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Transnational Higher Education Partnership Development: A New Research Agenda?

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Globalisation

- Globalisation has caused dramatic changes to the character and function of higher education in most countries around the world (Wing Ng 2012).

- World polity (WTO, IMF, UNESCO) have prompted higher education providers to reconsider their attitudes towards internationalisation.

- One method for realising international opportunities afforded by neo-liberal policies is to develop international partnerships (Chan 2004).

TNE Partnerships

• Numerous modes of cooperation with varying levels of formalisation (validation, franchise, joint programmes, IBC, distance-learning).

• Complex structures and systems which require careful management (Buchanan and Huczynski 2010).

• Formal partnerships must enable optimal levels of collaboration.

• As alliances grow in complexity and involve wider sets of stakeholders (Bolton and Nie 2010) understanding how partners interact and respond to each other offers a new way in which to evaluate the sustainability and value of international ventures.
Partnership Analysis

- Partnerships are not static, but **evolutionary** in nature.
- It is common to have them identified as a **series of phases** ranging in number and definition (Das and Teng 1998; Gray 1985).
- The phase approach makes it possible to categorise existing TNE partnership literature:
  1. **Initiation** – strategy/ function/ transactional/ value
  2. **Operational** – faculty/ CPD/ quality/ pedagogy
  3. Evaluation- minimal
The Operational Phase

- **Critical in transforming** inputs such as technology, capital, energy and knowledge into beneficial and valuable outputs *(Slack and Lewis 2008)*.

- Implementation - requires agents to **work together** to successfully negotiate and complete tasks and transform relationships.

- At the same time a certain course of action may effect the **motivation and attitude of other group members**.

- Previous work appears not to ask empirical questions, which contribute to an understanding of **how and why** TNE relationships develop.
Empirical Questions

1. What kind of activities do faculty engage in at the operational phase of a partnership?

2. Do certain faculty practices influence relations more than others?

3. Can modifications to faculty practices improve faculty relationships?

4. Are faculty encouraged and are they able to embed partnership learning’s over time?

5. How do the operational practices of faculty and the subsequent relationships affect the quality of TNE programmes and the experiences of students?
Conceptual Framework

- Partnership: a socially structured and evolutionary relationship, consisting of agents (faculty) who generate and participate in social activities in order to achieve mutual outcomes that stimulate positive relational developments over time.

- Partnership therefore represents a socially constructed phenomenon, reliant on social processes - develop relationships over time (Ryan et al. 2012).

- Social processes may take many forms- social activities.

- Activities are critical to the development of TNE partnerships over time.
• Third generation cultural, historical activity theory (Engeström 2001).

• ‘Collective, artefact-mediated and object orientated activity system, seen in its network relations to other activity systems’ (Engeström 2001, 136).
Theoretical Framework

• Operational phase- represents a system of **social interaction**, reliant on **resource sharing, learning and support** (Cohen and Prusak 2001).

• Yet faculty actions are constrained by structure.

• Can faculty **transformation** their partnership systems and social structures (work-place learning (mirco) vs organisational learning (macro))? 

• Joint activities = psychological effects (object\(^3\)) (Vygotsky 1989).

• **Important in the development of integrative bonds between subjects** (Molm, Whitham, and Melamed 2012).
Social Capital

- Represents a critical component in the forming and maintaining of long-term, successful partnerships (Eddy 2010; Dhillon 2009).

- Bourdieu and Coleman emphasise the intangible character of social capital, whereby it exists in the structure of social relationships (Portes 2000).

- Benefits are yielded by agents accessing and mobilising each others resources.

- How faculty feel about each other may influence accessibility and motivation to share resources.

- Perceptions of historical and current activities are important if positive relationships are to develop.
Social Capital

• Social capital: **resources embedded in partnership networks, which faculty access and/or mobilise in purposive social actions** (Lin 2001) **thereby creating psychological conditions (outputs) that affect further partnership relations, resources and actions over time.**

• Faculty, through their practices -ability to stimulate emotional states, which third generation CHAT does not identify.

• CHAT does not recognise time, motives, interpretations of action or associated meanings.

• **Social Action Theory** (Weber 1978) provides a theoretical lens in which to consider the more subjective aspects of social capital.
Conclusions

• Paper offers a new lens in which to investigate the operational phase of TNE partnerships.

• How partnership (activity) systems empower faculty to transform them over time in order to strengthen relations is critically important to the future of transnational alliances.

• Furthermore, third generation CHAT represents a thinking tool, enabling faculty activities to be analysed in light of their social capital potential.

• Social action clearly affects the generation of emotional outputs such as trust and commitment.

• Operational activities therefore have the potential to transform, positively or negatively international partnership relationships.
Research in Progress

• Critical realist paradigm- seeking to explore social reality.

• Multiple case-study design of 4 Sino-British TNE partnerships.

• Applying third generation CHAT and Social Action Theory in order to explore the challenges facing faculty.

• Limitations, opportunities and catalysts for improving TNE partnerships are being uncovered.

• Limitations of third generation CHAT as a theoretical model also being identified.
References

Feedback welcome

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