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*Nurturing Solidarity: Considering the
Internationalization of Research Activities in
Kinesiology as a Moral Practice*

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Nurturing solidarity: Considering the internationalization of research activities in kinesiology as a moral practice

There is a growing interest in the internationalization of research activities in higher education institutions. Economic and political motivations are increasingly the key drivers for internationalization which might be viewed as disruptive and insensitive to local contexts, fostering inequality and forms of cultural and socioeconomic imperialism. Unlike this reductionist view of internationalization, we argue that internationalization should be considered a moral practice grounded in solidarity as a key concept to transform the social and material conditions of inequality. It is a solidarity based on sharing the struggle with people, and the will to give, and rethink, ourselves. The aim of this study is to explore the challenges experienced by an academic as she attempts to increase the internationalization of research activities in kinesiology through related research, journals and academic associations. A critical theoretical framework, based on Freire's notion of solidarity, encourages the reader to interrogate the way in which they strive towards contributing to the internationalization of research activities in kinesiology. It is suggested that solidarity might direct readers to considering internationalization as the promotion of cooperation among nations and, in turn, improving quality and relevance of research.

Keywords: higher education; critical incidents; solidarity; internationalization; research; morals

Introduction

Commonly accepted definitions of internationalization in higher education refer to all aspects of an institute's mission, including teaching, research, and service (Knight, 2012). Internationalization of higher education can be defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight 2003, p. 2). This definition underlines the ongoing nature of internationalization as a process and as a response to

globalization (Taylor, 2004). It also highlights its potential benefits in terms of increasing cultural capital and diversity, enriching learning experiences, expanding researchers' horizons and capacity through a professional community (Yuan, Li, & Yu, 2019).

The internationalization of research activities in particular has increasingly become an area of emphasis for higher education institutions (Antelo, 2012; Woldegiyorgis, Proctor, & de Wit, 2018) and is the focus of this paper. According to the *Shape of Global Higher Education* (British Council, 2019), the more international the research, the higher its impact. In that sense, overcoming obstacles to research activities in this globalized world has become an important challenge to academics who undertake international research projects. Although the internationalization of research activities have increasingly become a priority in contemporary higher education institutions, far less attention has been paid in the literature, most likely due to the belief that research is international in nature (Woldegiyorgis et al., 2018). A more detailed understanding of the internationalization of research activities could be gathered via empirical studies in how work has been approached by academics.

There are various ways in which research activities, journals and academic associations can be internationalized. Internationalizing research activities might include: (a) publication and presentation of studies across international research networks; (b) international funding (e.g., Erasmus funding in Europe); (c) international Keynotes; (d) acting as a critical friend of international colleagues; (e) international PhD supervision and PhD examination, and (f) panel membership on national funding agencies of international countries. Internationalizing journals may include journals: (a) considering their scope to reach across continents and disciplines; (b) supporting publications written by colleagues across different continents; (c) supporting the publication of meaningful work that has been translated from another language; (d) ensuring there is international representation on editorial boards and, by association, international perspectives being shared in reviewing submissions to journals, and (e) upholding a journal culture that supports an international discourse. The internationalization of associations includes associations: (a) seeking international colleagues to serve the association; (b) informing and aligning the work of the association with related international associations, and (c) encouraging spaces where colleagues from related international associations meet, (e.g., identification of special interest groups).

A number of academics have revealed various challenges brought by the internationalization of research activities in higher education (e.g., Knight, 2012; Rumbley et al., 2012; Taylor, 2004). Economic and political rationales, such as the increasing attention paid to international university rankings and the place of research indicators within those rankings, are increasingly the key drivers for internationalization, while social and cultural motivations, such as the identification of grand and complex societal challenges, seem to be decreasing in importance (Knight, 2012; Rumbley et al., 2012; Taylor, 2004). These key drivers for internationalization have been viewed as disruptive and insensitive to local contexts, and as a consequence seen to nurture inequities. It is widely accepted that the international relevance of research includes a highly competitive agenda related to the increased productivity of individual researchers, their universities, and their nations, tied to the use of bibliometric analysis in support of rankings (Woldegiyorgis et al., 2018).

While market expansion and profit maximization are important motivators for internationalization in higher education, we believe that internationalization should be viewed as a "moral practice". This includes collectively educating academics to be prepared to deal with global conflicts based on their understanding of other peoples' cultures, and a desire to participate in the international academic debate in order to increase the contribution of higher education research in a global scenario (Khoo, Haapakoski, Hellstén, & Malone, 2019; Romani-Dias, Carneiro, & Barbosa, 2019). Other rationales for greater internationalization have also been proposed, including the identification of grand and complex societal challenges that are beyond the capacity of one institution or research team to study (Woldegiyorgis et al., 2018).

We believe the notion of solidarity could be a way of considering internationalization as a "moral practice". It could create openings for practices that have not institutionalized into universities and organizations. In that sense, the community cultivated by academics would not be based on particular geographical or institutional affiliations but on a shared set of values that may radicalize solidarity toward otherness (Freire, 1987; Zembylas, 2017). Despite the importance of considering academics' intentions in internationalization, few studies analyze the extent of the impact of academics' perspective on the internationalization of research activities.

A Freirean perspective of solidarity

The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side (Freire 1987, p.13).

Solidarity figures prominently in Brazilian education scholar Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a key concept to transform the social and material conditions of inequality. For Freire, it is a solidarity based on sharing the struggle with people, and the will to give and rethink ourselves. Through a commitment to love, Freire believed that solidarity is a radical posture and requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is in solidarity. Solidarity is not simply about entering into a state of solidarity—to be in solidarity—which might suggest feelings towards another, but about actions taken in relationship to someone (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). Freire described that we are in solidarity with the "other" only when we stop regarding the "other" as an abstract category and see them as subjects who have been unjustly dealt with and deprived of their voice. In that sense, solidarity would happen when we stop "making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love" (Freire 1987, p. 24). It must encompass a deep unwavering commitment to social inclusion and democracy: a revolutionary commitment to transform the oppressive ideologies and practices in education (Freire, 1987). The enactment of solidarity seeks to acknowledge these sufferings, yet without letting them perpetuate oppression and inequality (Zembylas, 2017).

Solidarity is characterized by the will to give (Chabot, 2008; Freire, 1987, 2007). Contrary to common misconceptions, giving does not refer to self-deprivation or "giving up" something. Instead, giving is a productive act that enhances the joy, insight, and ability of the giver as well as the receiver (Chabot, 2008). In *Pedagogy of Solidarity* (Freire, Freire, & Oliveira, 2014), Freire and colleagues problematized the case of a foreign professor helping to change education in Brazil. According to Freire and colleagues, he/she can only do that if he/she really knows something about Brazil, is eager to learn about Brazilian reality, and is sufficiently humble to re-think himself or herself (Freire et al. 2014). In that sense, solidarity also affects or modifies the one who acts (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012).

Solidarity is the commitment with the voices and perspectives of marginalized and non-dominant positionalities/perspectives, allowing researchers to recast power differences in the research, providing tools for dialogue, action, hope and imagination. It underscores the unpredictability of the encounter and of the coercion inherent in the process of learning to become (Freire, 1987). According to Freire, those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly and it requires a profound rebirth (Freire, 1987). It results in a process of personal and social transformation for everybody. It is a process of opening our own eyes as researchers and seeing the world through different eyes, coupled with a desire to open others' eyes (Cahill, Rios-Moore, & Threatts, 2008).

Although it is recognized that academics' experiences are essential if we consider internationalization as a "moral practice", there is a gap of empirical studies in this area. The aim of this study is to explore the challenges experienced by one academic, the first author, as she attempts to enhance the internationalization of her research activities in kinesiology as it relates to the research process itself, journals, and academic associations. The next section describes critical incidents deployed to investigate the academic's experiences. We conclude by identifying future developments and promising directions for considering solidarity as a lens through which to interrogate the internationalization of research activities.

Methodology

In being invited to contribute to the NAKHE leadership development workshop titled "Leadership in the International University" in June 2019, the first author was asked to speak to the leadership of the internationalization of research, journals and associations. Given this paper contributes to a special issue that has arisen from the NAKHE workshop, it focuses on the same three noted activities. The first author referred to critical incidents related to each element throughout the workshop. This paper provides an opportunity for these incidents to be revisited in greater depth and the significance of each to understanding the potential for nurturing solidarity through international research activities. The second author played a crucial role in introducing the solidarity framework and in discussions on the extent to which the critical incidents contributed to, and/or challenged, the framework. The development of each critical incident is a product of ongoing critical reflection between the two authors. They met

each other at a conference in 2012 and the professional and personal relationship was developed through collaborations in writing and mentoring. This has resulted in the creation of a safe space for a reciprocal trust with respect to constructive critical analyses of each other's perspectives.

The critical incident technique is a qualitative research method that is recognized as an effective exploratory and investigative tool (Butterfield et al., 2005). The critical incident technique offers a flexible set of principles that can be modified and adapted (Flanagan, 1954). In the context of this study, recalled extreme incidents capture the challenges an academic has faced in attempting to increase the internationalization of research activities in kinesiology. The authors have attempted to uphold Butterfield et al.'s (2005) criteria for incidents to be included in a study. That is, they provide some context to the incident, they contain a detailed description of the experience itself and they describe the outcome of the incident (Butterfield et al., 2005). The critical incidents evolved from the first author sharing stories about experiences related to internationalization of research activities in kinesiology. The second author probed the first author to ensure all detailed information related to the incident was captured before working together to identify which issues were the most pertinent with respect to the interest in nurturing solidarity across the kinesiology community. This, in turn, resulted in conversations related to how best to resolve the specific issue(s). The academic, Ann, is a senior scholar who was born in Scotland and completed her physical education teacher education (PETE) undergraduate education and PhD on curriculum development in physical education in Scottish universities. She then worked in England for three years as a Research Associate which entailed her being part of a small research team who were commissioned, at times, to do research in the area of sport pedagogy. The post allowed her to attend numerous international academic conferences and, through her mentor at the time, to be introduced to an international community of scholars. Ann has been working as a physical education teacher educator at the University of Limerick in Ireland since 2002. The world-class expertise in sport pedagogy in has been central to the University of Limerick being named as the top outstanding university in the field of sport pedagogy, as determined by a 2017 study (Dong et al., 2017) that reviewed almost 3,000 sport pedagogy-related publications. This further developed the international communities to which Ann was introduced. Her exposure to the internationalization of research activities was heightened during a five-year term as Chair of a Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences and more

recently as an Assistant Dean of Research for the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences. The values and identities that Ann holds in attempting to support the internationalization of kinesiology is somewhat evident in the critical incidents captured later.

In the true spirit of considering the internationalization of research activities, the first author approached a colleague, Carla (second author), to work together on capturing their respective challenges in attempting to increase the internationalization of research activities from their respective perspectives and jurisdictions. Carla is a Brazilian early/mid career academic who began working in Australia in 2019. She studied in England for part of her PhD and completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the United States (US). She has publications in collaboration with researchers from , Australia, Ireland, South America, Sweden, United Kingdom (UK) and US. The professional relationship between Carla and Ann is testimony to the importance of informally connecting with international colleagues before formally considering how best to work together in a bid to learn with, and from, each other. The intention was to capture the values and identities that each hold in attempting to support the internationalization of sport pedagogy/kinesiology through reporting critical incidents. However, as they considered how best to do this, it became apparent that providing critical incidents aligned to the three chosen research activities for both authors was not possible in the limited word count. The authors agreed to continue working collaboratively on this paper and have outlined a follow-up paper, to be led by Carla, that will extend some of the threads of the argument shared here.

Findings

This section presented a critical incident aligned with the internationalization of each of the three research activities discussed above, i.e., research, journals and associations.

Critical incident 1: Research

”Responsive to changes”: Capturing diverse perspectives

Setting a common international agenda for physical education, this book asks how physical education and physical education teacher education can be reconfigured together so that they are responsive to changes in today’s fast-paced, diverse and uncertain global society.

The above extract is taken from the preface of a recent edited book

(MacPhail & Lawson, 2020, p. i) that set out to emphasize international-comparative analyses which facilitate cross-border knowledge generation, innovation, professional learning and continuous improvement. This was to be achieved through international and cross-sector authorship teams addressing a specific "grand challenge" (e.g., readying schools and university program for student, teacher and faculty diversity) that was agreed to be representative of what professionals in diverse nations worldwide would discover and prioritize as catalysts for the collaborative redesign of physical education, teacher education, and research and development. In working as an editor of the text with lead authors of the respective chapters, it was evident to Ann that, in some instances, there remained a preference to work with already established research-teams that did not necessary include international and cross-sector involvement. This, in turn, did not maximise the intention of capturing diverse perspectives on specific identified grand challenges.

This critical incident highlights the challenge of considering how best all physical education and PETE stakeholders can authentically be held accountable for determining an international framework for strategic planning, proactive leadership, and adaptive designs. The premise of the book was that the time has come to extend what very well may be successful local and national research teams contributing to a specific agenda item to include international representation, not only in authoring the chapter but in the associated working relationship and conversations that can happen as a by-product of writing together. One such example is captured in a chapter where a PhD candidate in the field of Education, a Senior Education Officer for Health and Wellbeing, a Consultant for Career Transitions working for a K-12 school board and a Professor of Social Welfare and Educational Policy and Leadership have collaborated, from their respective jurisdictions of Canada, Scotland and the US, on how best to prepare and support teacher educators and teachers as change agents and policy entrepreneurs. As Arndt et al. (2017) shares, "The knowledges that each of us contributes are particular, situational, cultural and political (...) relational conceptions of embodiment, places, theories and education (...) openness and unpredictability (...) each of us applies the lens of our particular theoretical, educational, life-experiential angle" (p. 293).

Critical incident 2: Journals

266 "Being courteous to an international readership": internationalizing research

267 *It is noticeable that this section is very [name of country]-centric. Consider a*
 268 *wider geographical scope and then focus in on the [name of country] context.*
 269 *Acknowledge that this is an international phenomenon and that a [name of*
 270 *country] study is a contribution to understanding the nuances of such.*

271 The above extract arises from an initial peer review of a paper submitted to a
 272 journal within the broad field of kinesiology. The author(s)' response to the comment
 273 explains that while considering the comments, they had decided to state that their data
 274 was limited to the specific country setting and provide recommendations for the
 275 extension of this work to other international settings. In the second review of the same
 276 paper, the same reviewer states;

277 *I am not suggesting the necessity to examine the study and its results from an*
 278 *international perspective but rather position the importance of the focus of the*
 279 *study in an international context. This is not only good practice but is also*
 280 *crucial in being courteous to an international readership. The author(s)'*
 281 *comment in acknowledging the study was limited to the [name of country] does*
 282 *not hinder them from acknowledging the wider international context.*

283 In responding to this comment, the author(s) explained that the editor associated
 284 with this specific paper had recommended that the authors either (a) frame the study
 285 within an international context or (b) state from the beginning that their findings and the
 286 scope of this work is limited to the specific country context. The authors state that,
 287 given that their data were related to a specific country, that option (c) was their favored
 288 approach.

289 This critical incident draws attention to the central role that journal editors,
 290 associate editors, editorial board members and peer-reviewers (can) play in the
 291 internationalization of journals. We contend that the scope of journals should extend
 292 beyond communicating national and international research to developing strategies for
 293 communicating productively with those we hope will use our research around the world
 294 (McNae & Cowie, 2017). This, we suggest, would prove more feasible in instances
 295 where journals actively seek and support meaningful research from a wide geographical
 296 pool as well as ensuring associate editors and editorial boards are international.

298 ***Critical incident 3: Associations***

299 Recruiting and nurturing early-career scholars: a shared responsibility?

Objectives: (a) To consider how we can best work together across the sport pedagogy community to increase the critical mass of talented early career sport pedagogy scholars who may be confined by rules, regulations and/or experiences that somewhat limit the opportunity to grow and be nurtured; (b) To consider how we can encourage working as a collective community across jurisdictions.

The above extract is from a successful session submission made to an association conference special interest group in the field of kinesiology. The session was delivered by the senior academic and three early-career colleagues from three different countries who the senior academic had opportunities to work with and mentor. The context of the session was in response to addressing: (a) the prevailing demise of PETE/doctoral programmes in some countries; (b) the extent to which academics actively recruit and nurture international early-career scholars; (c) an increase in the critical mass of talented international early-career scholars and encouraging their work as a collective community, and (d) the reality that policies of working contexts in different countries can significantly hamper the opportunity to grow and be nurtured.

The session involved the sharing of three stories from the three early-career colleagues, and attendees were asked to work in groups and consider (a) What do you hear in the shared stories that would inform how we can support (international) early career scholars? and (b) How can we work as a collective community to support early career (international) scholars? It was evident that the discussion in some groups was somewhat stilted, perhaps conveying the impression that attendees had never been prompted to consider such questions. In visiting one group, there was an admittance that their potential for conversation had been weakened by a colleague with a particular perspective on the topic. In seeking their perspective, the individual made it clear that they did not appreciate the necessity for such a conversation, believing that the onus was on early-career scholars to "find them" / "approach them" rather than the established academic being proactive in locating such early-career scholars and extending an invitation to them.

This critical incident conveys the influence that learning communities cultivated by academics (can) have on acting as gatekeepers to early-career scholars looking to enter, or move to, a working context that will support and nurture their professional pathway. Given the admittance from the individual noted in the above paragraph, there may well be individuals whose perception of the world is predominantly focused on themselves. That is, they have not (and may choose never to) reached the stage in their

academic career where empowerment becomes related to a “growing sense of identifying with something bigger than the individual self, and which enhances the self’s sense of meaningfulness” (Locke, 2017, p. 193). It is therefore imperative that we find a way to encourage such ‘gatekeepers’ to reflect on their role in academia and, by association, the consequences for early-career scholars. Indeed, the challenge is to find a way to move away from even having ‘gatekeepers’ in our field.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the challenges experienced by an academic in her attempts to increase the internationalization of research activities in kinesiology through related research, journals and academic associations. In addressing this aim, the authors were interested in interrogating the way in which solidarity emerged, or not. This study extends what we know in the area by suggesting internationalization of research as a “moral practice”, grounded in solidarity as a key aspect to transform the social and material conditions of inequality. We focus on two specific observations: (a) Solidarity as empowerment and collective action; and (b) Solidarity requires reflexivity.

Solidarity as empowerment and collective action

The notion of being courteous to an international readership (critical incident 2) conveys a level of respect and consideration towards international colleagues and, in turn, a level of solidarity with respect to an awareness of shared interests, objectives and sympathies that will help create a sense of unity across kinesiology communities. We suggest that it is through such courteous practices as acknowledging the wider international kinesiology context that we are supporting a level of solidarity across the kinesiology field. While solidarity as a collective action was the premise of the text mentioned in critical incident 1, it was evident that not all contributors to the text had maximized the opportunity to work across kinesiology-related communities or stakeholders. An interesting extension to understanding solidarity as a collective action would be to interrogate the attributes and practices of individuals who advocate for solidarity. We suggest that empowerment is one such attribute.

Locke (2017) has suggested a connection between unity (solidarity) and power, “If unity is strength ... then a lack of unity (social fragmentation, isolation, anomie) is conducive to powerlessness” (p. 192). It is empowerment, related to a growing sense of identifying with something bigger than the individual self, and which enhances the

self's sense of meaningfulness, that we believe is central to the enactment of solidarity. That is, an interest in the "greater good", i.e., what is of benefit to a targeted population/group than to an individual. Critical incident 3 prompts us to consider the extent to which a number of individuals whose perception of the world is predominantly focused on themselves (conveyed through a lack of responsiveness, inclusiveness and accountability to early-career scholars) detracts from the social element of empowerment. That is, how such a view hinders established academics in positioning themselves as members of a learning/academic community responsible for nurturing early-career scholars.

In the critical incidents, we observed how the idea of empowerment has been co-opted by individualism, supporting the rampant individualization in today's (neoliberal) 21st Century university (Brown, 2015; Zipin, 2010). For example, liberal higher education democratic institutions "almost always fall short of their promise and at times cruelly invert it, yet liberal democratic principles hold, and hold out, ideals of both freedom and equality universally shared and of political rule by and for the people" (Brown, 2015, p. 18). This reduces the value of higher education to individual economic risk and gain to all domains and activities, and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, or what Brown (2015) described as *homo oeconomicus*.

Different to the concept of individual initiative, when people act independently to "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" and become even more self-reliant, we argue that empowerment has to be social. Empowerment comes from knowing, being, and acting in the world. It is a collective, comprehensive, mutual, and contagious empowerment (Freire, 1987). Collective because it transcends a narrow focus on individuals and targets groups and entire communities, aiming to organise and mobilize them for collective action. It requires a sense of solidarity based on sharing the struggle with people, and the will to give, and rethink, ourselves. By thinking of solidarity internationally, we might create an empowering space that challenges the individualization of neoliberal universities. In addition, it would democratize knowledge by positioning academics at different levels of experience as members of a learning/academic community.

Solidarity requires reflexivity

The revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity. This solidarity is born only when the leaders witness to it by their humble, loving, and

courageous encounter with the people. Not all men and women have sufficient courage for this encounter—but when they avoid encounter, they become inflexible and treat others as mere objects; instead of nurturing life, they kill life; instead of searching for life, they flee from it. And these are *oppressor* characteristics (Freire, 1987, p.102).

Freire described that discovering himself/herself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed. "Rationalizing his guilt through paternalistic treatment of the oppressed, all the while holding them fast in a position of dependence, will not do; it is a radical posture" (Freire, 1987, p.23). The oppressor is in solidarity with the oppressed only when she/he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as a subject. It is a process that requires a constant reflection and action.

In the critical incidents, we observed examples of a lack of conscientiousness that might perpetuate oppression and inequality. For example, researchers' preference to work with already established research-teams instead of including international and cross-sector involvement (critical incident 1) and/or academics believing that the onus was on early-career scholars to "find them" rather than the established academic being proactive in locating such early-career scholars and extending an invitation to them (critical incident 2). For those researchers, having more is an inalienable right, a right they acquired through their own "effort" with their "courage to take risks".

Enacting solidarity implies reflexivity. It is characterized by a practice of self-reflection and introspective awareness that involves being, or becoming, cognizant of one's values, biases, assumptions, and positionalities. Thus, academics should engage in ethical reflective practice to become more aware of how embodied subjectivities surface in relation to the practice of solidarity. In internationalizing research by considering solidarity, academics need to engage in reflexivity. This requires us to acknowledge our intersecting identities, both marginalized and privileged, and then employ self-reflexivity, which moves one beyond self-reflection to the uncomfortable level of self-implication.

Concluding thoughts

The aim of this study was to explore the challenges experienced by an academic in increasing the internationalization of research activities in kinesiology and to interrogate the way in which solidarity emerged, or not. Based on the critical incidents

described here, we argued that internationalization of research as “moral practice” should consider empowerment and require academics’ reflexivity. By thinking of solidarity internationally, we suggest creating an empowering space that would challenge the individualization of neoliberal universities. In that sense, knowledge and understanding are co-produced where academics across different levels and positionalities learn to resist the imposition of oppressive, disempowering, and commonly accepted, practices (Freire, 1987, 2007). Such a space would create a powerful way for academics to identify, critique and transform the oppressing situations they face. Futures studies should continue to explore internationalization of research activities as a “moral practice”, seeking to reimagine the conditions for ethical encounters with others that challenge present conditions of inequality. Our recommendations would be to map diverse academics’ learning trajectories and positionalities (e.g., from developed and developing countries) and considering the process of being, and becoming, a solidarity academic.

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