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, 474.

<sup>15</sup> See Brittany Aronson and Judson Laughter, “The theory and practice of Culturally Relevant Education: Synthesis of research across content areas,” *Review of Educational Research* 86, no. 1(2016): 163–206; Django Paris, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice,” *Educational Researcher* 41, no.3 (2012): 93-97.

<sup>16</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix,” *Harvard Educational Review* 84, no. 1(2014): 80-81.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Altbach and Jane Knight, “The internationalization of Higher Education: Motivations and realities,” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 11, no.3-4 (2007): 290-305.

promoting global citizenship has recently been employed by higher education institutions around the world, including Canadians, as being the purpose of international education.<sup>18</sup> However, this contested term also evokes questions in relation to its fulfillment. While “global citizenship discussions are predicated on an idea of agreement on universal ideals such as equity and social justice, at the same as honoring difference,”<sup>19</sup> it is questionable whether or how such aims have been sought in (Western) internationalized universities that are cloistered in their ways of thinking and privileges.

While the benefits of internationalization have been broadly discussed elsewhere, an evident benefit for international student recruitment is the economic contribution they make, an essential source of revenue for institutions.<sup>20</sup> Although it is possible to have a scenario of balanced interests, the way in which education has been regarded as a lucrative and tradable sector poses a big risk to it, where students may now be seen as mere customers, more trade than aid, the new cash cows, who are recruited in order to fulfill economic agendas.

### ***Teaching and Diversity***

Research shows that among the many factors that may cooperate or hamper international students' flourishing, the influence of teachers can be pivotal. Asher points out that “diversity is not necessarily indicative of the acceptance of difference,”<sup>21</sup> while noticing an increasing cultural gap between teachers and their diverse students. As the author concludes, even though we live in a globalized world, “clashes across differences of culture, religions, and region are increasingly evident in the international arena.”<sup>22</sup>

Bennett recognizes that “addressing legacies of exclusion rooted in institutional racism on campus is a major challenge,”<sup>23</sup> as they are ingrained not only at the individual

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<sup>18</sup> Valerie Clifford, “Challenging conceptions of Western Higher Education and promoting graduates as global citizens,” *Higher Education Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2014), 28-45.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> See Suzy Harris, “Internationalising the University,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 40, no. 2 (2008): 346-357; Dirk Van Damme, “Quality issues in the internationalisation of Higher Education,” *Higher Education* 41(2001): 415-441; Rashim Wadhwa, “New phase of internationalization of Higher Education and institutional change,” *Higher Education for the Future* 3, no. 2 (2016): 227–246.

<sup>21</sup> Nina Asher, “Listening to hyphenated Americans: Hybrid identities of youth from immigrant families,” *Theory into Practice* 47, no. 1 (2008): 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Christine Bennett, “Research on racial issues in American Higher Education,” In *Handbook of research on multicultural education*, eds. James Banks and Cherry Banks (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 857.

level (e.g., racist behaviors of students) but also at the institutional level (e.g., policies that favor mainstream students to the detriment of minorities). She points, however, that cultural racism can happen unintentionally. Many teachers may claim to appreciate cultural diversity while taking no actions to support it but ignoring or undermining whatever disharmonizes with the dominant figure and mindset.<sup>24</sup>

Conversely, recognizing and valuing the difference, rather than containing it, is what should be the backbone of quality education.<sup>25</sup> Facing the difference arouses the interruption of ourselves and directs us to a place of vulnerability, a place where many do not like to be. Here, then, is a call to hospitality: accommodating the difference as if hosting a guest. Such accommodation, however, does not come as a mere addition to what already exists, trying to fit it into something else. Rather, it requires accepting that “the arrival of the guest may change the space into which he or she is received.”<sup>26</sup> Only then can we finally learn from the other. In other words, “education must be constructed in such a way as to leave space for those students and those ideas that may arrive,”<sup>27</sup> which will inevitably happen in culturally diverse contexts.

### ***Teachers’ Beliefs in Higher Education***

A commonly neglected approach to internationalization is exactly that of the teachers’ perspective.<sup>28</sup> Korhonen and Weil argue that while the meaning of such concept is often limited either to the institutional level or to focus mainly on curricula (i.e., content design and delivery), it is crucial to analyze the impact of internationalization on teachers’ personal, social and professional context, as well as their self-conceptions. They recognize that “university teachers are in a key position when enabling enriching educational experiences for students and empowering students’ cultural competence for studying and working in a globalizing world.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, understanding how postsecondary teachers make sense of the internationalization process is a pivotal element

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<sup>24</sup> Launcelot Brown, “Diversity: The challenge for higher education,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 7, no.1 (2004): 21-34.

<sup>25</sup> Tim Molnar, “Responsibility as the welcoming of difference: Thoughts on Levinas and a teacher’s experience,” *In education* 18, no.1 (2012): 37-49.

<sup>26</sup> Claudia Ruitenberg, “The empty chair: Education in an ethic of hospitality,” *Philosophy of education* (2011): 32.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Vesa Korhonen and Markus Weil, “The internationalisation of higher education: Perspectives on self-conceptions in teaching,” *Journal of Research in International Education* 14, no. 3 (2015): 198-212.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

not only to their own professional development but also to strive for a meaningful cross-cultural academic experience for every part involved.

Investigating what professors understand to be the purpose of internationalization of higher education and their roles in this process, Clifford<sup>30</sup> points out that teachers acknowledged their responsibility to bring different perspectives to the curriculum and promote critical thinking. As one of the participants recognized: “rather than internationalizing others, e.g., students, we need to start with internationalizing ourselves.”<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, participants claimed not to have enough confidence and skills to develop a transformative curriculum as Western discourses are deeply embedded in their ways of thinking. Additionally, teachers felt engaging in critical self-reflection to be a profoundly disturbing task to be performed, especially after many years of experience.

Brown<sup>32</sup> is skeptical about how almost every faculty member proclaims to perceive diversity as beneficial and desirable, as the author noticed analyzing other research. She infers that it is possible for teachers to, “while agreeing with the principles of diversity, in practice [be] content to leave things as they are.”<sup>33</sup> Acknowledging diversity as an asset is not sufficient if teachers do not see themselves as active and responsible agents in assuring effective multiculturalism. Rather, it is necessary to take meaningful actions that promote diversity, challenge stereotypes, fight the status quo and create a welcoming environment for different perspectives.

### **METHODOLOGY**

By using a critical phenomenological framework and semi-structured interviews with ten professors across different areas, this study sought to uncover their beliefs towards international students, understand how they have been making sense of internationalization, and how their perspectives and practices have been affected by this process. Nonrandom and purposeful sampling was used in this research. In this way, professors of different faculties in both sciences and social sciences were invited based on certain characteristics from which the most could be learned. The criteria for inclusion were: a) hold a tenure-track position, b) have had at least four years of experience in this

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<sup>30</sup> Clifford, *Challenging conceptions of Western Higher Education and promoting graduates as global citizens*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *Diversity: The challenge for higher education*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

position, c) teach at the graduate level, and d) have had international students in their classes.

The institution selected for the study was a mid-sized university located in Western Canada, with a considerable proportion of students from other countries and several characteristics of a modern internationalized university. Interviews were conducted through Skype and lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. All participants received the full transcript of their interview after it was conducted and were given the opportunity to revise, edit or complete any part that was obscured (mainly because of audio problems) if they wished. Responses were kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms, no single answer was tied to any specific individual, and no specific faculty member has been identified. Where necessary, words (such as one's faculty) have been replaced by something else in brackets so as to keep the sentence's meaning. All interviews were digitally recorded and manually verbatim transcribed by the researcher. All data were coded and analyzed, step-by-step, as presented by Moustakas,<sup>34</sup> as a transcendental phenomenological approach.

### FINDINGS

#### *Perception of internationalization*

In all their years of experience (ranging between 13 and 34), professors have been in charge of teaching as well as supervising international graduate students, although in a highly varied proportion among participants. Most participants associated internationalization of higher education to the presence of international students on the university's campus. A few others demonstrated a deeper understanding of it, noting, for example, the possibility of developing global partnerships.

When it comes to perceived benefits and challenges of this process, participants believe the way in which international students benefit is mainly related to acquiring better education and developing English skills. Many professors also emphasized how Canada is an even more desirable destination given the facility for immigration and integration into its society, as this participant expressed:

Elizabeth: ... they get a program that they can hold in their hand, their certificate that says, "I've a Master's or Ph.D. from Canada," that adds a big plus around the world actually, not just in Iraq, Iran, China, Malaysia, Nigeria, you know, but everywhere. Because we are, Canada is regarded as a pretty high and ah, education-educated country.

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<sup>34</sup> Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological research methods* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1994).

So, if they go back, that's good. It probably helps them become professionals wherever they go. It also means that many students have the opportunity to stay in Canada because of the immigration policies here.

As for the benefits for the university, a common aspect raised by professors is how international students expose everyone to different ways of thinking, of solving problems, perspectives. It is this mix of cultures that all participants saw in common as being beneficial for the institution itself.

Samuel: ... You know, I think that the more diversity you have, the stronger you are. The more kind of, um... complexity to the human experience that you bring together the richer the tapestry that you kind of, you know, weave out of all the different threads that are there.

While some discussed the way in which a huge amount of research is conducted by those individuals, the major common point among participants was the financial gain international students promote to the institution:

Daniel: Well, the university stands to make a lot more money [laughs]. So monetary gains are probably one of the most, um, how can I say? It's the foremost thing in some of the administrators' mind, I would guess. It's because the fees charged by the university to international students is very very high as compared to national students. So of course, the university is going to make more money, they're going to become stronger. Ah, and they're in fact, I think there's a competition across Canada by the major universities such as the University of Toronto, University of Montreal, the U of M, University of Saskatchewan, etc. They're all competing for these international student pools because, of course, their programs become richer when they hire, or they come and turn in more international students.

In terms of challenges, participants feel that the process of recruiting international graduate students has been time and money consuming, but they also feel it has been unfair and inefficient in several ways:

Peter: Well... from the point you're making it more financially difficult um... the requirements for accepting, um...in my experience have not been, um, fair for international students, I guess... ah, or as equal. So, it's more difficult for students from some countries to get accepted into our program because their grading system disadvantages them for acceptance.

Especially when it comes to measuring one's capacity to handle graduate studies, professors feel frustrated to see so many students beginning their programs unable to communicate their ideas clearly. Consequently, professors claim that much extra time is needed with students to help them overcome their language difficulties. But professors have also frequently struggled with students who come with questionable commitment to conduct research, and who may have simply been seeking to immigrate to Canada or attend someone's intentions for them:

Mary: ... you know, many people want to come to Canada. So, sometimes international students are using that as an immigration tool, more than anything else. So, when they come it feel maybe are not focused on the studies but what they can, you know, quickly get themselves instead of this Ph.D. So, I have it, some students I-I had to discontinue because they were not even around. They were my students, but they were not even around because they were chasing other things. They're not into this Ph.D. to begin with.

Meanwhile, professors see many students falling in the "trap" of plagiarism whether by accident or by deliberately seeking a shortcut. Professors feel all these situations elevate the hurdles students have to leap throughout their programs if they want to be successful, in Canadian terms. According to the professors, the challenge becomes even more complicated when the university is not flexible in regarding time concerns for completing their programs. Finally, professors also feel that the university does not support international research as would be expected of an internationalized institution, and so they believe many who want to conduct their research abroad are disadvantaged.

### ***Beliefs about self and others***

Although all participants believe they had to learn "by osmosis" how to teach international students, they feel confident about their performance today, at least in academic matters. Nonetheless, most of them seem to agree that there should be additional support from the institution in order to help all professors realize how challenging it can be to pursue a degree abroad.

When it comes to deconstructing how professors regard international students, almost all professors were emphatic using words such as *talented*, *superstars*, *hard-working*, *passionate*, etc., and they claim to appreciate having them in their classes. However, all of them seem to agree that those students generally start their programs with serious gaps in their language and academic skills (especially when compared to Canadians).

Anna: ... they bring a lot to the classroom; they bring a lot to the university. And I would wish that we had more, um, as long as we're prepared to support them in some way, to assist them so that they can be successful ... One would be looking at what the students who come to our campus bring. And we don't always do that. We sort of say "come join us and we'll fill you full of our ideas," and we never ask, "what do you bring," like "what ideas do you bring?". Um... so if we were more attentive in our pedagogical approaches to what the university could, um, learn from the international students, I think it would be a better experience for everybody.... Um ... and, but I think we need to pay more attention to what international students bring. Um ... you know, they're highly educated people, right? [laughs] Yet we tend to view them as... in some instances even a problem, right? Because there may be language issues, there may be, um, do they know how to write in English, which is the predominant language for science. Um ... and so instead of saying "ok, what do you bring?" we view them as a problem. Um ... that's not universal, but it certainly continues to be a theme that you can see, yeah.

Only a couple of professors gave little importance to the personal difficulties international students might go through, which could directly affect their academic life. Participants pointed out several ways in which international students can make the most out of their experience, especially regarding their academic achievement, such as going hand in hand with their advisors. However, one aspect that was common to all participants is their belief on integrating the Canadian culture as a necessary step for students' success.

### *Social relations*

All participants believe they have a very good relationship with international students. Although they claim not to differentiate purposefully, they feel there is a different connection with Canadian and international students. While with the former it is easier to convey messages and have conversations about general things, the contact with the latter group is typically marked by counseling and guidance. Many participants believe they treat people differently just because they are attentive to each person's individuality.

Matthew: ... I treat each individual differently because of that. Um, because my job I see as trying to get the-the one person to perform to the best of their ability. And that means you have to deal with each individual, and with individuals in a different way.

At the same time that professors do not seek to have a personal relationship with students, they do like to establish a friendly connection with them and regard them as colleagues. Nevertheless, this situation often extrapolates to the point that international students are constantly going to their offices, seeking someone to talk to and get advice from. Professors express a willingness to help, but at the same time feel unprepared for dealing with their personal issues.

David: Um... I mean, I've always, ah, struggled a little bit with this sort of divide, ah, between being a friend of students and being a professor to students.

Additionally, professors perceive a dynamic connection with their international students. In the beginning, students seem to fear their teachers, but, with time, as they see how professors treat them as colleagues, it evolves to an equal relationship. Professors feel that there has not been any personal challenge with an international student that has been caused necessarily by their different nationalities. Instead, they attribute any conflict as personality-wise. As for academic challenges, they believe those have been limited to plagiarism occurrences and language difficulties. When it comes to students' relationship with each other, some professors have witnessed cultural mismatches, having then to intervene and help them solve the issue. Consequently, most participants express

the importance of developing interpersonal skills if one wants to succeed in graduate studies.

### ***Beliefs about knowledge***

In general, professors hold high esteem for international students, notwithstanding what was previously mentioned about a perceived tendency to plagiarize. Participants expressed how the talent and experience international students bring to class cannot be wasted. However, at the same time, most professors did not make it clear *how* their knowledge can be validated.

Samuel: Well, I think you need to recognize the wisdom of the students in your class. Like, especially at the graduate level, people have usually had quite a bit of life experience, and it's important not to waste that. You know, if I think the whole thing is "I'm the font of knowledge, and I transmit it to other people and they're just supposed to sit there and receive it and write it down and then spin it back to me in an essay," then I'm wasting all of the life experience, all the knowledge of the people in-in the class that are there.

All professors have a complex understanding of academic excellence, which goes beyond getting good grades (although also part of the concept). Based on their definitions, they believe their former international students have been very successful, especially their own mentees. The whole group of participants is aware of how important their role is in matters of helping the international students develop necessary skills for their academic endeavors, and so they seek to do it. Professors claim that there have been many ways in which they accommodate their practices to support students, although they feel some of their trials were not as successful as others. Professors want to establish a comfortable environment for every student to speak up, but they feel tense when having to stop the class to help international students pick up language or something else they "should already know," because they feel the need to be fair to the class as a whole. The fact that teaching international students demands more time and effort is felt by all professors, but the way they react to this situation was not the same among professors: While just a couple of them perceive it to be a natural part of the process, most of them feel a lot of pressure, nearly a burden to be carried.

### **DISCUSSION: WHERE ARE WE?**

The modern process of internationalization of higher education and Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant theory clearly approximate on their main goal. While a culturally relevant approach seeks to "produce students who can achieve academically, ... demonstrate cultural competence, and ... both understand and critique the existing social

order,”<sup>35</sup> internationalization practices aims, at least in theory, at enriching and enhancing the educational experience for all students, “equip participants to understand local and global connections critically, to expand frames of reference and possibilities for rethinking, relationships and educational, economic, and social practice.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, “Internationalisation brings with it many challenges to the *status quo*. It introduces alternative ways of thinking, it questions the education model, and it impacts on governance and management.”<sup>37</sup>

However, these aspects also show how internationalization deviates from its successful implementation in Canadian higher education classrooms. While much has been said about the potential benefits provided by this process, many miscomprehended and unspoken issues need to be addressed, especially in what concerns teachers’ openness to change, their correct estimation of the other and themselves. A lot is spoken about attending stakeholders’ demands, joining forces between government and institutions’ policies, but scant information is provided about professors’ importance, beliefs, and practices. Nonetheless, for an effective and democratic internationalization of higher education to take place, it is necessary that every part involved in this process understand their roles, responsibilities, and rights, especially teachers. Therefore, in light of the three theoretical underpinnings of Ladson-Billings’ culturally relevant pedagogy, the literature review, and the emergent data of this research, I now proceed to consider the present condition of the process of internationalization in the pursuit of hospitable education for international students.

### ***Professors’ Beliefs about Internationalization***

Most professors in this study have demonstrated a quite limited view of the internationalization of higher education. Even though some participants pointed out the way in which it can provide international partnerships, for example, they mainly relate it to the presence of students from other countries. Despite critics of internationalization affirming that student mobility is still its most outstanding feature, a narrow

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<sup>35</sup> Ladson-Billings, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, 474.

<sup>36</sup> Association of Canadian Deans of Education, “Accord on the internationalization of education,” 5.

<sup>37</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Approaches to Internationalisation and Their Implications for Strategic Management and Institutional Practice - A Guide for Higher Education Institutions,” 8.

<https://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/Approaches%20to%20internationalisation%20-%20final%20-%20web.pdf>.

understanding of this process prevents professors from grasping their own roles within it, which would be problematic for every part involved. Such a huge phenomenon in which professors are immersed must be clearly explained to them *a priori*, pointing its facets, challenges, benefits, and so on, not merely expect everyone to learn it with time and experience. For example, professors believe students come to Canada, among other reasons, because it is a country that can provide students with better education and opportunity to develop their English skills than they would get in their home countries. Even if true for many students, it is alarming how this could be linked to a superiority perception that professors hold of their society in detriment to the other.

As other scholars have also shown in their studies, Canada is perceived by professors in this research as a more welcoming country than many other common destinations given the facilitation of immigration and the cheaper cost of education. However, this point was perceived as an issue by participants who feel as if they were often dealing with individuals who enter university merely as a facilitator to immigration. In such cases, professors experience frustration and disappointment, feeling powerless to help students succeed. So, it seems that all the time spent selecting good students, based on disconcerting criteria, has frequently been failing on a major point: finding those who are willing to study.

When it comes to the perceived benefits of internationalization for the university, professors rapidly expressed how the institution profits financially above all. Although they agree that there is no obscurity on the fact that the international students' tuition fees are much higher than domestic ones, professors perceive it as a contradiction to the facilitation of students' flow (which they regard as the essence of internationalization). Indeed, the way in which modern higher education institutions have been using international students as a source of revenue evokes a deep polemic. When we turn to existing policies and guidelines for the internationalization of higher education, it is also clearly recognized that universities charge higher fees to international students (usually as a solution for decreasing funds from the government). Nonetheless, they also point out that "concerns arise when financial goals supersede the educational, research, and community building goals of the program or institution."<sup>38</sup> Despite the pertinence of these concerns, they often talk about ensuring educational quality but do not mention which

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<sup>38</sup> Association of Canadian Deans of Education, "Accord on the internationalization of education," 6.

measures would be used for that. If academic achievement is something much deeper than grades, as both Ladson-Billings and my participants pointed out, what makes good education? Educational organizations around the world have correctly shown that social justice, equity, reciprocity, intercultural awareness, respect, and ethical teaching are some of the desired outcomes. But how are we to achieve such utopian goals on a daily basis? Talk involving the Government and stakeholders may be necessary, but it so distant from the reality, from what happens inside the classroom. Here, in fact, is an urgent call for theorizing and spreading world-wide an educational ethics which directly speaks to the postsecondary teacher. After all, ethical practices should take place not only on the roundtable but also where teaching comes to pass.

Professors recognize that the university gains from the research conducted by international students, who become their brain power and human capital,<sup>39</sup> thus enhancing its reputation around the world. All participants also affirm that the presence of people, from many different countries, is valuable, exposing everyone to different perspectives and ways to solve problems. However, it is debatable the extent to which professors claim to appreciate cultural diversity while they, in fact, maintain the status quo rather than take effective actions to allow changes in the environment in favor of international students. Just being exposed to the other is not enough without meaningful actions. Conversely, teachers' beliefs, and consequently their pedagogy, are pivotal for achieving the full potential of a multicultural classroom.<sup>40</sup> Only when professors recognize and resort to students' diversity as an educational tool will higher education start to become truly internationalized.

Among the challenges for the university, participants regard the process of recruitment of international graduate students as burdensome and problematic in many ways, especially when it comes to trusting solely one's transcripts as an accurate indicator of capacity to conduct graduate studies. The OECD guide also recognizes that "recruitment practices have become increasingly business-like within the globalised education marketplace as international education has become a 'tradeable commodity.'"<sup>41</sup> Similarly, English proficiency tests are perceived as useful but insufficient to measure

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<sup>39</sup> Jane Knight, "Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 8, no. 5 (2004): 5-31.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *Diversity: The challenge for higher education*.

<sup>41</sup> OECD, "Approaches to Internationalisation and Their Implications for Strategic Management and Institutional Practice - A Guide for Higher Education Institutions," 25.

whether or not a person can function in an academic environment. Because many students arrive with language impairments, as professors see, they are often regarded with a deficit approach, which is further complicated in cases of plagiarism. However, it is necessary to remind how equalizing language with intelligence or adopting a pedagogy that seeks to homogenize the way in which students understand the world goes against any attempt to achieve democratic education regardless of one's nationality. A narrow assessment of intelligence, which does not take cultural contexts into account, will only go as far as reinforcing differences and a mindset of superiority.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Professors' Beliefs about Themselves and International Students***

In the midst of such an entrenched and complex process, professors are "left alone to devise solutions to socially generated problems, and to do it independently, using their individual skills and assets."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, from all that has been said, it seems that a lot is thrown on professors' shoulders without enough support for them, as Elizabeth claimed: "It's a lot of homework for me." But this is not a surprise. Ladson-Billings had already adverted that culturally relevant pedagogy "is about the kind of teaching that promotes this excellence despite little administrative or collegial support."<sup>44</sup>

Participants believe their capacity to teach was acquired *a posteriori* rather than from specific guidance from the institution, especially through their exposure to different cultures (either as an international student, traveler, or professor). Even when it comes to adapting their teaching styles to attend the demands of international students every attempt has been made based on their own trial and error rather than coordinated support from the university, which is probably due to an assumption that professors are already capable of such task. While professors are not sure how the university could help them, I argue that what might actually be necessary is not a remedy for every problem that appears on the surface, but digging deeper into the roots of the issue and helping teachers anticipate such problems by broadening their understandings of teaching styles, feedback, error correction, classroom language, interpersonal skills, etc. that can vary greatly cross-

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Sternberg, "Culture and Intelligence," *American Psychologist* 59, no. 5 (2004): 325–338

<sup>43</sup> Robert Bullough, "Higher Education and the Neoliberal Threat: Place, Fast Time, and Identity," *Journal of Thought* 48, no. 3-4 (2014): 16.

<sup>44</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 14.

culturally, and which is frequently what professors mostly need to comprehend.<sup>45</sup>

Professors' experience has taught them some ways in which they can accommodate their practices in order to help students overcome their challenges, whether academic, personal or language. Professors believe, for example, pairing international and Canadian students has been helpful, so everyone can profit from their different perspectives, as Banks and Banks<sup>46</sup> also supported in their equity pedagogy theory. Many participants have tried not to be as strict with grammar in their evaluations and offer different options for exams whenever possible. They also mention how they spend a lot of time with students helping them develop their writing and speaking skills.

Some professors believe they have tried to be more open to different perspectives, bringing in more international examples that might get students more interested. Indeed, students will not become interculturally competent if all they are exposed to is a Canadian way of thinking. However, many participants also noted that it is not possible to modify the content because it is science-based, which may be closely related to an idea of the curriculum as intellectual property.<sup>47</sup> Robson and Turner also noticed that in their study that “discussions about internationalizing teaching tended to focus on program content rather than pedagogy.”<sup>48</sup> This, in fact, could be related to a false dichotomy that pervades higher education: It is all about maintaining traditions or a total reformation.<sup>49</sup> Conversely, my stance is that internationalizing the curriculum does not necessarily means changing it, but making it meaningful to students' lives.

Overall, professors believe they have been sensitive and supportive of students' particularities, but they also emphasize how this sensitivity is not restricted to international students. Nonetheless, it is relevant to note that the fact that most participants in my study claimed to admire international students' perspectives (as opposed to the way in which they believe their colleagues view them), could be linked to

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<sup>45</sup> Maureen Andrade, “International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors,” *Journal of Research in International Education* 5, no. 2 (2006): 131-154.

<sup>46</sup> Cherry Banks and James Banks, “Equity Pedagogy: An essential component of Multicultural Education,” *Theory into Practice* 34, no. 3 (1995): 152-158.

<sup>47</sup> Harris, *Internationalising the University*.

<sup>48</sup> Sue Robson and Yvonne Turner, “‘Teaching is a co-learning experience’: academics reflecting on learning and teaching in an ‘internationalized’ faculty,” *Teaching in Higher Education* 12, no. 1 (2007): 45.

<sup>49</sup> Tony Luxon and Moira Peelo, “Internationalisation: Its implications for curriculum design and course development in UK higher education,” *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 46, no. 1 (2009): 51-60.

my position as a complete insider researcher (international student and teacher), which may have influenced their answers. Additionally, there is the possibility that the professors who agreed to participate in this study are the ones who are actually more aware and active in their work with international students.

A contrasting aspect with Ladson-Billings' theory is that the author believes a culturally relevant teacher help students be proud of their origins, whereas professors in this study often claimed that international students have to integrate the Canadian society to succeed. It is not clear from all participants, however, if such would be through a process of assimilation or assimilationism, as Callan<sup>50</sup> differentiates, an assimilation model that is in fact entrenched to a superiority conception of western conventions for learning, teaching, and assessment. Having been an international student myself, I recognize the importance of learning how another society functions to navigate through it safely. Nevertheless, not everyone wants to immigrate or adopt a "Canadian way of life." It is possible that a student, regardless of their origins, may, in fact, wish to maintain their cultural integrity, and that has to be recognized by professors as an asset, not a threat to the flow of the class. Professors must indeed help students understand how Canadian society works, for their own safety and well-being (such as knowing how to adapt their resumes and behave in a job interview as expected in Canada, which can be different from other countries). Nonetheless, professors should not have a superiority perception of any given aspect of their cultural manifestations in detriment to others. Their role with students, rather than judging the value of any given country, is to lead students to understand and respect every culture while learning how to make informed decisions on a daily basis based on such knowledge.

### ***Professors' Perceived Social Relations with International Students***

It is clear that the time spent with international students, especially the relationship with those they advise, is crucial to students' development, where they learn their expectations and receive close guidance throughout their program. As Ladson-Billings said, "good teaching starts with building good relationships."<sup>51</sup> However, while all professors seek to have a friendly and equitable relationship with every student, they do not want it to be personal. Participants felt uneasy by having to be a tutor to students, especially because they were not confident enough to tell students what to do about certain personal matters.

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<sup>50</sup> Eamonn Callan, "The ethics of assimilation," *Ethics* 115, no. 3 (2005): 471-500.

<sup>51</sup> Ladson-Billings, *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*, 136.

Elizabeth, for instance, mentioned many times how this situation frustrates her: “We are not immigration experts. Period.” Hence, the extent to which a postsecondary institution should intervene in order to alleviate teachers’ role with students has to be clarified. It is of utmost importance that universities help not only students (by making sure there are counseling services available for them) but also professors, to guide in how to deal with such a high demand of advice.

### ***Professors’ Beliefs about Knowledge***

Professors recognize that international students arrive at graduate studies with the same level of instruction of Canadians, but that there is a stark contrast in how both groups fit the Canadian academic system. It was commonly noticed that international students are insecure, rely heavily on their teacher for every step, and do not criticize teachers and texts as they should. Hence, notwithstanding all the standardized methods to recruit students, it has become crystal clear that those not enough when it comes to measuring one’s capacity to pursue a degree, especially when it comes to English proficiency tests. On many occasions, my participants saw people with a great level of English in those scales be a “terrible researcher” and people who did poorly on those tests become outstanding scientists. So, the question is: How long still will those tests be taken as a hardline when recruiting students? Moreover, as culture and intelligence are intrinsically interconnected,<sup>52</sup> how can one single model be enough to assess people’s performance in such a pluralistic world as we live in?

Such standards serve not only to reinforce the privileges of those who speak the ideal English but, at the same time further segregate those who do not. As a result, “native speakerism [becomes] a benchmark for academic performance,”<sup>53</sup> when in fact, an accent, for example, should be recognized and praised as evidence of someone who is capable of speaking more than one language.

An internationalized higher education institution has to be shaped by a global way of communication, which “include policies and practices that incorporate an understanding of the historical and colonial link between language, race, and education in settler societies.”<sup>54</sup> It is not primarily about lowering the standards in pedagogical

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<sup>52</sup> Sternberg, *Culture and Intelligence*.

<sup>53</sup> Andrea Sterzuk, “The standard remains the same’: language standardisation, race and othering in higher education,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 36, no. 1 (2015): 59

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

practices, for example, than it is about openness to linguistic heterogeneity. After all, restricting competence and legitimacy to such a limited way of speaking is, in fact, to elevate the hurdles that a language attempts to leap. An act of decolonization of higher education will begin to take place only when such standards in the English language are consciously and effectively reconsidered from the moment of recruiting students and throughout their whole academic experience.

Not only has language difficulties served to create and sustain an unfavorable and degrading image of international students, but this situation gets more troublesome when an international student is caught committing plagiarism. Such a complex and a somewhat blurred term for many, this widespread phenomenon seems to haunt international students as soon as they enter the gates of a Canadian university. Confusion and embarrassment have been commonly found in the academic circle among those who are perceived as criminals for having copied someone else's statements. While one student is praised for borrowing words appropriately, the other is treated as a thief and incompetent. There is a dim line that separates creativity from criminality, a line that is even more obscure and easily trespassed for someone who was not raised in such context. In fact, the intrinsic link between language and culture has to be considered before blaming someone of a crime. If universities are to be truly international, a historical-cultural reflection about global textual relations has to be put in place so as to promote more understanding, tolerance, and sensitivity to other modes of approaching a text. Such reflection will serve not only students who arrive in Canada but every faculty member who is to welcome them instead of walking around with magnifying glasses to spot students' misconduct.

Most professors recognize their international students as passionate and hard-working people and admire their efforts to succeed. They claim to enjoy when international students participate in the class, as they bring different ways of viewing the world. However, many participants remarked that because the content remains the same, international students end up contributing just the same as Canadians, which serves to confirm how often multicultural education understanding at higher education has been reduced to content delivered. From this point, it is also questionable to what extent professors are willing to have their spaces changed, as a welcoming host would.<sup>55</sup> Do professors actually believe in students' uniqueness, in the irreplaceability of the other, or

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<sup>55</sup> Ruitenberg, *The empty chair: Education in an ethic of hospitality*.

do they merely see them as an “unfortunate necessity?”<sup>56</sup> Conversely, professors ought to think of the other as someone whom they can learn from, someone of value, someone whose experience has much to teach. Then they will be more prone to yielding to change, more inclined to listen, more willing to leave the chair empty for the arrival of the unknown.

Finally, when it comes to professors’ understanding of academic achievement, they have put much emphasis on students’ critical thinking as a necessary skill to be developed in graduate studies. However, they also seem to disregard the potential hypocrisy embedded in such term, where students ought to become critical thinkers but taking for granted the dominant perspective as infallible.

### **CONCLUSIONS: BUILDING WALLS OR BRIDGES?**

An attempt to comprehend the process of internationalization through the eyes of professors and in light of a culturally relevant theory framework has thus far shed light on many issues to be better investigated. It is believed that “Internationalization has the potential to equip participants to understand local and global connections critically, to expand frames of reference and possibilities for rethinking, relationships and educational, economic, and social practice.”<sup>57</sup> However, just as language has served to segregate those who do not speak like Canadians, the idea of legitimate knowledge has also contributed to a negative view that professors and faculty members have of international students. Professors noticed such occurrences in this study as early as the recruitment of students and faculty members, which is perceived to have “pretty strong biases,” tending to recruit those who appear to think and act like Canadians. Despite all GPA conversions, English proficiency tests and other means of recruiting, international students continue to be undermined by professors, mainly because of a perceived lack of critical thinking and language skills. That has been the case even among professors who claim to appreciate having international students in their classes, showing that in higher education, intelligence has often been equalized to critical thinking and being proficient in English.

Nonetheless, for an institution to be truly internationalized, it is necessary for teachers and other faculty members to be aware of the countless learning styles,

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<sup>56</sup> Robson and Turner, *‘Teaching is a co-learning experience’: academics reflecting on learning and teaching in an ‘internationalized’ faculty*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> Association of Canadian Deans of Education, “Accord on the internationalization of education,” 5.

approaches and orientations to studying, and levels of intellectual development. This will enable the teachers to be critical of their own epistemology and be open to recognizing the knowledge that students bring to the classroom as equally legitimate to understand the world we live in. The process of internationalization is incompatible with a single view of education, where one side delivers, and the other absorbs. Not only do teachers have to be aware of such differences and how legitimate they all are, but they also have to help students understand that, and thus discover how they can make the most out of their potential.

International students are in danger of being disempowered and segregated because of the way in which professors conceptualize their pedagogy, in a clear dissociation between just appreciating one's culture and in fact, resorting to it. The fact that many participants claimed that international students "are just a normal student" who "contribute in the same way as a non-international student" is alarming. The first problem comes from a shallow perception of how one's culture can influence the class. In order for students' culture to be validated and used as a tool to make the educational experience more meaningful to everyone, it is necessary to eliminate any superiority perception professors have of their own society, believing that their ways of thinking, studying, working, behaving, etc. are more legitimate than others. The way in which professors conceptualize the other will be crucial in how they enact their practices. If teachers think of international students merely as unprivileged people, coming from undeveloped countries, who cannot speak English adequately, and who are just trying to escape from the difficulties in their home countries, it will indeed be a lot more difficult for international students to develop their subjectivity and succeed academically. Rather, it is necessary for professors to create an atmosphere of trust, respect, and reciprocity. It is necessary to recognize each person's uniqueness and irreplaceability and sincerely seek to learn from everyone's experience and knowledge.

The second issue comes from a misunderstanding of equity vs. equality. Some professors feel that they would be unfair to the rest of the class if not helping everyone in the same way. The result is teachers are overwhelmed with, for example, a significant amount of feedback they have to give to every student and the professors are feeling it would be unfair to the others if they stopped the class to help them. The result is a considerable amount of extra time spent with students after class, reinforcing the feeling of carrying a burden on their shoulders. Thus, it is necessary that professors (as well as

other faculty members directly involved in this process) understand and engage in a student-focused pedagogy that goes beyond good intentions and which may require treating students differently. It requires teachers to “focus on the individual characteristics of the students ... use diversity to enrich instruction instead of fearing or ignoring it.”<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, ignoring the difference or not allowing changes that could jeopardize the status quo is in every way, contradictory to the process of internationalization of higher education. A university that strives to be international has to be open to the arrival of the unknown.<sup>59</sup> That is, for effective hospitable education to take place, teachers have to be comfortable with the discomfort of change. The fact that we can never predict or determine the outcome of the class (a consequence of the hermeneutic character of education) must be accepted and recognized by professors as an asset and a tool while pursuing the class' full potential. The empty chair which Ruitenbergh talks about is, in fact, the image that teachers have to bear in mind and seek in every class they teach, whether in a traditional classroom setting, lab or outdoors. Only when teachers recognize the uniqueness of the unknown other and make informed decisions to leave a space for the unpredictable will true hospitable education be able to start taking place. It is necessary to have an upfront stance toward difference and raise the flag of diversity, rather than that of sameness, not only through policies but also through educational practice in order to be truly international. Silencing or ignoring the difference does not suffice either. If the goal of internationalizing higher education is to make the most out of global diversity, rather than promoting global sameness, knowledge and perspectives, which represent cultural manifestations, should be welcomed and supported, regardless of subject or content. The key for an effective culturally relevant education, and an internationalization process, which builds bridges to the world in our classrooms, lies on a multi-direction road, where culturally diverse students can have their experience validated and allowed to make meaningful contributions to a class which is at the same time meaningful to them.

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<sup>58</sup> Banks and Banks, *Equity Pedagogy: An essential component of Multicultural Education*, 157.

<sup>59</sup> Ruitenbergh, *The empty chair: Education in an ethic of hospitality*.

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