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## INTERNATIONALIZATION AS A PROCESS OF CHANGE: AN INTERVIEW WITH JANE KNIGHT

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INTERNACIONALIZAÇÃO COMO UM PROCESSO DE MUDANÇA: UMA  
ENTREVISTA COM JANE KNIGHT

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INTERNACIONALIZACIÓN COMO UN PROCESO DE CAMBIO:  
UNA ENTREVISTA CON JANE KNIGHT

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*Claudia Schiedeck Soares de Souza<sup>1</sup>, Maria Julieta Abba<sup>2</sup>, Danilo Romeu Streck<sup>3</sup>*

### ABSTRACT

This article features an interview with Jane Knight, professor at the *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education* (OISE-University of Toronto), held in June 2019, during the event “*Shaping Sustainable Futures for Internationalization in Higher Education*”, where Professor Knight was among the main speakers. Internationally recognized for being one of the first authors to define the internationalization of Higher Education theoretically, Jane Knight reflects on this definition after 25 years. In this interview, she also talks about the diversity of institutions in the educational scenario that develops internationalization programs, with particular attention to the international program and provider mobility (IPPM). She highlights as well some relevant and inspiring experiences, such as the one she promoted in the African continent. Finally, she reflects on some challenges of research in internationalization, highlighting the need for interdisciplinary investigations based on evidence on different dimensions of Higher Education.

**KEYWORDS:** Higher education. International education. International universities. Student mobility.

### RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta uma entrevista com Jane Knight, professora do *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education* (OISE-University of Toronto), realizada em junho de 2019, durante o evento “*Shaping Sustainable Futures for Internationalization in Higher Education*”, onde a professora Knight esteve entre os principais conferencistas. Reconhecida internacionalmente por ser uma das primeiras autoras a definir teoricamente a internacionalização da educação superior, Jane Knight reflete sobre essa definição após 25 anos. Na entrevista, fala ainda sobre a diversificação de instituições no cenário educativo que desenvolvem programas de internacionalização, com especial atenção para a mobilidade de programas e provedores internacionais (*International Program and Provider Mobility - IPPM*). Também destaca algumas experiências relevantes e inspiradoras, como a que promoveu no continente africano. Por fim, reflete sobre alguns desafios da pesquisa em internacionalização, destacando a necessidade de investigações interdisciplinares baseadas em evidências sobre diferentes dimensões da educação superior.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação superior. Educação internacional. Universidades internacionais. Mobilidade de estudantes.

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<sup>1</sup> Doutora em Educação - Universidade do Vale dos Sinos (UNISINOS). São Leopoldo, RS - Brasil. Professora de Ensino Superior - Instituto Federal do Rio Grande do Sul - Campus Bento Gonçalves (IFRS). Porto Alegre, RS - Brasil. **E-mail:** [claudiaschiedeck1609@gmail.com](mailto:claudiaschiedeck1609@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Doutora em Educação - Universidade do Vale dos Sinos (UNISINOS). Pós-doutoranda (bolsa CAPES/FAPERGS) - Universidade do Vale dos Sinos (UNISINOS). São Leopoldo, RS - Brasil. **E-mail:** [mjulieta.abba@gmail.com](mailto:mjulieta.abba@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Doutor em Educação - Rutgers University (New Jersey/US). Professor titular Universidade do Vale dos Sinos (UNISINOS). São Leopoldo, RS - Brasil. **E-mail:** [dstreck@unisinos.br](mailto:dstreck@unisinos.br)

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## RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta una entrevista con Jane Knight, profesora del *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education* (OISE-University of Toronto), realizada en junio de 2019, durante el evento “*Shaping Sustainable Futures for Internationalization in Higher Education*”, donde la profesora Knight estuvo entre los principales conferencistas. Reconocida internacionalmente por ser una de las primeras autoras en definir teóricamente la internacionalización de la educación superior, Jane Knight reflexiona sobre esta definición después de 25 años. En la entrevista, habla sobre la diversificación de instituciones en el escenario educativo que desarrollan programas de internacionalización, con especial atención para la movilidad de programas y proveedores internacionales (International Program and Provider Mobility - IPPM). También destaca algunas experiencias relevantes e inspiradoras, como la que promovió en el continente africano. Por último, reflexiona sobre algunos desafíos de la investigación en internacionalización, destacando la necesidad de investigaciones interdisciplinarias basadas en evidencias sobre diferentes dimensiones de la educación superior.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación superior. Educación internacional. Universidades internacionales. Movilidad de estudiantes

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Jane Knight is today one of the most prominent researchers in the field of internationalization of Higher Education. She is currently a professor of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. She focuses her research on the international dimension of higher education at the institutional, national, regional, and international levels. Her work in over 70 countries with universities, governments, and UN Agencies helps to bring a comparative, development, and international perspective to her research, teaching, and policy work. She has been a visiting scholar at numerous universities, including in India, Japan, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, Germany, and South Africa. She is the author of numerous publications on internationalization concepts and strategies, quality assurance, institutional management, trade, education hubs, and cross-border education. She is the co-founder of the African Network for the Internationalization of Education and sits on the advisory boards of several international organizations, universities, and journals. She is the recipient of several awards and two honorary doctorates. She has received the Outstanding Researcher Award from the European Association for Institutional Research and the Gilbert Medal from Universitas 21 for her contribution to higher education internationalization.

This interview was granted during the conference “*Shaping Sustainable Futures for Internationalization in Higher Education*” at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada. In the opening keynote address, Jane Knight discussed the internationalization in Higher Education as it is currently evolving in Canada and around the world and challenged to consider ways in which it could be shaped sustainably into the future. In the 21st century, internationalization has become significantly more pronounced with, for example, considerable increases in global flows of students, new branch campuses opening in every corner of the globe, and leaps in the number of cross-national research collaborations and co-authored publications. Theories, policies, and

practices of internationalization are spreading and transforming new ideas and approaches around the world.

The interview highlights some issues discussed at the keynote, drawing as well on her previous work to understand the modern-day developments in the internationalization of higher education. One of the key ideas is the understanding of internationalization as a multidimensional process of change. Her non-normative definition of internationalization allows for a broad approach to this process, which does not follow a common rule of implementation. There are cultural, academic, and ideological differences that will profoundly influence the practice and policies of internationalization. That's why her call for more robust regional research is especially relevant for the Brazilian and Latin American contexts.

Our participation in this Conference where we met Jane Knight was promoted by the Center for International Studies in Education [*Centro de Estudos Internacionais em Educação – CEIE* <http://www.unisinos.br/ceie/>] of the Graduate Program in Education of the Unisinos University [Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos – Unisinos]. CEIE was created in 2015 as a means for carrying out and supporting internationalization initiatives by the faculty and students, as well as creating conditions for the development of comparative and international studies in education. We are glad about the possibility of sharing the rich learning experience and thank Jane Knight for her time at the conference and for complementing the interview with relevant information.

## 2 INTERVIEW

**Interviewers** – You were one of the first authors to elaborate on a definition of internationalization, and that definition is one of the internationally most referenced. After 25 years of that definition, which elements are still present in that definition, and which ones have changed?

**Jane Knight** – The definition of internationalization has changed since the 1980s when it was oriented to activities such as area studies, student mobility, language studies, and international development projects. During the last 20 or 30 years, not only has higher education changed, so has the environment in which we are working been transformed. Globalization, in the sense of increased connectedness and interdependency, has been a huge factor, but so have new geopolitical realities and restrictions. Thus, I question whether it is appropriate to describe internationalization only in terms of activities, even if they are new developments. For instance, currently, we are not talking about area studies or language, we are discussing internationalizing the teaching-learning process, internationalizing the curriculum, developing students' intercultural skills and global

competencies. In terms of international academic mobility, we have moved beyond the important area of student and scholar mobility. More attention is being paid to program and provider mobility, which take the programs to students in their home country or region, instead of the students moving to a foreign country. International branch campuses; international joint universities; franchising arrangements, virtual classrooms, internships, and laboratories; joint degree programs and MOOCs are a few examples of the changing world of international program and provider mobility (IPPM). While the immense benefits for student mobility should never be underestimated, we are now living in a complex and turbulent world where borders are closing due to geopolitical or health reasons; national disasters are increasing, incidences of intercultural tensions and racism are unfortunately rising. It is time to look at additional new forms of international academic mobility and cooperation beyond students moving.

So even though there are new developments in internationalization, I think it is very limiting if we use and define internationalization in terms of the most prevalent strategies being used. I think it is more important to understand internationalization as a process of change. It is a way of transforming Higher education, hopefully for the better such as - increased access for students, new international research collaboration to address global challenges, capacity-building projects which bring benefits to all partners, preparing the next generation of humane citizens of the world- but we cannot deny that there are also unintentional and negative consequences attached to internationalization. It is interesting to see the increased use of the term 'internationalism' in higher education. Internationalism -because of the suffix 'ism' refers to a set of beliefs or an ideology. This is very different from internationalization, where the suffix of 'ization' denotes process. Thus, the working definition I use for internationalization is "the process of integrating international, intercultural and global dimensions into the purpose, primary functions (teaching/learning, research, and service to society) and delivery at the institutional and system-level".

**Interviewers** – In your writings, you have indicated that internationalization should be understood more as a neutral process. What do you mean by that, and why?

**Jane Knight** – Yes, this is true, I have always maintained that a definition of internationalization should be neutral and devoid of specific rationales, activities, or expected outcomes. I believe that internationalization must respect and build on local context. One size does not fit all. Operationalizing internationalization differs across disciplines, within and between institutions and national systems, and across countries. Internationalization is not an end unto itself. It is a means to an end. Recently, I was surprised to learn that colleagues in Europe have added an addendum to my working definition of internationalization by suggesting that it be defined as "the intentional process

of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society”. While this is certainly a noble, well-intentioned, and attractive reason/outcome to internationalize, it is normative, and definitions normally do not and should not contain normative statements. No one would question that some countries and institutions see internationalization for a variety of purposes – both positive and perhaps negative, but that is reality. Some see internationalization for its economic and commercial benefits, others see internationalization for the purposes of geopolitical influence, in the age of rankings internationalization is seen as a way of raising an institution’s or country’s ranking and profile. There is a multitude of reasons that internationalization of higher education is a priority in different settings. Just as I think that a definition should not be based on activities, I do not think rationales and outcomes should be part of a universal definition of internationalization. Having a neutral definition allows for more universality, a wider research agenda on the phenomena, and a more diversified set of rationales, actors, policies, activities, and outcomes. I am aware of the fact that there are benefits and risks attached to internationalization. I do not need to itemize them, but they differ across countries, institutions, research centers, development projects, etc.

**Interviewers** – Can you give an example of an unintended outcome of internationalization?

**Jane Knight** – I would say that the orientation and emphasis on the commercialization of international student recruitment and mobility is an unintended consequence. In earlier times, International student mobility focused on providing scholarships for students in countries that did not have the capacity to provide post-graduate or specialized training for students or where the higher education system was negatively impacted by political instability and economically challenging times. They usually returned to their country. This is not the case today. Several middle to high-income countries are deliberately attracting international students to meet their national needs and targets for science and technology innovation. Furthermore, the number and variety of scholarships have decreased, and international student is often seen as a revenue stream. Of course, this is not true for all countries, but it is quite pervasive. Furthermore, there are rogue international providers who are more interested in their bottom line than in providing quality and sustainable education programs. Secondly, rankings have made a difference, and in my humble opinion, not always a positive one. Internationalization is sometimes seen as a way to increase rankings, given that some indicators are international in nature. Frequently national and institutional level internationalization strategies are more oriented to raising profile and rankings than on providing the many and diverse benefits of internationalization.

I think we have to see internationalization as a process of change both in a proactive way anticipating what higher education is going to need both in the present and in the future, but also in a reactive way to the changes in globalization and new global challenges that we are facing. Thus, it is important that we really visualize and understand internationalization as a process of change with international, intercultural, and global dimensions for our teaching and learning, research, and innovation as well as service to society.

**Interviewers** – The Higher Education landscape has been changing during the last decades due to a diversification in the sector. There are new institutions with new programs, which bring to the scenario new possibilities of qualification and students with different qualifications and different needs. For instance, many colleges can offer Higher Education worldwide nowadays. How does it affect the internationalization process for education?

**Jane Knight** – Internationalization of higher education is not only a university activity. I think that for vocational and technical colleges it is equally important. I do not understand why people question the relevance of internationalization for students who may never leave the country for employment purposes because of professional qualification accreditation reasons. I believe that even if a student never leaves their country, it is extremely important that they can be exposed to new ideas, a diversity of cultural contexts and norms, and different ways of thinking and doing things. With today's interconnectedness and interdependence, migration, and new global challenges, it is imperative that all levels of tertiary education be engaged in internationalization that is appropriate to their situation. But this, of course, demands that faculty members and instructors are equipped to do so.

Of course, we should also be thinking about developing intercultural skills and global competencies in school-age children. UNESCO has a very interesting project for schools that you may already know about. They call it global education, while in higher education, we refer to it as international education. We worked very hard in the 1990s to talk about the internationalization of higher education, not the globalization of higher education. We wanted to show that it was between and among peoples of countries and their cultures and systems. When you use the word global education or globalization, it has a very different root concept which is global- usually understood to mean worldwide. However, the concept of global does not acknowledge the relationships between and among nations and their people and cultures like international does. So yes, I do think there is a lot of work happening at the primary and secondary level, and I am very much supportive of the fact that we are encouraging greater understanding about ourselves, our country, and our role and relationships in the world. The adage that 'we do not develop or understand our relationships with others until we know ourselves' is very relevant in internationalization.

**Interviewers** – Are there experiences of internationalization that you consider especially relevant, and that could eventually inspire practices in other parts of the world? Yesterday, at the conference, you talked about your work in Africa. How do you think this experience is relevant for discussing the internationalization?

**Jane Knight** – I am very concerned that people see internationalization as a westernization and/or homogenization process. I think this is a rather narrow understanding of the complexity and depth of internationalization. I firmly believe that every region, every country, every institution has to look at internationalization that meets their priorities, their needs, their resources and also find ways of collaborating with other countries to meet both national and international challenges that can no longer be solved by one country alone. As I said earlier, one size does not fit all. And so the reasons that I'm working in Africa right now as a distinguished visiting professor are to gain a deeper understanding about how they are approaching internationalization to meet their needs and priorities, undertake joint research with colleagues, and mentor graduate students and young faculty who are interested in doing research on internationalization. And, of course, colonization is a major aspect in the history of many African countries, which adds another layer of complexity to internationalization that must be explored. Internationalization critics maintain that today's internationalization is a new form of neo-colonization, and the focus should be on decolonizing curriculum, teaching, research, etc., not on internationalization.

Many African countries have a major brain drain issue due to developed country's strategies to attract the best and brightest minds in order to meet the needs of their labor market or to meet their science and technology targets; and, foreign-trained African students often prefer to stay abroad for employment or further study. African institutions are keen to modernize their academic policies, develop new strategic partnerships for teaching, research, and innovation purposes and are looking for collaboration opportunities where there are reciprocity and benefits for all partners.

**Interviewers** – Your keynote presentation focused on new developments and challenges related to international programs and provide mobility. What prompted you to do more research on this topic?

**Jane Knight** – As we have discussed, in the last two decades, there has been an exponential increase in all forms of international academic mobility – student and scholar, programs and providers, policies and regulations, and the universal exchange of knowledge, ideas, values, and culture. The diversity in the modes of mobility is unprecedented. It is no longer just students who are moving across borders, so are higher education programs and providers. This has brought new opportunities and innovation to international higher education and has also raised new issues and potential risks.

To date, I have found that the favored terms for program and provider mobility are cross-border, transnational, offshore, and borderless education. These terms often include student mobility and are most often used interchangeably even though they mean different things to higher education actors and stakeholders. As a result, I think that the terms are becoming broader in concept but less meaningful in practice. The challenge is to have clarity and a common understanding of the terms, without trying to standardize definitions - thus ignoring local context, policies, and language orientation. I think that one solution is to use the terms international program and provider mobility (IPPM) and International Student and Scholar Mobility (ISSM) to clearly delineate that these are two fundamentally different types of international academic mobility. The main modes of IPPM include international branch campuses, franchise programs, distance education, partnership programs, and international joint universities.

I must admit to being surprised at the increasing enrolment rates in IPPM programs. For instance, I read in a 2019 report from the UK that about 50% of the students enrolled in a UK program take the course in their home or neighboring country and not overseas in a UK based institution<sup>4</sup>. From recent research, we have found that about 37 percent of local tertiary students in Mauritius are doing it through franchise operations and branch campuses located there. For Botswana, Malaysia, and Singapore, it is about 30% of local students studying in IPPM programs offered in their home country. The increasing IPPM enrolments in host countries offer convincing evidence of the potential for IPPM to increase access and program diversity for local students. However, the research and monitoring of these new IPPM developments are not keeping pace with the accelerated rate of change. While opinion and anecdotal evidence reveal the benefits and risks attached to this burgeoning field, there continues to be a significant lack of robust data and analysis regarding the scope and impact of different IPPM modes of delivery, especially in host countries.

**Interviewers** – What would you say about the research on internationalization?

**Jane Knight** – I would make a plea that we have more rigorous evidence-based research on Internationalization. From the 1980s to 2000, there was a lot of opinion and anecdotal based research on the internationalization of higher education. Case studies were the favored methodology, and generalization of insights and lessons learned were often limited or inappropriately assumed. We need to see more solid and robust evidence-based research. I follow the literature on internationalization very closely, especially in non-western and developing countries. I love to keep up to date with new research, and I have

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<sup>4</sup> The report is available at the following link:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/Documents/2019/intl-facts-figs-19.pdf>

very talented research assistants who help me to constantly update the comprehensive and interdisciplinary bibliography and references I use for teaching, research, and policy work. It appears that the majority of research from 2000-2010 was on different aspects of student mobility, international student recruitment, and institutional level case studies. This has broadened in the last decade, but there is still an urgent need for further research on diverse aspects of internationalization such as intercultural teaching and learning, program and provider mobility, understanding partnerships, impact studies on international collaborative research, refugee and migrant education, virtual classrooms and internships, online teaching, the use of social media and the list goes on. I also think that more interdisciplinary studies would be beneficial. For instance, my current research is on the role of international higher education, research, and innovation in strengthening relations between and among countries in order to address global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, food, and water security and others. Approaching this topic with a higher education lens is not enough; an understanding of international relations and diplomacy is necessary. We also need to monitor trends that are impacting internationalization in addition to researching the process and policies of internationalization itself. Most importantly, we have to support and encourage the next generation of researchers to undertake robust research- applied, conceptual and theoretical- on the multiple dimensions of international higher education as well as the national, regional, and global trends that are impacting our field from an interdisciplinary perspective.

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