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## Reframing and hospicing mobility in higher education: challenges and possibilities



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### Abstract

While the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold around the world, one of its most immediate effects – beyond significant loss of life and livelihood – has been the exposure of existing weaknesses in various sectors and systems. This is especially evident in higher education, with its growing overreliance on the (hyper)mobile student body. In this paper we explore critically the challenges and possibilities behind the options of “reframing” and “hospicing” current understandings of student mobility, particularly with respect to the simultaneously romanticized and commodified development of intercultural (communicative) competence. We treat reframing and hospicing as concurrent, co-existing approaches and spaces in which we may dwell as we rethink what it means to engage meaningfully and equitably with difference at both global and local levels. We also explore how “hospicing” may help us to disinvest ourselves from the promises of mobility, letting go of our attachment to it, not simply because of its current impossibility, but rather because of its many ideological and ethical problems. We conclude with a set of critical, reflective questions intended as provocations that may stimulate ongoing dialogue in our shared journeys of knowing, being and relating to ourselves and the Other in the world.

**Keywords:** mobility, higher education, hospicing, intercultural communicative competence, equity

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## Introduction

While the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold around the world, one of its most immediate effects – beyond significant loss of life and livelihood – has been the exposure of existing weaknesses in various sectors and systems. This is especially evident in higher education (HE), with its growing overreliance on the (hyper)mobile student body. In effect, over the last three decades, student mobility—both out-bound (study abroad) and in-bound (enrolling international students)—had emerged as a key driver of HE internationalization processes (Shkoler *et al.*, 2020). However, in the last few years—even before the COVID-19 crisis—student mobility, its commodification and romanticized understandings of its implications for the development of global citizenship had begun to be problematized, as indeed were the widely held understandings of the term global citizenship itself (Andreotti & de Souza, 2012; Salter & Halbert, 2017; Sharpe, 2015). Today, faced with international *immobility* and physical distancing regulations, HE institutions around the world, and particularly in the more privileged Anglophone center, have to contend with the possibility of letting go of (international) student mobility as a pillar to internationalization strategies. We write from that center, or from one of its outposts, Australian HE.

Reckoning with this “new (ab)normal” for the foreseeable future requires critical engagement with an interdisciplinary body of research pointing to the intersectional inequalities and unsustainability of student mobility as we know it. In recent years, for instance, several studies (many of which were situated within the Anglophone center) have highlighted the fact that study abroad (SA) programs were being accessed by a minority of students of specific ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds (Doerr, 2020; Sweeney, 2013; Thomas, 2013; among others). Additionally, many studies have questioned the assumption that SA guarantees the benefits with which it is widely associated: engagement with difference, the development of linguistic proficiency, intercultural understanding, intercultural (communicative) competence, and an overall global worldview (e.g., Blum, 2020; Caruana, 2014; Surtees, 2016). Finally, the sustainability of the (hyper)mobile practices of students and academics alike have been challenged beyond anthropocentric notions, that is, in relation to environmental concerns (Shields, 2019).

It is against this backdrop of gnawing but under-acknowledged concern that the pandemic has canceled the enabling condition of SA: the possibility of physical mobility. Faced with unprecedented financial pressures, operating amidst unfolding implementation of contingency plans, emergency responses, and protocols (Peters *et al.*, 2020), HE institutions have scrambled to find solutions for students and programs committed to SA. It is understandable that first reactions have been to fill the gap with alternative options which are positioned as “Ersatz” international SA experiences, that is, as unsatisfactory and temporary substitutes for the “real thing”: virtual mobility, for example, is presented as a stop-gap, the AirBNB virtual experience as we await the resumption of normal business. However, beyond these first responses, some institutions may be able to use this time as an opportunity to rethink what they were offering in the first place, along with the ideologies underpinning their existing international mobility strategies (cf. Surtees, 2016).

Participating in the evolution of these approaches, we propose engaging with the idea of *hospicing* the notion of physical international mobility as guarantor of engagement with difference and of global worldview. The notion of ‘hospicing’ draws on the theorization of HE approaches to institutional reform proposed by the *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Horizons (GTDH)* research collective, “an international assemblage of researchers, artists, educators, students, social justice and environmental activists, and Indigenous knowledge keepers” (Suša, *et al.*, 2020). In the context of our paper, the concept of hospicing is thus understood as a way of problematising reframing strategies and our very own desire to look for and articulate these in ways that may perpetuate pre-

existing inequalities. As such, we draw on the notion of hospicing conceived as:

sitting with a system in decline, learning from its history, offering palliative care, seeing oneself in that which is dying, attending to the integrity of the process, dealing with tantrums, incontinence, anger and hopelessness, ‘cleaning up’, and clearing the space for something new. (Andreotti *et al.*, 2015, p. 28)

In this paper we explore critically the challenges and possibilities behind the options of reframing and hospicing current understandings of student mobility, particularly with respect to the simultaneously romanticized and commodified development of intercultural competence. In so doing, we treat reframing and hospicing as concurrent, co-existing approaches and spaces in which we may dwell as we rethink what it means to engage meaningfully and equitably with difference beyond self-affirming platitudes. The paper proceeds in three main sections. First, we outline the increasingly evident limitations of mobility already emerging in pre-COVID conditions. Then, we consider the potential of ‘reframing’ student mobility as we know it, particularly, in relation to engagement with difference. In so doing, we also consider the limitations of ‘reframing’ mobility as an exercise that may ultimately lead to a circularity trap, one in which we may reify and reproduce the same patterns of unsustainability and inequity that led us to where we are now. We thus discuss the notion of ‘hospicing’ as a way of moving beyond the seductive potential of ‘reframing’. The hospicing process entails disinvesting ourselves from the promises of mobility, letting go of our attachment to it, not simply because of its current impossibility, but rather because of its many ideological and ethical problems. Hospicing also requires us to disinvest ourselves from the urgent desire to ‘solve this problem’ through formulating seemingly actionable solutions which may in fact reinstate the status quo. We conclude with a set of critical, reflective questions framed as provocations that may stimulate ongoing dialogue.

### **The limitations of mobility as we know it**

Globally, our collective imaginary of student mobility presumes the need to cross national boundaries.

For advocates, the transformative potential of [SA] stems primarily from two pedagogical features. The first is that SA creates opportunities for students to be exposed to beliefs and value orientations that contrast with their current beliefs (Tarrant, 2010). As Prins and Webster (2010) articulate “by stepping outside national borders, students become more aware of how they and people abroad view their home nation, an awareness that can reinforce or erode their identification with ideological features” of the home country (p. 7). The second is the immersive and experiential quality of the pedagogical approach, both of which differ from the traditional classroom (Hovey, 2004). (Sharpe, 2015, p. 227)

Such movement and immersion are currently impossibilities: a large percentage of HE institutions worldwide have either suspended or canceled student exchanges until further notice (Marinoni *et al.*, 2020). While we must acknowledge the human cost of missed opportunities for international mobility in general, when it comes to SA, the cessation of these practices has revealed significant limitations in the internationalized “eduscape.”

One of these limitations is the strong asymmetry in the direction of student mobility. There is indeed a long-standing “Anglophone asymmetry” (Hughes, 2008), whereby four English-speaking countries (the US, UK, Australia and Canada) attract over 50% of the students studying abroad (UNESCO).

This stands in stark contrast to the outward-bound SA figures from the same countries. According to the latest *Open Doors Report* (2018/19), 10% of US undergraduate students study abroad before graduating; while this percentage is almost double in Australia, it still only sits around 18.5% (AUIDF, 2019). Indeed, Australian SA figures have been in decline for some time with most students choosing short-term, intensive summer or winter courses rather than semester or year-long courses (see, for example, Jones *et al.*, 2016). It is not that SA has lacked advocacy or exposure. The promotion of SA in these countries has long espoused a range of attractive values ranging from personal enrichment and transformation, academic development, cultural immersion, the development of a global perspective, employability, and language acquisition (see, for example, Forsey *et al.*, 2012) to national security and national dominance (see, for example, Diao & Trentman, 2016). World languages education programs have co-opted the benefits and attractions of student mobility to promote themselves in the face of enrollment decline (see, for example, McGregor, 2020). Yet, several studies reveal that only a small fraction of (language) students could access SA opportunities, with barriers including credit transfer concerns, degree structure, failure to meet academic requirements, economic hardship, family responsibilities, the fear of a prolonged encounter with cultural, linguistic, and logistical differences or simple lack of knowledge about SA opportunities (Bell, 2016; Forsey *et al.*, 2012; Raby, 2007).

When examining student mobility through the lens of linguistic and epistemological justice, we find that it is largely underpinned by “often uni-directional flows of people, capital and knowledge” (Marginson, 2006, p. 35) that ultimately reproduce inequalities. In some contexts, this has led to increased stratification and hierarchization of languages and the development of ‘elite multilingualism’ which is “essentially a phenomenon where language serves as an access code to a local, national or global perceived elite (way of life)” (Barakos & Selleck, 2019, p. 362). In the Australian context, participation in mobility programs has thus “become a marker of success and social status” (Rizvi, 2011, p. 693), rewarding those who can “take advantage of global mobility, negotiate linguistic and cultural diversity and have the class-consciousness of the transnational elite” (Rizvi, 2009, p. 209). Similarly, in their large US based study, Salisbury *et al.* (2011) found that prospects of opportunities for cross-cultural learning and career development through SA did not affect most minority students’ decisions regarding participation, in part because they already had rich experiences navigating cross-cultural environments, but also because they had different constraints in planning their career trajectories than their non/less-marginalized (white) peers.

The diversity referred to by Salisbury *et al.* reminds us that despite the institutional rhetoric, SA has never been the only exposure which students have to intercultural and plurilingual differences. Yet, as Doerr (2017) argues, SA programs often focus on cultural differences between the supposedly monolithic home and host cultures, ignoring the diversity of the students’ own communities, therefore promoting “learning as othering and privileged difference” (2017, p. 100). Doerr concludes that:

the view that study abroad experience produces global competence suggests the privileged position of the difference of the study abroad destinations they learned – that it is considered more meaningful than the difference of immigrants or other minorities in the students’ home country. Also, some argue that study abroad is for privileged class [sic] to use the encounter with difference, and global competence as a result, as a resource to build cultural capital. (p. 100)

In the Australian context, increasing levels of diversity – linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, etc. – evident on and off university campuses provide valuable opportunities for the student body as a whole to engage in intercultural interactions. However, paradoxically, such

opportunities are regularly overlooked, avoided, and ultimately, entirely missed. Indeed, research reveals growing segregation and sociocultural fragmentation among students, which throw into question universities' promises to deliver on a global(ized), cosmopolitan educational experience (see, for instance, Borkovic *et al.*, 2020 and Marangell, 2020). Furthermore, as pointed out by Díaz (2018, p. 23):

While universities in [the Anglophone centre] market their campuses' population diversity as a key point of attraction, they turn a blind eye to their linguistic diversity when it comes to engagement with scholarly discourses such as academic rhetoric as well as different 'ways of knowing' including canons of research and research methodologies that go beyond Eurocentric models.

The mounting inequalities associated with the current imaginaries of physical student mobility, the way it is promoted, and its actual uptake through SA therefore warrant the exploration of potential avenues to reframe it, building on the lessons learned and on the development of alternative, sustainable, solutions.

### **The potential of “reframing” (im)mobility**

Reframing can be defined from a cognitive perspective as an exercise requiring us to change our perspective or approach toward a situation or a 'wicked' problem (cf. Rittel & Webber, 1973). It entails considering the situation or problem from as many perspectives as possible and in relation to the broader context in which it is embedded. Reframing can be conceived as an individual or collaborative endeavour. In the latter case, involving several stakeholders can enhance the process of perspective-taking through challenging assumptions of specific groups.

Our initial focus in this paper centred on the current impossibility of international, physical student mobility and accessing its putative golden ticket to intercultural and linguistic competence. However, as our analysis, above, has shown, many of the assumptions surrounding and perpetuated by current SA practices are deeply problematic. Here, the “problem” therefore becomes: is it possible to access the benefits of SA in other ways, and do these other routes go beyond the simply substitutionary to offer, first, means of avoiding some of the problems of SA and, second, their own distinct opportunities? Furthermore, can reframing the problems of (im)mobility through (other) explorations of viable and sustainable means to develop plurilingual and pluricultural proficiency also help us challenge current models of outward-bound travel as the privileged, unquestioned means of attaining that goal? Below, two such alternative reframing approaches are presented: the first explores the means by which cultural otherness can be accessed; the second, the location of that cultural otherness.

### **The promise of virtual mobility**

One of the ways in which conceptualizations of mobility are reframed is by thinking beyond the physical realm. Reframing, in this context, may therefore entail considering *virtual* mobility and the opening up of virtual borders as a means to providing university students with the possibility of engaging with different realities. Over the last decades, technological advances have indeed helped us reimagine and relocate intercultural exchange and have even blurred boundaries between the internationalisation at home and abroad approaches. From simple explorations of 'target culture' websites; target language virtual worlds; discussions with speakers of the target language through tandem class arrangements or other pedagogical projects; participation in online cultural practices; enrolment in classes offered by overseas institutions – the advent of the internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) has made meaningful intercultural experiences with immersion

possible from a distance. When these experiences fall under the oversight of an HE institution, they may be known as Virtual Mobility (VM) or Virtual Exchange.

[Virtual Exchange (VE)] is an umbrella term that includes educational practices which are also known as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), telecollaboration and teletandem. It involves people-to-people technology-enabled communication, engaging individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds who are geographically distant in meaningful conversations, with the support of educators. [T]he underlying assumption of VE is that contact between culturally diverse individuals does not automatically lead to greater intercultural understanding. The role of educators, who can help learners reflect on their assumptions, encourage active listening and facilitate dialogue, is thus considered a crucial part of VE. (O'Dowd & Beaven, 2019, p. 15)

VM can address several concerns raised by the sustainability – in all senses of the word – of physical mobility and equitable access to it. Intercultural experiences are at the fingertips of students whose life circumstances preclude physical travel at a particular point in time or long-term. The existence of these models, pre-COVID, has afforded one possible means of providing access to difference when everyone is limited in their real-life mobility. However, the language used to promote VM inclines to represent it in ways accepting of certain problematic principles.

Firstly, there is the tendency to represent VM only in terms of a relation to physical mobility, taken as the privileged norm. Take, for example, this presentation from the Council of Europe's PluriMobil project, which is committed to "Learning Mobility" and to the promotion of the two forms of mobility the term covers, Face-to-face mobility and Virtual mobility:

Virtual mobility need not necessarily be considered inferior to face-to-face mobility. Rather it offers alternative opportunities for students who for different reasons do not want to or are not able to move to a new place. Virtual mobility activities can be used to prepare, enrich and follow up face-to-face mobility activity, and to enable participants from different institutions to meet, communicate and cooperate at different stages of a mobility project. (Egli Cuenat *et al.*, 2015, p. 15)

If VM is "not necessarily" inferior, it is clearly however the second choice, or the value-add: the promotion of its possibilities here does nothing to question the centrality of face-to-face mobility. Secondly, these VM projects – from the most excitingly enriching to the most banal – are predicated on the belief that the privileged encounter with the other lies elsewhere, as exemplified in O'Dowd and Beaven's use of "geographically distant" or "a new place" in Egli Cuenat *et al.* (for all that the authors refer to local cultural diversity): the outward look of traditional mobility has prevented us from looking inward towards the 'global in the local'. Furthermore, access to technology in these studies remains largely uncontested.

Alternatively, Mittelmeier *et al.*'s exploration of internationalization at a distance (IaD) models acknowledges that technology is not neutral and that access to technology cannot be considered universal (Mittelmeier *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, Funk and Guthadjaka (2020) argue that while online digital platforms have the potential to increase access to educational opportunities for marginalized students, authors, and communities, specifically Indigenous communities, and for outsiders, here too technology carries bias.. They posit that digital platform design risks further marginalizing Indigenous knowledge when such platforms are structured according to western epistemological assumptions, which do not accommodate Indigenous or alternative knowledge frameworks. This

example, germane to the Australian context – but also to many other countries seeking to recognize and promote local Indigenous knowledges and rights – helps us consider other types of technologically-enabled border crossings, intercultural understandings, and framings of sustainability.

Two innovative Australian programs illustrate how technology use can be conceived as carefully attendant to overcome both physical and epistemological distance. Both programs are situated within moves to promote Indigenous languages and cultures learning available in tertiary education, and build on a sparse but established history (Gale, 2011; Giacon & Simpson, 2012). Furthermore, both programs have engaged deeply with processes of authentic knowledge framing and creation, knowledge ownership, rights, and management (Christie *et al.*, 2010; Christie & Verran, 2013; Funk & Guthadjaka, 2020), which draw knowledge creators and learners into a truly intercultural dialogue. These programs were conceived within the larger vision held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples seeking ways to communicate to non-Indigenous Australians how to be and live in the diverse countries of the continent. Both programs are born digital, with VM a first choice, rather than a backup plan and digital learning platforms key in this exchange of knowledges and innovation of practices.

The first initiative, the “Teaching from Country” program, began in 2008 to address the aspiration of Yolŋu elders living on their traditional land in very remote Arnhem Land homeland centers to participate remotely in the Yolŋu Studies program at Charles Darwin University (CDU) (Christie *et al.*, 2010) located in the Northern Territory capital, Darwin. The program began in 1994, establishing a long dialogue and process of negotiating understanding of knowledge creation, ownership, and sharing. From 2009, “Teaching from Country” sessions were broadcast from remote Arnhem Land to students sitting in Darwin using Mac laptops, G3 connectors, and a range of communication software such as Skype. Each session was recorded, transcribed, and translated, and the videos and transcriptions uploaded to the course website. Later, students from further afield, in Australia, Japan, and California joined the program. The technical challenges were mitigated with on the ground technical support and even the provision of satellite mobile technology required in remote sites. These socio-technical demands intersected with the philosophical work required as Yolŋu (people of Arnhem Land) and their Balanda (non-Aboriginal) colleagues searched, constructed, negotiated, and reflected upon ways of “framing the program conceptually which were valid in Yolŋu terms, and which also supported translation into academic contexts” (Christie *et al.*, 2010, p. 2; Christie & Verran, 2013; Hayashi, 2020).

In this context, technology enabled participants to open the metaphysical Yolŋu world, allowing authentic Yolŋu knowledge sharing from and together with country, and thereby, to resist and even escape the onto-epistemological entrapment of the modern university. Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu creators strive to carry out this work outside “the house modernity built” (see Stein *et al.*, 2017), with all participants mindful and vigilant of its presence and shadow. Indeed, the genesis of this program, its authority and processes, all took place on ancestral land, by and with land as the foundation of knowledge, teaching, and learning. This kind of reframing required thinking, collaborating, and negotiating through a Yolŋu ontology of immediacy (live rather than pre-recorded videos) and of co-becoming (with human and non-human participants) that sees everything as knowledgeable, vital, and interconnected.

Table 1 below presents an extract from an interview with Yinjiya, the Yolŋu Studies lecturer at Charles Darwin University (CDU) explaining elements of the “Teaching from Country” project.

**Table 1.** *Teaching from Country* (Source: <https://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/yaci/resources.html>)

Yiŋiya's text transcribed by Wangurru	Yiŋiya's and Wangurru's translation	Notes by researchers
Digital technology ŋayi dhu gurrupan litjalarŋ mǎrr ga ŋali dhu dhipuŋur bili yan dhǎwu lakaram dhudiŋur wǎŋaŋur, ŋunhi wanhal ŋayi ga riŋgitj mala ŋorra.	They must provide us with a digital technology so that we can tell the story straight from base right here at home, where all the songs and dances lie.	We need them to tell the story from the dhudi wǎŋa (baseplace), where the riŋgitj reside.
Wuŋjili mala ga dhǎrra, warraw dharpa ŋunhi ŋali dhu nhina.	Where the images (ancestors, predecessors) are, shades of trees that we can sit under.	Where the wuŋjili are, where the tree shade, that's where we'll sit.
Wo nhe dhu ga dhǎwu lakaram dhipuŋur ga ŋunha gali'lil worldlil. Duŋha gali'lil wǎŋalil ŋarakalil.	You can even tell the story from here to the other side of the world. Over across the water to the other side.	Pointing to the Japanese student on the poster Wǎŋa ŋaraka – country bones.
Yakan ŋali dhu butthun Tokyoolil Djapangu dhǎwu gǎma, ga ŋunhili ŋali dhu waŋa wǎŋapuy ŋunhi dhǎwuny mala warrpamtja ŋali ŋunhan banydjil ganatharna.	We don't have to fly and take the story to Tokyo, and there we will tell all the stories about the land which we've left all behind.	All (warrpam) the mob (mala) of stories (dhǎwu).
Daliny ga gǎnan empty-n mada martji, ga ŋunhaldja ŋali dhu dhǎwu lakaram, bǎyŋun, empty-n dhǎwu.	You and I are travelling alone, empty and when we get there to tell the story, it is empty and powerless.	If we travel away to tell a story, it's nothing.

The second initiative, the development of the Digital Language Shell and associated pilot Kunwinjku course built on the conceptual framework of the first (Bow, 2019). Bininj Kunwok is the name used for a chain of six mutually intelligible dialects, which includes Kunwinjku, whose speakers reside across Kakadu National Park and West Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory (Bow, 2019, p. 55). The project began at CDU and language program delivery moved to a partnership with the Australian National University (ANU). The Bininj Kunwok Language Project Committee as authorities for their languages collaborated in a design process with project academics and previous language learners, determining what should be taught, how, by whom, and gradually how to assess and grade the non-Bininj learners. The academic team members worked out the technical means for teaching content and creating the connections between people online, including sequencing of information and developing explanations in English. According to Bow (2019, p. 57) this “drew on the existing strengths of the Bininj authorities, rather than requiring native speakers to learn the metalanguage of grammar or non-Indigenous methods of language teaching”. The program grappled with the same paradoxes faced in the Yolŋu Studies Program - of providing knowledge to distant strangers in a setting where knowledge is place-based and owned, and deeply entwined with kin, land custodial, and ceremonial relations. One means of fostering the connections between educators and learners in the project was the use of ‘skin names’. Skin names are the set of classificatory terms of reference for individuals according to their place in the moiety and subsection system. This system overlays kin and all sociality, present across much of Aboriginal Australia. Students were brought into this social system and taught its vocabulary and complexity. They practiced terms of address and described relationships with their newly formed connections in the community, achieved through VM of teachers and learners.

The explorative and ethical use of technology to support Indigenous communities in educating others, while promoting, maintaining, and in further cases, reviving their languages and cultures, provides a valuable opportunity to reframe the ‘outward-looking’ notion of physical student



mobility to consider the locally available opportunities to engage with differences. Additionally, given Australia's long history as a destination for migrants, we can also turn to further linguistically and culturally diverse groups.

### **Community engagement and service learning**

Despite the fact that over 21% of Australians speak a language other than English at home and the rhetoric of multiculturalism in Australia (ABS, 2016), the pressures to assimilate to the monolithic Australian/English way are strong, causing many culturally and linguistically diverse individuals to shift to functional monolingualism/monoculturalism. Thus, the cultural and linguistic diversity available locally is often obscured or completely overlooked, while at the same time, the visible (yet for many unattainable) experience abroad is romanticized and valued. This contradiction whereby diversity/otherness are both effaced and elevated is complicated by the greater socio-political forces rendering knowledge/experience of some economically and culturally prestigious languages/cultures as valuable while effectively making less politically and economically valued languages/cultures a liability.

Incorporating locally-available diversity into the teaching of intercultural competence provides situated, authentic, intercultural experiences to a much wider pool of students, while acknowledging and validating culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) individuals and communities, within the University and beyond. Regular conversations and interactions within these communities have the potential to enrich the language and cultural experiences of students, while acknowledging and valuing the community language resources that are too often ignored (Cordella & Huang, 2016). Importantly, such an approach can rely on existing and emerging infrastructures supporting the increasing value Australian and international(ized) universities already place on such goals as employability and connecting students' coursework with real-world experience.

Firstly, at the university level, we note that the student population in Australian universities is culturally rich, including international and local CALD students. Universities are therefore sites that represent a micro-reality of the broader community within which intercultural interactions and learning opportunities occur. There is a current tendency in Anglophone educational settings to focus on the shortfalls of international and local CALD students (e.g., English language proficiency; level of familiarity with academic culture) and provide remedial work, with rather less emphasis on their language and cultural expertise which could provide intercultural experiences through peer-to-peer exchanges. Both local and international students would benefit from gaining a more nuanced understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity available in the community. Collaborative exchanges among all diverse groups in a university could provide an additional or even an alternative intercultural experience that is available to all students.

Community engagement and service learning, that is, learning occurring when students and community-based organizations enter into a mutually beneficial partnership, have been long argued to produce 'work-ready' graduates with an understanding of socially responsible professional practice" and "a means of addressing complex issues, and building bridges between university, community, student and faculty expertise" (Andersen, 2017, p. 58). Soria *et al.* (2019) report on service learning leading to an increase in the sense of belonging in lower/working-class students. Baker's (2019) review of 69 studies of community-engaged (service) learning in mostly Anglophone contexts shows that language courses which engaged with local communities found positive correlations with the following learning outcomes: linguistic gains, cultural knowledge, professional goals, motivation, and interest as well as civic engagement. The social contexts in which service learning occurred varied from secondary schools and adult education to virtual communities and

medical institutions.

A further example of mutually beneficial engagement with a broader community is the intergenerational and intercultural study Cordella and Huang (2016) conducted in Melbourne, where senior secondary language learners were paired with migrant speakers of that language and their fortnightly conversations recorded for three consecutive years. The results demonstrate the significant benefits of those interactions. Language and cultural development, intercultural awareness, and the dismantling of stereotypes were prominent. Other examples of purposefully designed student engagement with local communities in Australia include a community choir (Kennedy & Miceli, 2017) and a project with Italian speakers in aged care (Bouvet *et al.*, 2017).

To recognize local diversity is firstly a question of social justice. But secondly, to work with it in the development of students' intercultural competence equips them for the reality of the interculturally complex world in which they are always already located, whether they are at home or abroad, rather than perpetuating the fiction that cultural difference and the need to deal with it can be conveniently held at a distance.

As the approaches surveyed above, VM and locally-sourced diversity, predate COVID: it might appear then that the current crisis propels these minor players forward to their moment in the spotlight due to the temporary unavailability of SA. While that is not the conclusion of this paper, let us stay momentarily with this image. Firstly, it acknowledges that VM and local experiences of differences have often been used to prepare or prolong the intercultural contact of SA, that is, the three approaches can work together. Research on best practices for SA highlights the necessity (and desirability) that students engage with diversity and develop their intercultural (communicative) competence prior to SA to make the latter most effective. Even from the point of view of language gains, Baker-Smemoe *et al.* (2014) demonstrate that high intercultural sensitivity prior to departure and dispersion and density of social networks during their stay rather than initial proficiency or amount of language use predicted linguistic growth in SA students. A number of scholars call for systematic inclusion of intercultural competency in the language curriculum and opportunities for students to build social networks with native speakers of the target language prior to departure. Comstock and Kagan (2020) argue that students should be required to demonstrate intercultural competence prior to departure for study abroad programs that include internships or service-learning components. And Martinsen (2010) and Marijuan and Sanz (2017) call for curriculum design that explicitly pushes learners to practice the language with diverse speakers and expand their social networks. Secondly, this use of multiple approaches in concert with SA shows that the star player cannot do it all, that is, it is already acknowledged that SA on its own does not guarantee the acquisition of intercultural competence.

SA, VM, CMC as well as local contacts and community engagement are therefore already part of a potentially interrelated repertoire of means to the acquisition of intercultural competence. For different students, at different points in their personal journeys, one or other of these options will be more feasible than others. In a world still characterized by mass movements of people, where Indigenous and immigrant cultures meet those of sojourners, and where online collaboration across distance is ubiquitous, we might question the privileged status of international physical mobility in general, and SA in particular. This kind of reframing has the potential to serve as intermediary stages to help us move beyond reframing to hospicing.

### **Beyond the potential *circularity* of reframing**

The times that we live in have crystallized a sense of *collective* experiencing of trauma.

Underpinning much of this experience is the loss of certainty, of being able to plan and map out a course of action, in the specific context of this paper, in relation to traveling, completing a program of study across borders, engaging in global networks and acquiring sets of knowledge and marketable skills. Ontological security and certainty, key aspects in the teleology of Western modernity upheld by (HE) institutions around the world are therefore challenged. Against this backdrop, imposed physical *immobility* has forced us to turn our gaze inward to consider the emerging, and in some cases, long standing hyper-diversity that characterizes many urban spaces around the world. Moreover, the current crisis has exacerbated our disconnect with these local realities, their historical development, and present conditions.

The examples of reframing explored in the previous section provided several alternative and (more or less) sustainable means to developing plurilingual and pluricultural proficiency beyond the outward-bound travel mobility as the privileged, unquestioned means model of attaining that goal. Nevertheless, in some cases, their construction as ‘alternative’ keeps these ‘reframed’ opportunities in the space of ‘other’, ‘not the same as the original’ which can ultimately lead to maintaining the same patterns that they seek to transcend in the ‘center’. Indeed, as Amsler (2019, p. 927) points out, “the will to transcend these patterns can sometimes create a circularity as the desire to arrive immediately at a changed future may result in the glossing over of deeper enduring problems”. It is also important to recognize that many efforts to reframe (international) mobility are being conceived within a problem-solving approach to reality. Reframing mobility under such extreme circumstances as the ones we live in, may be ultimately seen simply as a strategic, emergency-response exercise, which, without critical consideration, may lead to the perpetuation of pre-existing problems.

It is against this backdrop that we turned to the metaphor of “hospicing”, evoking the process of a long and difficult goodbye. Our leave-taking is not with mobility itself, but rather with a version of outward-looking, physical mobility which is venerated as the ultimate model for the acquisition of linguistic and cultural competence, and of which other experiences can only be less effectual simulations. Far from abandoning international mobility itself, we call for its rehabilitation, for it to be subject to a careful, critical gaze. And if it is not too much to push the metaphor of contagion at this time, that vigilance must extend to the other approaches we have highlighted here. May their proximity to SA in the repertoire of approaches to the development of intercultural (communicative) competence and skills not result in infection by the malaises of the current international mobility models.

Above all, we sit within this hospicing space in an attempt to acknowledge and “*stay with* [our own] complicity in the system we critique, and to remain self-reflexively attentive to the tendency to reproduce harmful systemic patterns” (Amsler, 2019, p. 928, emphasis in original). This space can allow us to engage intellectually, physically, and emotionally with our enduring investment in the instrumentalization of knowledge and future-making processes that characterize modern higher education. Within this hospicing space, as Amsler (2019, p. 928) explains:

[e]ncounters with different knowledge systems and social practices are therefore not meant as a strategy for acquiring and consuming new knowledges, but rather for denaturalising the structures of knowing, being and wanting that treat knowledge as a site of acquisition and accumulation, and for facing the affective responses that emerge when those patterns are challenged. This approach can be characterised as neither making ‘futures for the present’ (coherent plans or visions to guide future action) nor making ‘presents for the future’ (producing knowledge and action that we are confident can influence developmental trajectories in responsible ways) (Knappe *et al.*, 2018) but as ‘gesturing’ towards both activities in the present absence of

adequate conditions of possibility for either.

Inspired by scholarship of *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures* research collective and the developing field of ‘critical international studies’ (Stein, 2019; Stein et al., 2020), we deliberately propose to engage with the formulation of potentially painful questions as a way to restrain ourselves from the drive to propose solutions and outline seemingly straightforward, all-encompassing implications. Such questions might help us take the first step in pluralising possible futures “without losing sight of the past and the history through which we arrived here” (Stein, 2019, p. 11):

- Who stands to benefit from reframed notions of mobility?
- How can we support universities in grieving and letting go of international student mobility as the elixir producing internationalization?
- What alternative frames could be proposed?
- How might we draw on local realities to enhance the intercultural learning experiences of our students?
- How might we draw on the existing student population’s intercultural experience to enhance the learning experiences of all students?
- What can we learn from students’ lived experiences of confronting their situated/local realities?
- What would this mean for current degree structures which include compulsory SA either as the flagship experience or the means to the achievement of advanced linguistic proficiency?
- What would opening up degrees to other forms of intercultural experiences mean for preparatory courses, for provision of language courses, for recognition of prior intercultural learning?
- What would this mean for university services which are currently dedicated to the management of overseas experiences for domestic students?
- What current models of language learning could be utilized to reduce inequality and promote informed intercultural exchanges and social inclusion?
- How can these considerations inform the teaching and learning of languages which may not be available locally?
- Would this activity enhance inclusion and promote valuing of linguistic, cultural, ecological, and onto-epistemological diversity?
- What lessons could be learned and transferred to a broader community of practice?
- What voices may continue to be ex/included in conversations with local realities?
- How can we resist the commodification or romanticization of locally available forms of diversity?
- What new research agenda could be opened up by these recalibrations?
- How can such research be conducted in ways that are mindful of the relational nature between human and non-human participants?

Grappling with these questions highlights the irreducible hypercomplexity of the kinds of problems that we are facing. Against this backdrop, there cannot be one-size-fits-all solutions or sets of recommendations. Dwelling in the uncomfortable uncertainty of what remains to be experienced requires us to remain curious and open to possibilities. Most importantly, it requires us to engage in the present, situated struggles of our everyday realities. In doing so, we see actively turning to our interactions with the local communities (of practice) as a first step in ‘mobilizing’ different conversations about our roles and responsibilities in our shared journeys of knowing, being, and relating to ourselves and the Other in the world.

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