Comparative and International Education
Éducation comparée et internationale

Editorial

Kumari Beck, Dale M. McCartney, Eva Lemaire and Rim Fathallah

Volume 53, Number 1, 2024

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1111807ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v53i1.18218

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

University of Western Ontario

ISSN

2369-2634 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this document

Beck, K., McCartney, D. M., Lemaire, E. & Fathallah, R. (2024). Editorial. *Comparative and International Education / Éducation comparée et internationale*, *53*(1). https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v53i1.18218

Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale

Volume 53 | Issue 1

March 2024

Editorial

Kumari Beck
Simon Fraser University
kumari_beck@sfu.ca

Dale M. McCartney
University of the Fraser Valley
dale.Mccartney@ufv.ca

Eva Lemaire
University of Alberta
lemaire@ualberta.ca

Rim Fathallah
University of Toronto
rim.fathallah@mail.utoronto.ca

Recommended Citation
Beck, K., McCartney, D. M., Lemaire, E., & Fathallah, R. (2024). Editorial. Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale 53(1).https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v53i1.18218

Who Stands for International Students?

On January 22, the federal government of Canada announced a cap on student permits granted over the next 2 years. The cap will see permits approved for about 360,000 undergraduate students for 2024, a reduction of 35% from the previous year (Wherry, 2024). As a reference point, over a million international students (at all levels of study) were enrolled in Canadian educational institutions in 2023, an increase of 29% over the previous year (CBIE, n.d.).

The cuts are meant to target "bad actors," the private institutions who recruit increasing numbers of international students, and exploit them by charging excessive fees, providing poor quality education with few or no support services. In the worst reported cases, agents have defrauded students by promising falsified admission to private or public institutions. The minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada, Marc Miller, described them as "the diploma equivalent of puppy mills" continuing, "[i]t's a bit of a mess and it's time to reign it in" (Wherry, 2024).

We agree that unethical recruitment practices and the exploitation of vulnerable international students must be called out and stopped. There's more to this issue, however, that warrant attention. The issue of exploitation of international students, whether by recruiting agents or by private schools/institutions, is hardly new. Scholars and the media have been reporting on this for a few years, highlighting the hardships, racism, and financial difficulties experienced by international students. Provincial and federal governments, however, did not see this as an issue of concern, let alone act on what was building up into a crisis situation for students. Why the outrage and concern now? What is different?

As we noted in an editorial a few months ago (McCartney et al., 2023), public anger has been building over the past year against international students and new immigrants who are being blamed for the housing crisis in Canada. As history has shown us, newcomers to Canada have often been scapegoated for prevailing social problems, and the media have played a role in creating the moral panics regarding international students. Once considered "the competition" in displacing local students and taking up seats in universities and colleges (Stein & Andreotti, 2016), they are now "the competition" taking up scarce rental housing. While the housing crisis is real for everyone, international students are hardly the cause, and, in fact, are themselves often forced to live far from school and in overcrowded shared spaces. It is clear that the pushback against increasing numbers of international students coming to communities that don't have the capacity to accommodate them, and the hysteria surrounding the rental housing market is the main reason for the timing of this new federal announcement. The cap on international student permits and assurances from some Canadian provinces about addressing licensing and regulatory measures for private schools will be a good start, but this is just one aspect of a complex problem.

Canadian colleges and universities are also complicit in the unbridled growth of the international student market over the years. As scholars in international higher education have pointed to over the past two decades, public funding for higher education has been decreasing over the past couple of decades, adding pressure on institutions to become more entrepreneurial. They have now become overly dependent on revenue from international students, leaving themselves open to financial vulnerability at times of threat. The pandemic and its aftermath were one such threat, leading to low enrollments across Canada and subsequent budget cuts in many institutions this year. Budget cuts most commonly affect services to underserved groups, programs and courses that, for example, maintain commitments to equity, and already precarious teaching staff, all

leading to an erosion of a quality educational experience for all, but particularly for international students.

The federal government itself has contributed to the growing student population through its marketization of the "Canada brand" for international education, and through policies on international education. For example, the first federal strategy on international education spoke about "maximising economic opportunities, … strengthening engagement with key and emerging markets, and attracting the best and brightest international students" (FATDC, 2014, p. 5). It hinted that international students "may be eligible for permanent residents" and that they are "well positioned to immigrate to Canada" with their Canadian credentials and experience. This prize was made specific in the second strategy that promised "pathways to permanent residency" (GAC, 2019), a ploy that has been used by agents to entice students to come to Canada.

The use of private recruiting agents by both public and private institutions highlights yet another aspect of international higher education—the growth of the private sector in higher education. The more obvious reflection of this is the proliferation of private schools, including language schools. Universities and colleges are increasingly using the private sector and private-public partnerships for the recruitment of international students, and to establish pathway colleges and other programs. These trends demonstrate how key institutional elements that used to have academic oversight are now being outsourced to for-profit companies that have little interest in educational goals. De Wit and Altbach (2024) observed that privatization together with the underfunding of higher education "create financial constraints for the sector and make universities vulnerable to illegal practices and a drop in quality standards."

When international students are recruited to come to Canada, we make promises to them about the kind of educational experience and Canadian experience they can hope to have. A recent CBIE survey of international students found that the top three reasons that international students choose Canada for their education away from home are: Canada's reputation as a safe and stable country, the reputation and quality of the education system in Canada, and that Canada offers a society that (generally) is tolerant and not discriminatory (CBIE, n.d.). In each of these areas we are failing students. In the first, basic accommodation, a fundamental necessity and an expectation in a stable country, is simply not available. The quality of education is not a given, and the "generally tolerant and nondiscriminatory" society is increasingly racist, blaming, and angry.

The federal minister asserted that these cuts are not aimed at students:

> To be absolutely clear, these measures are not against individual international students, … [t]hey are to ensure that as future students arrive in Canada, they receive the quality of education that they signed up for and the hope that they were provided in their home countries. (Wherry, 2024)

But it is the students who are being demonized in the public eye. The cuts themselves are insufficient to address the multitude of other issues that are at play. As members of universities and colleges, as researchers and teaching staff, we have a moral responsibility to advocate for change, to be academic activists in employing research for the greater social good. This is a call to be vocal about the academic benefits of hosting students from around the world, to advocate for decent living conditions and effective support services for international students, to challenge corporate models of international education that prioritize economic rather than academic goals, and to promote a vision of international education that is based in educational goals, mutuality and relationality, and well-being.

On to our current issue, which features one French and three English articles that take seriously the moral responsibility and potential of international education and scholarship. Abdulganiy Aremu Sulyman and Kate Ojomah Ukwumaka offer a discussion of the possibility of

applying the African Conversational School of Philosophy (also known as conversationalism) to the vital task of critical peace education in Nigeria. They suggest that conversationalism can be employed to achieve a form of "moderate decolonization," which would allow for the harmonization of African and foreign influences in Nigeria, to contribute to a peaceful and sustainable future. After making their theoretical case, they apply those insights to key policies impacting education in Nigeria, and show how critical peace education, informed by conversationalism, could further decolonize efforts and help build a better, more sustainable future for Nigeria.

Emin Kilinc, Ardavan Eizadirad, and Jennifer Straub are similarly inspired by the potential of global citizenship education to contribute to a better future for Turkey. Given Turkey's status as host to the world's largest refugee population, the government has made efforts to incorporate a global perspective into its social studies curriculum, but Kilinc et al. find it has done so to mixed results so far. They examine social studies textbooks in Grades 4 to 7 to show that there continues to be a significant emphasis on nationalist paradigms, to the detriment of the global citizenship project in Turkish schools. They draw on their analysis to recommend reforms to the Turkish curriculum, including a reduction in nationalist positions and an increase in efforts to teach critical thinking skills, as steps towards a more globally oriented curriculum and a more inclusive Turkish society.

In our third article, Haoming Tang, Paul Tarc, James Budrow, and Polin Sankar Persad draw on an innovative collection of evidence to examine what makes scholars globally minded in the first place, with implications for the international education project as a whole. They examine the autobiographical sketches in Kirkwood-Tucker's 2018 book *The Global Education Movement: Narratives of Distinguished Global Scholars* to identify patterns in the lives of leading international education scholars. They find that there are key themes in the lives of these researchers, including experiencing war or political tension, witnessing social injustice at a formative time in their lives, and an interest in engaging with difference and exploring the unknown. In some ways these patterns reinforce the point Kilinc et al. make about the value of global citizenship education, as these renowned scholars pursued their own personal versions of a globalized curriculum, leading to lifelong work as educators and researchers in international education. As with the other authors in this issue, Tang et al. show the necessary link between international education, social justice, and the necessary work to build a better future.

Finally, we are excited to include the first French submission to our new "Emerging Scholars" section. Rooted in the dialectical square of cultural difference, Marc Donald Jean Baptiste uses data from a 2022 thesis to present, in the context of Brazil, the practices of primary school teachers considering the cultural differences of students from Haitian origins. Jean Baptiste finds that despite the efforts of teachers, students experience problematic intercultural interventions. The study shows the pressing need for the development of greater intercultural and inclusive approaches within the Brazilian school system.

This issue also includes two book reviews: Emily Dobrich reviews L. M. Griffith's 2023 book *Graceful Resistance: How Capoeiristas Use Their Art for Activism and Community Engagement*; and Alishau Diebold discusses Ranjan Datta's 2023 book *Decolonization in Practice: Reflective Learning From Cross-Cultural Perspectives*.

Kumari Beck
Simon Fraser University

With

Dale M. McCartney
University of the Fraser Valley

Eva Lemaire
University of Alberta

Rim Fathallah
University of Ontario

References

CBIE. (n.d.). *Facts and Figures. Canadian Bureau for International Education*. https://cbie.ca/infographic/

De Wit, H., & Altbach, P. G. (2024, February 20). *Chaos as headwinds hit international student recruitment.* University World News. https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20240220125648569&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=GLNL0774

Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (FATDC). (2014). *Canada's international education strategy: Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity*. FATDC.

Global Affairs Canada (GAC). (2019). *Building on success: International education strategy 2019–2024*. https://www.international.gc.ca/education/strategy-2019-2024-strategie.aspx?lang=eng

McCartney, D. M., Beck, K., Lemaire, E., Teng, E., & Fathallah, R. (2023). Editorial. Comparative and International Education/Éducation comparée et internationale. *52*(1). http://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v52i1.16781.

Stein, S., & de Andreotti, V. O. (2016). Cash, competition or charity: International students and the global imaginary. *Higher Education*, *72*(2), 225–239. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9949-8

Wherry, A. (2024, January 22). *Federal government announces 2-year cap on student permits*. CBC News. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/miller-cap-international-students-1.7090779