Re-Positioning Internationalisation as Interculturality: A Cultural Historical Analysis
of a Swedish early childhood teacher education programme

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Higher education organisations are expected to implement internationalisation agenda, and justification for internationalisation in higher education policy is often based on globalization. The research aim for this study was to increase understanding of systems-level implementation and sector views of of internationalisation as a concept. This research has been funded by the Karlstad University Teacher Education Board (Lärarutbildningsnämnden) for the purpose of informing teacher education with new research evidence. This article presents the use of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to analyse course data from one early childhood (EC) teacher education course in Sweden, course participants and local principals. The research is based on four related 2020 studies in a Swedish university EC teacher education programme: (a) document analysis of course descriptors, literature and policy; (b) discourse analysis of 26 student teacher research projects connected to internationalisation: (c) ECE student teacher questionnaire (n=94): and (d) interviews with 12 EC principals. University ethical approval was obtained. Results of the study show that there are four key areas that impact on the success of internationalization including: (i) higher education objectives of internationalization within the course are under threat with limited opportunities to meet students from other countries, either in Sweden or online, (ii) some challenges with English language texts, (iii) limited value of international content, and (iv) there are few students choosing to research areas associated with internationalisation. More poignantly however, the findings show that the concept of ‘internationalisation’ lacks resonance with EC student teachers or EC principals. Instead, this presentation provides empirical evidence that an alternative concept, *interculturality*, based on social justice, is a more authentic initiative for EC education contexts. Interculturality highlights the way Swedish EC student teachers and EC principals value content and concepts that actively connect to working alongside culturally diverse students in Sweden. This includes field practice that foregrounds professionally-connected intercultural practice outcomes. Using CHAT as a framework of analysis this research concludes that there is an imperative to harness the strength of intercultural practice, which is better understood within the EC sector than the higher education discourse of internationalisation. The implication for higher education is that the goals of internationalisation can be re-framed as interculturality, which better positions opportunities for authentic cross-cultural understandings and graduate intercultural practice capability.