

Experiences of Diversity within the Context of an Emergent Transnationalism

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Imagine a boy in his mid teens immigrating to Australia from India in 1968. Imagine also the same boy immigrating in 2010, forty years later. How would his experiences of Australia and of migration be different?

That boy is me, and I find this *thought experiment* useful for understanding some of the enormous changes that have taken place around the world over the past four decades. For me, this contrast is helpful in considering the challenges of diversity facing educators in the context of an emergent transnationalism.

Associated with globalization, these changes have transformed the cultural landscape in India and Australia alike. In 1970, India was a poverty stricken country, still struggling to come to terms with its colonial legacy. In contrast, the India of 2010 is a confident nation --globally networked, with a booming economy.

Australia, in 1970, was mostly a white country, unable to reconcile its historically British traditions with its geographical location within the Asia-pacific region. Forty years later, six percent of Australian population is of an Asian background, as the most people in Australia now accept that their future lies in Asia.

The future of India and Australia is now tied together, not only through their common colonial legacy but also through growing patterns of trade, migration and educational, sporting and cultural relations. People in both countries are now likely to know much more about each other than they did in 1968.

So far from having a lonely and isolating experience of mobility, as I did in 1968, I would now encounter a more cosmopolitan Australia where I would find a well-established Indian diaspora, as well as Australians who are much more open to other cultures and diversity.

What has driven these historically profound changes? Beyond national policy shifts, to what extent have global processes been a factor? And what implications do these changes have for thinking about international education?

Globalization is largely about transnational flows of people and cultures; money and capital; technology and innovation; media and images; ideas and ideologies; and hopes and desires. Everyone is affected by these flows, albeit in ways that are uneven and unequal.

Let us focus just on the mobility of people. People move for a wide variety of reasons, including migration, employment, education, tourism, and business and trade, but in ways that is not the same as it was forty years ago. The development of links is now much more rapid and intense.

Migration, for example, is now networked, leading to an enormous increase in the number of both documented and undocumented, skilled and unskilled, and temporary and permanent migrants, as well as refugees. The reasons for mobility are now much more varied and complex.

With developments in communication technologies and travel industries, migrant experiences have also become transformed, with regular and dynamic connectivities with friends and family at home, and elsewhere. Cheap telephone calls and technologies like Skype and regular travel have changed the migrant experience, perhaps the notion of migrancy itself.

Migrants and refugees however are not the only people crossing national borders. Business has created a class of people who are constantly moving. The number of international tourists has multiplied many folds over the past forty years. And international education has become a major industry.

The consequences of global mobility have been enormous, both positive and negative. Mobility has transformed the demographic composition of communities, especially of cities, many of which have become truly global.

On the positive side, global mobility of people has led to greater diversification of communities, cultural exchange, hybridization of cultures and new patterns of global interconnectivity. It has cosmopolitanized lifestyles, creating new patterns of desires and aspirations, and shifting the notions of citizenship and belongingness

On the negative side, mobility has created population pressures, and has generated risks associated with the commodification of cultural practices and new consumerist desires. The problems of remittances and brain drain have arisen as never before. And so has the reactionary politics of cultural fears and conflict.

Within the context of this emergent transnationalism, if I were emigrating from India in 2010, I would bring to Australian schools many cultural resources and experiences of mobility that the schools could well take advantage of in internationalizing their curriculum and pedagogy.

At the same time, my teachers would need to better understand the rapidly changing world, associated with global forces, connections and imagination, which I would inhabit in the twenty first century. Most importantly, they need to realize that globalization has *normalized* diversity.

Educational Policy and practice have traditionally assumed diversity to be exceptional phenomenon to the norms of cultural heterogeneity. The policy of assimilation, for example, assumed society to be constituted by a set of established cultural norms into which migrants had to become assimilated. Multiculturalism similarly assumed a set of norms within which cultural diversity is recognized and has to be managed.

Given the global flows of people and cultural ideas, we can no longer assume this cultural homogeneity to be a natural condition. Indeed, most societies are now dynamic and constantly, as cultural traditions increasingly rub up against each other. Negotiation of cultural difference is therefore no longer an option but a requirement of living in a globally interconnected world.

The challenge facing educators is then how we prepare students to interpret and experience diversity within the context of rapid changes, developing their skills to negotiate it in a range of ethically productive ways. For international educators, no task is more urgent than this.