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'The changing map of international student mobility' as an experiment in collective and co[labor]ative writing

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(Green Chameleon, 2015)

ABSTRACT

This short paper explores the collective writing experiment that materialized into the paper, 'The Changing Map of International Student Mobility' (Peters, Hollings et al., 2021). It explains how 14 students of Professor Michael A. Peters, each writing 500-word essays, were able to create a unique and diverse dialogue on international student mobility. By being reliant on numerous perspectives, this dialogue offered a more holistic outlook on recent disruptions to international education and international students. Thus, the dialogue offered a collective approach to knowledge production within a knowledge socialist pedagogy.

The paper, 'The Changing Map of International Student Mobility' (Peters, Hollings et al., 2021)**,** may appear rather unusual to some as it brings the voices of 14 vastly different authors together to form a dialogue on international student mobility (ISM) and international education. However, what this paper represents is a collective intelligence in which 'knowledge is a global public good' that is not diminished by use, nor exclusive and 'not transparent' (Peters, 2020, p. 2). By sharing their own small part, each author is producing an insight into ISM and adds onto the knowledge of ISM. This endeavor was born from a postgraduate course, *International Education*, at Beijing Normal University, taught by Professor Michael A. Peters. As the coiner of the concept of knowledge socialism and co[labor]ation, Professor Peters designed the course differently to most by containing what could be considered a co[labor]ative writing focus. The classwork consisted of weekly short essays of around 500 words on a prompt assigned by Professor Peters. Throughout the semester, the students like myself were advised that our homework could provide the basis for a publishable paper as long as someone was willing to take the initiative to be an editor.

Peters, Hollings et al. (2021) is a collection of one of those assignments. It was edited by two student volunteers who took up the initiative, myself being one of them. I think it is important to mention that the two editors reflected the makeup of the class, as this class was one of the few education courses at Beijing Normal University that was open to both Chinese and the English-taught international students. By having this diverse makeup, the class discussions allowed for more views and perspectives to be shared. What is then highlighted in this paper is a community

endeavor to give a broader perspective of ISM, based off the individual assessments of each community member. These assessments come from personal experiences but they also come from being part of this unique classroom community and producing knowledge as a community. Since the subject matter of the class was the humanistic and philosophical background of international education, it was quite fitting that a collective approach to knowledge emerged from within the course.

This was not the first collective writing that emerged from this course. The class also produced the paper, 'China's Internationalized Higher Education During Covid-19: Collective Student Autoethnography' (Peters, Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, the paper, 'Education in and for the Belt and Road Initiative' (Peters, Oladele et al., 2020) was based on the coursework from a previous course taught by Professor Peters at Beijing Normal University. I took part in both these papers, as well as the majority of the students in the respective courses. Throughout these courses, the students in the class were encouraged to be full participators in these collective writing endeavors on a voluntary basis. Voluntary is a key word here, as peer production relies on the voluntary belonging to a community.

While being similar in the collective nature of the essays, the ISM paper was slightly different to these two papers. The first was a collection of autoethnographies by the students on their personal educational experiences during COVID-19. The second was a paper on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It emerged out of edited abstracts from students' final papers on the various aspects of the BRI that interested students. Unlike these two papers, the ISM paper materialized from a more direct prompt. A prompt that came as a homework assignment to write on the changing map of international student mobility – Brexit, America First and COVID-19. However, the students were free to respond and reflect in any given way using the assigned readings and any supplemental sources they wanted. In some ways this could be seen as a combination or even an extension of the two previous ones within a more narrow topic. While there was still freedom to tackle the topic from numerous angles and with various sources (Peters, Oladele et al., 2020), there was also the opportunity to use personal experiences of being international students (Peters, Wang et al., 2020) and being part of this community.

Yet, this prompt was still one of eight given throughout the semester. Thus, after the course was finished, each student submitted their individual essays for the eight homework assignments. While the compilation of any of these eight could have theoretically constituted a publishable paper, this particular homework assignment on ISM was encouraged by Professor Peters after I volunteered as an editor. It was after this recommendation and compilation that it was then left to the two self-appointed editors, Zhang Man and myself, to organize, edit and make a paper that was publishable. Herein lies the emphasis on the labor part of co[labor]ation, as it was a labor of love, time and collaboration. Numerous messages were sent to students asking them for missing references, to cut down their parts and various other necessities. While it was a time-consuming process to communicate amongst such a large group, a vision was shared of what we could accomplish as a collective. This paper shows what can emerge from a collective effort.

It was mentioned above that the professor of the course was the coiner of the concept of knowledge socialism. Hence, what this paper represents is an experiment in knowledge socialism and knowledge socialism pedagogy. Knowledge socialism and its subsequent pedagogy has its basis in peer production, collaboration, collective intelligence and openness. As Peters (2021) states, 'knowledge socialism promotes the sociality of knowledge by providing mechanisms for a truly free exchange of ideas, enhanced by peer review' and 'unlike knowledge capitalism, which relies on exclusivity - and thus scarcity - to drive innovation, the socialist alternative recognizes that exclusivity can also greatly limit innovation' (p. 5). Hopefully, it is these elements that come through to the readers of our collective writing and why this innovative method was utilized.

Collective writing or co[labor]ative writing represents a type of peer production. Through this act of peer production, in itself a type of collective intelligence (Peters, as cited in Research Features, 2018), these 14 voices were able to co-create knowledge through openness and sharing (Peters & Jandrić, 2018). This openness came from each member of the class being given an opportunity to share their own thoughts and ideas on ISM and three recent disruptions to it. Even more so, by utilizing their own experiences in relation to these disruptions, a reflection is produced on international education as a whole, as knowledge is co-created within the community. For those familiar with other 'academic authorial collaboration' and 'collective assemblages', such as the Editors Collective (another product of Professor Peters), Peters, Besley, and Arndt (2019) note that these collaborations are made up of individual contributors motivated by the aspiration to innovate and create further than one's sole capacity. This is essentially what this paper is offering, a collection of knowledge that allows for each individual in this paper to go above and beyond their own capacity and to have their voices heard. Thus, knowledge and voices that may not have been heard individually are given the chance to be published allowing the knowledge to propagate.

Buras and Apple (2006) discuss how there are certain types of knowledges that are deemed of the most worth. Similarly, Burke (2012) expresses that while certain varieties of knowledge, capital and experience are privileged, others are ignored. The question could be asked, whose view on ISM should be valued? From a pedagogical perspective, this collaboration has allowed for 14 students to use their individual knowledge to form a collective knowledge or knowledges, emphasizing that each view should be of value as it offers something new and different. This paper was created with an idea of inclusivity; all the students who had submitted writing would be included. No one's voice would be ignored. This allowed for a myriad of voices to be heard in tandem with each other, and an avenue for more knowledge to be brought to light. What is even more powerful is the complement of the academic sources with the personal experiences brought into the discussion by those in the midst of experiencing the changing map of ISM. Hence, the paper offers readers an inside look at the realities of ISM. The reader can see how the disruptions discussed actually impact those at the heart of international education and how that influences the way that each student sees and reads that dynamic map. This provides the readers what one or two authors cannot - a more holistic overview. This is a particularly useful way to look at the recent disruptions to ISM.

Putting the work of so many people together seems like it could result in a cacophony of ideas, writing styles and perspectives. But the opposite occurred. What resulted is a scholarly work created by the collective intelligence of a group. Through collective responsibility and collective action, the group worked together to fulfill the same ideals and principles behind international education, while also providing a glimpse into the future of international education and international student mobility.

Notes on contributor

Stephanie Hollings is a PhD student in the Faculty of Education at Beijing Normal University. Her primary areas of interest are international education, global citizenship and international schools.

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