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Pedagogic identities on offer in a case of online internationalised education

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ABSTRACT:

An ethnographic analysis of the pedagogic interaction online in an internationalised MBA unit showed how expressions of cultural difference were produced both as a curricular asset, and as regulative troubles. The relational cultural identities thus produced are further analysed with reference to Bernstein's (2000) typology of pedagogic identities, and the points of suture or articulation (Hall 1996) between student identities, student aspirations and the subjectivities offered through curricular and pedagogic design. The identities invoked through such mechanisms and within the semiotic means available, are shown to be discursively restricted to overly deferential and retrospective notions of the culturally determined Other, with limited expressions of the emerging 'market', hybrid or cosmopolitan identities which such sites could potentially and profitably facilitate. This analysis is used to reflect on the cultural politics of limiting imagination in the wider context of commodified education in globalised markets.

Introduction

FIRST STUDENT VOICE:

...I must agree that having a Western education has somewhat changed my way of thinking. Sometimes, I am being called "banana man" (meaning yellow on the outside, but white in the inside) by my fellow Malaysians. This may not be a bad thing all together if we do not use all the theories what we learn wholesale. We need to filter and use all the good practices only. At the moment, Asians do not have much research materials. With more and more students doing their doctorate degrees, I hope this situation would change in the near future. Until then, we would still be dependent on Western materials. Actually, I think Asians are not Anti-West or anything like that. Most of us have no problems working with Westerners nor do we feel "second class".
(Email Interview A3 with student enrolled in an online MBA unit with an Australian university)

SECOND STUDENT VOICE:

I chose this course because I believed it would develop me so that I could move up the ladder to management. I chose this uni, because I did my undergraduate there and I live nearby, so am therefore very familiar with it and know lots of the lecturers.
(Email Interview A2 with student enrolled in same online MBA unit with an Australian university)

Enrolling in education offers new possibilities in any individual's ongoing 'process of becoming' (Hall 1996, p.4). Enrolling in internationalised education could be seen as a particularly proactive and strategic investment in new cultural and symbolic capital with which to re-scope and imagine future career paths. As an example, the first student quoted above was 'a Malaysia Chinese' residing in Selangor, Malaysia, enrolled in a MBA offered online by an enterprising Australian university. This university had negotiated a contractual partnership with an equally enterprising Malaysian institution. In contrast, the second student was enrolled in the same program, in the same online class, but had enrolled at her local university for reasons of local allegiance, social capital and convenience. This constellation of relations between individuals and institutions all 'on the make', makes an interesting crucible for identity formation in terms of what future identities students come looking for, what subjectivities are offered to them, and how well the different sides of the equation can 'articulate' (Hall, 1996, p.6). This paper reviews a case study of the growing practice of internationalised online education to explore such processes and sites of cultural and identity production. What kind of student is produced when local educational institutions go global? What kind of students could be produced through re-imagined curricular and pedagogic design?

Resourcing identity processes

a. New logics for cultural identity

Old logics of stable bounded cultures and their 'given' cultural identities are being replaced with new logics, new processes and active strategies of identification (Hall 1991, 1996) in the conditions of 'liquid modernity', being 'the unstructured, fluid

state of the immediate setting of life-politics' (Bauman 2000, p.8). What was once a notionally structural position, ascribed by birth and location, is now achieved as a more slippery, contingent position, discursively negotiated through difference, and constituted from the excess of cultural resources available in the increasing global flows of people, ideas, technologies, ideologies and cultural products. Through the technological means of network society (Castells 1996; Castells 1997), previous geographical and political borders have become porous and ephemeral as new communes and projects are pursued in electronic networks of interactivity and interdependence across their arbitrary boundaries. Online internationalised education is such a practice, pursued enthusiastically by provider institutions in the hopes of garnering new markets, and by prospective students with an eye to investing in timely new cultural resources. Knowledge thus becomes business with implications for the relation between knowledge giver and knowledge taker.

b. Pedagogy and its identity potentials

As a site and resource for self-making, the formal educational setting is however distinguished by the inherent legitimation of the subjectivities offered. Students, by enrolling, symbolically submit to their positioning, disciplining, and shaping by the subjectivities projected in the curriculum and the pedagogy. Bernstein (2000) offers the concept of 'pedagogic identity' for these pedagogically produced subjectivities and a typology of possible modes thereof, which will be developed here to address the types of subjectivities offered in the case study.

For Bernstein, a **pedagogic identity** is 'the result of embedding a career in a collective base' (2000, p. 66). In other words, a pedagogic identity is produced in the relation between the learner and the socially constituted body of knowledge, and will reflect both the specialisation of that body of knowledge from others, and its relation to the broader economic context. Thus, enrolment in an online MBA may be a source of identity flowing from membership in the esoteric or rarefied nature of the instructional discourse imparted through the curriculum. It may also be a source of identity due to the material rewards flowing from the status of the credential, and thus its desirability.

Bernstein identifies four positions 'for designing and distributing pedagogic identities' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 205) – retrospective, prospective, therapeutic, and market positions. Each of these orientations attempts 'to construct in teachers and students a particular moral disposition, motivation and aspiration, embedded in particular performances and practices' (Bernstein 1999, p.246). A '**retrospective**' identity recaptures the past in the present, and is pedagogically realised in tight control over the inputs of education. A '**prospective**' identity reflects the neo-conservative effort to undergo change in order to retain desirable aspects of the past in conditions of the present, controlling both inputs and outputs. These two identities are considered 'centred' as they are driven by top-down policy, and aim for convergence, that is uniform outputs, whereas the other 'de-centred' identities encourage divergence. A de-centred, '**therapeutic**' identity, currently less prominent in formal educational models, is premised on progressive theories of personal development and constructs multiple 'presents' through stable, integrated personal identities. The de-centred '**market**' identity is competitive and contingent as it responds to market values and market opportunities – 'the transmission here arises to produce an identity

whose product has an exchange value in a market ... the identity is a reflection of external contingencies' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 69-70).

A **competition** between these modes of pedagogic identity (henceforth PI) is played out in the control of educational inputs (curriculum) and outputs (evaluation). It is significant that any PI position can operate in conflict or coexist, with different ones driving different curricular aspects, or achieving temporary ascendancy (Moore, 2002). Importantly, these target PIs condition teacher subjectivities and practices (Moore, 2002) as much as the student subjectivities being cultivated.

The concept of PI **meshes** with processual theorisations of cultural identity/identification in that the PIs offered can interact and potentially conflict or cohere with the personal and cultural identity projects of individual students. The PI positions Bernstein describes can be interpreted as a typology of subjectivities with which the student can 'articulate' or 'suture' (Hall 1996b) their personal identity projects. Bernstein defines the personal cultural identity as: 'contemporary resources for constructing belonging, recognition of self and others, and context management (what I am, where, with whom and when)' (2000, p. 205). This definition is compatible with Hall's processual and relational conceptualisation of identity/identification alluded to above. The important link is Bernstein's acknowledgment of education as a source for, and impinging context for, identity formation. The discussion below will explore how pedagogic design can precipitate certain versions of cultural identity

In apposition to his PI typology, Bernstein also describes **three dominant identity positions** as competing models/resources under current fluid conditions of 're-organising capital' (2000, p. 205): the de-centred (with the subcategories of instrumental and therapeutic); the retrospective (with the subcategories of fundamentalist and elitist); and the prospective. As with the PI typology, the de-centred identities pursue multiple paths: the instrumental identity driven by external local market circumstances; the therapeutic driven by internal processes of sense making in search of a coherent self. Retrospective identities are 'centred' around stabilised collective identities such as nation or religion in the case of fundamentalist, and high cultural aesthetic taste in the case of elites. Prospective identities cohere around the sense of becoming a future collective – a re-centring as subscription to the collective political project, which overwrites past collective and personal identities.

From this theorisation, we can draw a sense of how pedagogy can work with or against local identity projects and their imagined communities (Anderson 1991; Appadurai 1996), and how the field of pedagogy has within itself a competition over the kind of identities to be facilitated and promoted. The conceptualization of PIs allows an analytic way of exploring Hall's treatment of articulation between the individual and the discursive subjectivities on offer, in educational contexts in particular. Bernstein's distinction between retrospective, de-centred and prospective identity constructions as past/present/future orientations helps map dimensions reflecting an individual's processual identification in 'liquid' conditions. This theorization gives pedagogy a particular and unique status in being able to design and offer certain subjectivities. It is the foregone legitimation of this sanctioned influence that could be under stress in commodified education where teacher/student relations also have to account for service provider/client relations. Table 1 and 2 below

summarize the two typologies, that of pedagogic identity, and that of identity, and exemplify their modes with data from the case study where possible.

Table 1: Typology of pedagogic identity orientations

PEDAGOGIC IDENTITY (PI) ORIENTATIONS		Description	Hypothetical/data example
Centred	Retrospective	Tight control over inputs, recaptures the past in the present	Curriculum drawn from canonical works
	Prospective	Tight control over outputs, neo-conservative reform	Assessment focussed on reproducing one endorsed version of knowledge from curriculum
Decentred	Therapeutic	premised on progressive theories of personal development and constructs multiple 'presents' through stable, integrated personal identities	Final assessment item in case study: reflecting and evaluating own managerial practices.
	Market	competitive and contingent as it responds to market values and market opportunities	Group discussions in case study: students to make suggestions for each other's work place scenarios.

Table 2: Typology of identity orientations

IDENTITY TYPES		Description	Hypothetical/data Example
Retrospective	Fundamentalist	Past oriented , centred around nationalism, religion or other stabilised collective identity	Student from PNG in case study arguing that any business in PNG much take account of traditional 'wantok' cultural practices.
	Elitist	Past oriented , centred around high cultural/aesthetic taste	Pursuit of excellence in disciplinary rigours of classical music.
Decentred	Therapeutic	Present oriented , concerned with internal processes of sense making in search of a coherent self	Student in case study argues against managing with regard to cultural differences on the grounds that we are all human, and it's up to the individuals involved . . .
	Instrumental	Present oriented , driven by external local market circumstances	Student in case study arguing that it is the business clients needs that should be accounted for, not just the cultural traditions of the workers.
Prospective		Future oriented around the sense of becoming a future collective	Student argues, 'If we are to be global managers,'

In the potential articulation of these schemata, the curriculum of an MBA offered internationally by online means, could hypothetically offer a cosmopolitan market-oriented PI subjectivity, constructing an adaptive supra-national professional with marketable skills of high exchange value, that attempts to overwrite any local cultural

allegiance the student brings with them. The management discourse transmitted may offer the student a prospective identity in terms of membership in some imagined culture-neutral, global business community, which might conflict with aspirations to Western dispositions the student seeks through their study, or conversely their allegiance to a local cultural community and its practices. Conversely, a conservative MBA could emphasise the reproduction of canonical works to mould certain types of business leaders with conservative ideologies that will steer a steady predictable course into the future and cohere with retrospective notions of national identity.

The case study pursued in this study displayed a number of different PI orientations competing through different aspects of its design. The curriculum could be characterised as offering a relatively centred, 'prospective' PI, being based on a best-seller US textbook in its 'nth' edition, offering a universalised theory for modern business management across the globe in the twenty-first century. Such dominant publications emerge as a default orthodoxy in their fields, anointing the selected content and silencing other pertinent literatures. The fact that the unit materials had been sourced from another university also suggests a converging, standardising curriculum across this intellectual field. However, the lecturer's adaptations of the unit's pedagogical processes offered a more 'market' orientation to the PIs being produced, whereby students had to select and apply aspects of the curricular content to their own workplace settings and problems. In addition, the assessable group discussions required students to explore the theories in each other's settings as well, so the ideas had to be de-centred, re-contextualised and professionally evaluated for particular settings and business goals. In contrast the final introspective assignment, in which the student had to reflect on and evaluate their own personal management style in light of the curricular content, constructed a more therapeutic orientation. By his account, the lecturer purposefully rejected the 'retrospective' orientation evident in the common business education practice of studying canonical case narratives.

c. Pedagogy and its imaginary potentials

Pedagogic discourse has another distinctive feature in its device of recontextualisation whereby discourses are disembedded from their field of production (for example, the physics laboratory) and re-animated in the educational setting. The 'discursive gap' thus produced allows 'an **imaginary** discourse... unmediated discourses are transformed into mediated, virtual or imaginary discourses' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 33). This could be understood as the discourse of heuristic devices, generalisations or hypothetical examples, produced and tolerated for consumption only in the pedagogical setting. Moreover, the imaginary pedagogic discourse will in turn create 'imaginary subjects' such that 'we should not overestimate the fit between pedagogic discourse and any practice external to it ... the "fit" is essentially an imaginary practice which may well be differently ideologically positioned by the activities of different agencies' (Bernstein 1990, p.198). This point is well exemplified in the first student voice above, where he admits he can take or leave the knowledge offered to him in his studies: '*We need to filter and use all the good practices only*'. In common parlance this suggests that he is 'going through the motions', fully intending to be selective in his application of this learning to any 'real' life. He plays the imaginary student subject, but this will not necessarily impinge on his future practice or identity.

There is an additional affordance for the role of the imagination in the ‘different phenomenological mode’ (Tomlinson 1999, p.157) of online pedagogy. Within its ‘narrower range of symbolic cues’ (p.158) via a text only bulletin board in the commercial courseware, the usual markers of cultural identity have to be ‘re-semiotised’ (Iedema 2004). Much attention has thus been given to the resulting potential for identity play in electronic interaction (Hine 2000). Chesher (2004; Chesher forthcoming) re-describes digital technologies as ‘invocational media’ given their modus operandi of ‘calling up’ or ‘invoking’ second and third order virtual events premised on pre-existing material practices and categories. His link between digital invocation and magical practices highlights the potential for work of the social imaginary that can be accomplished in this symbolic medium. When it comes to producing cultural identities in online interactions, there is thus ample room and means for invoking imaginary versions, be they polarised in essentialising ‘purity’ and ‘authenticity’, or blurred in negating ‘hybridity’.

To summarise this section, we have in both pedagogic discourse and technologically mediated interaction, the capacity to invoke and act through imaginary identities and imaginary discourse. These understandings lead us to critically appraise any expressions of cultural identity and its necessary if imagined logic of cultural difference produced through the medium of online pedagogic interaction. The identities invoked will not reference transparent truths, but rather are versions made discursively possible within the relations and the affordances of the setting, that articulate imagined identities with/through the subjective positions facilitated by the pedagogical design. The next section outlines how expressions of cultural difference were produced both as a curricular asset and as a pedagogical problem in the conduct of the case study, then describe the types of cultural identities thus produced with reference to Bernstein’s past/present/future orientations and PI orientations.

The case study in review

A ‘virtual ethnography’ (Hine 2000) was conducted of a semester long core unit in an MBA offered online by an Australian university to an internationalised student group (Doherty 2004). The 2152 postings made in the shared interaction over its nineteen week period were analysed and described through a macrogenre structure (Christie 1997; Christie 2002), which distinguished the instructional register activity (developing the curricular content, the ‘what’) from the regulative register activity (organising and managing the pedagogical process, the ‘how’). Following this step, selected episodes that highlighted the production of cultural difference and expressions of cultural identity in each register were further analysed using tools of systemic functional linguistics.

In **the instructional register**, cultural differencing was encouraged and emerged as a curricular asset through the design of ‘student subsidy’ and the cultured ‘voicing’ of the interaction (Doherty 2004). The lecturer purposefully mixed ‘local’ and ‘international’ students for assessable small group discussions around workplace narratives. In terms of an assessment task, I have just described this design of discussion of each other’s work place narratives as facilitating a ‘de-centred, market’ PI, because students had to consider, differentiate between, and adapt theory to diverse settings. However, this design also aimed to enrich the curriculum with students’ insights into cultural particularities by harnessing their privileged status and

superior insight as members of a cultural group, or their personal knowledge from working in culturally diverse settings. As described below, this multi-tasking of the activity produced incongruent or dissonant positions for the students both centring them in narratives of homogeneous national culture, and de-centring them by asking them to contribute insight to other's cultural workplace scenarios.

The textbook offered Hofstede's framework of cultural work values as expert knowledge of cultural difference for workplace management. This framework and its successors subscribe to a metaculture (Robertson 1992; Mulhern 2000) that understands cultures to be discrete, located, nationally bounded, inherently homogeneous and reproducing over time. This pluralist metaculture could be considered the current majority positioning in business discourse, fuelling the 'cultural shock prevention industry' (Hannerz 1990, p.245). The pedagogic design of student subsidy similarly offered, and enrolled the students into, the position of cultural informants, that is, superior knowers, speaking for their national and presumably homogeneous cultures. Thus the PI being facilitated in this curricular aspect could be interpreted as retrospective, being respectful of past narratives, not disrupting this metaculture and its static, inherited categories. On reflection this choice seems ironic given the innovative globalising enterprise the interactants were participating in. This PI design in turn predisposed the interaction to foreground and voice cultural identities that could be described as centring towards a fundamentalist interpretation of culture, as became evident in the conduct of the course. While 'fundamentalist' nowadays carries connotations of extremism, the meaning intended here is more one of 'essentialising', in that students were encouraged by the retrospective PI to voice homogeneous versions of the cultural identity, imaginatively essentialised for the heuristic purpose of instructing the Other student in cultural difference. Thus the mesh between the PI offered and student identities made homogeneous, essentialised culture thinkable, and duly reified.

Typically students invoked such retrospective fundamentalist versions of cultural identity in the imaginary discourse's '**comfort zone**', reporting on their 'culture' as an objective, knowable factor embedded in a locality, for example: '*The "wantok" system does play a greater role ... and influences most of these cultures and related behaviours in nearly every organisation in PNG in various perspective*' (2L20). There was an expectation that the Other could reasonably be known through such generalisations, and this knowledge could be extracted and applied in the future. By naturalising the attributes associated with a cultural category as timeless and fixed, interactions could proceed in the polite tenor of mutual respect and deference. The cultural categories were constructed as mutually exclusive, making invisible any historical and current interdependencies, penetrations and 'polythetic ... resemblances' (Appadurai 1990). The maintenance of such a pluralist metaculture in the face of globalisation, such as the network in which they were participating and their many accounts of industries penetrated and shaped by global influences, suggests 'a certain kind of wilful nostalgia' (Robertson, 1992, p.31) sustaining imagined national communities as a form of denial of the changes underway. Such were the subjectivities projected and promoted by the design. Whether or not these legitimated meanings reflected student's lived realities is another matter.

The 'comfort zone' created its own shadow in a correlating '**discomfort zone**', where students were asked to comment on each other's workplace narratives and make

suggestions. Many such postings were prefaced by apologetic disclaimers, for example, *'please understand that our cultures are very different and my suggestions may not be appropriate in your world'* (2K46) because the cultured subjectivities endorsed by the design were premised on a logic of discrete cultures and a heightened sense of difference. Thus even though the task required students to cross the boundary drawn between cultured identities in order to make suggestions, the retrospective cultural identities invoked could not easily articulate with the de-centred PI asked for in this collaborative aspect of the design.

The analysis also identified the occasional **aberrant** voice that resisted such positioning and denied deterministic interpretations of their respective cultures. These students chose to represent their respective cultural identities as more dynamic, heterogeneous, volatile or hybridised, for example: *'In our country (Malaysia) that consist of different culture background we realize the important of tolerance as if we not tolerance between different races, our country will collapse'* (2N27). Such accounts shifted or dismantled imagined boundaries, or weakened the degree of insulation between cultural categories. As one student from Malaysia put it, *'paradigms have shifted and times have changed... to generalize the situation on national culture is to make attribution errors or stereotyping'* (2K39). This more problematised, fluid version of cultural identity allowed for more de-centred discourse around business practices, and more market-oriented PI. For example, *'If U keep insisting on managing 100% based on your local culture, my thinking is that it is going to be difficult meeting the diverse needs of your international guests'* (2L70).

To summarise, the design of activities that were respectful of cultural identities interpreted through a pluralist frame, facilitated and endorsed retrospective versions of cultural identity (where do I come from). When the activity asked for a more market-oriented PI (where is this course taking you), such versions of cultural identity proved unwieldy or overly rigid, whereas the aberrant student voice with its decentred or prospective version of cultural identity (where am I at?) could articulate with the PI subjectivity offered more readily.

In **the regulative register**, cultural differencing emerged as a pedagogical problem across the conduct of the unit, whereby certain groups of students expressed or demonstrated relative disadvantage as a collective grievance. Three such 'hermeneutical problems' (Bauman 1990) emerged:

- trouble over naming protocols produced by the ethnocentric defaults in the courseware settings, which mishandled the tripartite Chinese names.
- Trouble over the assumption of familiarity with the textual conventions of the genre required in assessment tasks
- The intervention of local time and space delaying assessment feedback for Malaysia students.

The lecturer had not intended the pedagogical design to differentiate between groups of students in any way, thus he had envisaged and planned around a singular imagined, culturally neutral pedagogic subject. However, the students through their complaints or demands made it clear that this singular template for a generic student subjectivity did not adequately articulate with their diversity of cultural identities. In

other words, the default settings were not always appropriate or comfortable positions for students to occupy.

In regard to the naming trouble, the online software produced names at various junctures in the online interaction, according to default settings which presumed Western naming conventions. Early in proceedings, a student from Malaysia protested about the mis-construal of his name, and thus the mis-representation of his identity, given that names served as the major semiotic index/marker of identity in this online mode. For this student, his community's naming practices were considered equally relevant and legitimate in this space as any hegemonic Anglo script. He intended to participate on his terms. He was not a re-territorialised migrant learning to live in another set of circumstances, but rather a paying customer of an internationalised education system, who had engaged with the global product locally. Once such problems were made evident, the lecturer alerted the university to the commercial risk of such default practice, and how it might jeopardise the university's efforts to build its '*future as an international provider*'. In other words, he argued that for the university's re-imagining of itself into a prospective identity as an international player, the university's courseware had to design around a more de-centred 'market' pedagogic identity embracing different scripts as circumstances and markets demanded.

In regard to the genre troubles, there was a flurry of queries from some students in Malaysia attempting to excavate the implicit textual conventions and expectations embedded in each assessment task. Their persistence demonstrated that this group of students were differently resourced when it came to producing the required genre, and that they demanded additional support. Their relative disadvantage serves to highlight the power invested in assessment protocols and how the implicit assumptions about which or whose genre is to be legitimated in this context work to differently position groups of students. By using a generic template for the student subject in his design, thus suppressing considerations of difference, the lecturer was unprepared for the learning needs displayed.

The troubles stemming from the delay in assessment feedback for the students in Malaysia further complicate the mesh between pedagogic identities and students' cultured identities. In the wake of the first assessment item, it became evident that the marking of the Malaysia students' work was differently administered with an additional layer of management in the local Malaysian partner institution. Considerations of local time and local space intruded when papers marked in Malaysia had to be couriered to Australia for moderation, a step the lecturer required to fulfil his design of the singular imagined pedagogic subject, that is, to guard against differential treatment. However the original complaint about the delay then became a complaint about the use of local Malaysian markers. This could be interpreted as a matter of feeling confined to a local cultural context by the contractual arrangements when they intended and felt entitled to participate in the cosmopolitan relations of transnational education, or more possibly, a notionally authentic 'West'-branded qualification. In other words, the students in Malaysia felt that they had been allocated a limiting retrospective identity where they had intended to engage in this online education on the basis of a more prospective identity, oriented to a future collective membership.

The differential treatment of the Malaysia cohort might better be interpreted as constituting de-centred market pedagogic identities – pedagogical practices and subjectivities designed for the contingencies of market opportunities. However, this interpretation does not change the fact that the Malaysia students took offence at their imagined confinement to a ‘local’ identity, when their project was to articulate with a more ‘global’ identity.

The three troubles could be summarised as arising from presumptuous assumptions: firstly those that imagined common ground where it did not exist; and secondly those that imagined different lifeworlds where this frame was equally unwelcome. The reactionary reparative work the lecturer had to take to address these various troubles meant that at times he had to undo and de-centre the homogeneous student subject of his original design, to allow the differently cultured identities of the internationalised student body to articulate with the pedagogical process. At other times he had to re-centre the student subject and assure students that they weren’t being treated differently.

Redesigning pedagogy for global complexity

This paper distinguished between the pedagogic identities endorsed and offered in various aspects of the design of an educational program and the personal/cultural identities students asserted in the conduct of the program, and then explored how these two projects of identification could articulate or clash. Through these lenses, this study has demonstrated aspects of the messy and complex cultural politics at play in a case study of online internationalised education. The ephemera of online pedagogic interaction is not an inert medium. It will actively be making certain subjectivities available, positioning and shaping students through the design of the interactions and its affordance of imaginary discourse. To add to the complexity, different aspects of the curriculum, assessment and pedagogy could be offering a variety of competing such subjectivities, as demonstrated in this case study. Students, perhaps particularly so in commodified settings such as MBA education, have their own agency and ability to articulate with the subjectivities offered, or resist them in the conduct of the interaction. Thus the expressions of cultural identity produced in such pedagogical sites are not independent truths, but rather relational and contingent positions taken within the means and spaces made available in the interactions. This suggests that despite the facts that students are sharing ‘the same field, the same bounded space’ (Featherstone 1995, pp. 123-134), pedagogical design cannot do away with factoring the play of cultured identities into pedagogic design, but has to be prepared for volatile reactionary engagements that are less predictable and more complex in their logics and trajectories.

The case study unit was carefully designed to be respectful of students’ cultural differences and sought to garner that diversity as an enriching aspect of the global encounter. The ethics behind the practice would be considered exemplary and laudable, being inclusive and respectful of difference. However, the pluralist metaculture framing such design seems dated and inappropriate for the enterprising self-projects of the students, and the symbiotic contract between the international institutional partners. Are we all missing an opportunity here? What kind of students are we hoping to produce when we sell or source our educational products offshore?

With a renovated sense of how cultural processes are lived in these more liquid times, such courses and the larger enterprise of globalised education could have a much more purposeful and coherent design engaging the students on the grounds of offering resources for a prospective cultural identity, and membership in new alliances and identity projects. If designed with an ethic of 'collaboration' as the basic premise, we can acknowledge that all parties have engaged in such sites by choice and design, and that the temporal confluence of projects need not displace cultural particularities, but can address our shared purpose at this point of intersection in time and 'space'.

In conclusion, I want to return to the first student voice quoted at the beginning of this paper. This student seems comfortable in his pragmatic, self-assured and productive hybridity at this circumstantial juncture wherein studying Western-produced texts makes sense to him for now. Circumstances may well change, but he and his colleagues will engage with global offerings on his terms and can be trusted to do so with his own interests, projects and imagined future uppermost. This may mean that he will protest about any treatment that constrains, misconstrues, marginalises or patronises him or his objectives, but such trouble will keep providers 'real' and grounded in how they imagine who their students are.

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