

# The dilemma of inclusivity in the globalization of academia

Carolina Castano Rodriguez<sup>1</sup>

Received: 24 July 2015 / Accepted: 24 July 2015 / Published online: 1 September 2015  
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2015

**Abstract** This paper extends the conversation started by Mariona Espinet, Mercè Izquierdo, Clara Garcia-Pujol; Ludovic Morge and Isabel Martins and Susana de Souza regarding the diverse issues faced by the internationalisation of science education journals. I use my own experience as an early career researcher coming from an underrepresented culture and language within academia to expand on these issues. I focus on the issues which I have experienced the most: the disconnection between university research and school practice and the struggles with the unspoken power structures. As I delve into my experience, I argue that we are failing to ask the right questions to create a science education community that is inclusive of diverse views and multicultural perspectives. We need to rethink how we can avoid colonisation of school teachers, as Isabel and Susana describe, but also the colonisation of those academics and teachers who are from non-English speaking cultures. I urge us to carry more debates such as the one initiated by these three authors, exposing and debating about the different power structures within science education so that we can progress in empowering all those voices that have been silenced.

**Keywords** Science education journals · Internationalization · Teachers · Inclusivity · Minorities

I read the three forum articles from Espinet, Izquierdo and Garcia-Pujol, Morge, Martins and De Souza with great interest as they present a diversity of issues that academia and academic journals face. While reading these articles I could not stop thinking of my own

---

Lead Editor: Carolina Castano-Rodriguez.

---

This review essay addresses issues raised in the three forum articles from Espinet, Izquierdo and Garcia-Pujol, Morge, Martins and De Souza.

---

✉ Carolina Castano Rodriguez  
carolina.rodriguez@acu.edu.au

<sup>1</sup> Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia

journey and transition from working in schools to working as an academic at university. I sympathise with these authors' discussions over several issues including:

- The role and status quo of teachers and academics;
- The nature of the teaching practice and that of the academic discourse and theory;
- The culture and diversity of languages and their underrepresentation in academic journals;
- The transparency of the review procedures and the power struggles between diverse learning communities.

I use my own experience- as a former school teacher and a new academic, coming from a minority culture and language within academia- to further expand on the issues described by these authors. The tensions between practice and theory, the stratified groups of people involved in education and the 'possible colonisation of school teachers' discourses by those from academia' as Isabel and Susana point out, are intended to be addressed wisely and in diverse ways by the journals and review processes that these authors describe. However, two main aspects of these issues remained unquestioned and silent.

### **(Dis)Empowering teachers?**

The first issue that arise from these three papers is that of the intentions to involve teachers in academic journals as authors, members of editorial boards and/or reviewers. As a school teacher I was not concerned about the discourses of the academia and often thought that academics who used to visit the school to deliver professional development courses did not know the realities and challenges of working in schools. I use to comment with other school teachers that we did not find of much use what they were presenting. The concerns I had were related to the school structure and to the lack of time to prepare classes, innovate, mark, prepare student reports, meet with parents, attend to school meetings. At the same time we needed to identify the needs and interests of the children I worked with to value their voices. I did not see a clear link between the theory presented by the university educators, who ran the professional development courses and my own practice and needs. This experience was not unique and other authors such as Tom Barone et al. (1996) had reported on this issue, arguing that many teacher programs presented theory without much connection to practice. This disconnection, they argue, presents a fragmented view of education, distant from the reality and complexities of the education system within schools.

Although I now truly believe that if I had the chance to read more about the different debates in science education presented in academic journals, I could had innovated more during my classes, I still think I would had preferred to read about school practices and examples from books and journals that were made by teachers and for teachers. The study carried by Pete Boyd and Kim Harris (2010) with school teachers in UK who have been appointed as university lecturers in the previous 4 years, do not differ from what I experienced. Their findings suggest that, even when teachers move as university-based-teachers-educators, they prefer to review 'strategic and good practice professional documents rather than more specific underpinning research papers or scholarly texts' for their preparation for teaching (p. 18).

Similarly, if someone had invited me to participate in publishing in an academic journal or/and reviewing articles while at the school, I wouldn't have accepted as I felt it was 'their' world, the world of academics, not 'my' world as a school teacher. This feeling was

even strengthen by the fact that, at least in the schools I worked, publishing in academic journals would not have been as valued as my own teaching practice and it was not even part of my job description as a teacher. My feeling is that this thinking is not different from other teachers and is reflected in the difficulty encountered in those attempts to include more teachers in the different levels of participation in academic journals such as the ones described by Mariona, Mercè and Clara, Ludovic, and Isabel and Susana.

At the same time as I think about my own views and feelings while I was a teacher, while reading these three papers I also started to question my own views on the relevance of academic journals for school practices. I questioned the motives and assumptions we make when thinking that to be 'less colonising and more inclusive' of the teaching practice they should (or we should encourage them to) participate in the production and publishing of papers in academic journals. 'Colonisation' is a word that resonates in my mind while I continue reading Isabel and Susana's paper. I consider that instead of asking school teachers to listen, participate and learn from us, it is us, academic lecturers, who should be participating more often in school practices, in getting involved with communities and in experiencing the struggles of teachers and their students.

By asking teachers to participate in the different academic spaces, valued by us in Universities, and encouraging them to publish in academic journals, we might be reinforcing the notion that university educators possess a higher level of knowledge regarding education. This notion has been reported by other authors such as Bih-Jen Fwu and Hsiou-Huai Wang (2002) who identified that in developed countries such as England, Australia, New Zealand and United States there was a general poor public image of teaching. This was contrasted with non-western countries such as Taiwan, where the teaching profession was perceived as prestigious, holding a positive social status.

Similarly, from a review of the literature, Allan Feldman (1993) identified that even though the term 'collaboration' was often used to refer to the school teacher-university researcher relationship, this relationship was not based on a common set of goals established with equal participation of both parties. Often, the structure and establishment of this relation was founded on the notion of university educators as contributing to resolve problems within the school teaching practices and school teachers.

Instead of asking teachers to participate in the structures we have created, in the spaces we so much value and in the discourses we consider important, we might start by asking them which spaces are relevant for them and how we can participate in their experiences. Maybe then we can write about the school experience, reduce the gap between practice and theory and write papers of more interest and direct relevance for teachers and school communities. By doing so we might also empower teachers to realise that they have as much, if not more, to teach us than us to them.

## From school teacher to academia

As I continue reading the forum articles, my memories take me back to the moment in which I decided to pursue a career in the academia and my reasons to take this path. The main reason for my decision was that I truly believed that, as an academic, I could have more opportunities to innovate, to interact not only with one but with several schools and communities and to further explore my views and thoughts regarding science education. However, one of the biggest challenges which have confronted me as a young scholar is the pressure that is placed on academics to publish and the lack of opportunities and support to

interact with communities. My interest is still in generating theory that comes from practice, to write with and for the communities, to live the challenges of schools so I can write about them. However, more often than not, I am dragged by the increasing pressure that comes as an academic to publish in certain journals. In no conversation I have had, have I been encouraged to think about the nature of what I write, the nature of writing in this profession and the responsibility that comes with writing about schools, school practice and teachers. Moreover, in my attempt to reconnect with communities, to participate and get involved with the life of schools and teachers, I feel I am failing; I feel academia is also failing to encourage those spaces with community. More and more I feel that I am asked to contribute to the university life by belonging to committees and participating in numerous meetings instead of connecting with those I will write about. Now that I am part of those who shape policies, who shape the nature and structure of education, now when I feel it is even more critical to keep contact with those whom my writing and ideas will influence is when I have less opportunities to interact with them.

So maybe we need to rethink about the role of teachers in the academic community, on how to reduce the risk to colonise them. Maybe the debate should not be about how the journals' review process or academic board can become more inclusive of teachers. This approach is based on the assumption that teachers want and 'should' be part of our world. Participating in academic journals is of great interest to us, academics, it is part of our job descriptions and expectations and a requisite to move up the 'academic ladder'. Consequently, it will probably continue to be the case that the majority of the authors, editorial board members and reviewers of academic journals are academics. So, although I believe that it is important to revise the 'social, cultural and pragmatic determinants' of the requisites and characteristics of a journal and its reviewing procedure, as Ludovic suggests, it might be better if we start by questioning the reasons behind our interest in involving teachers in this process and ask ourselves if it is in their interest or whether it is another way of validating our own structures. If we do not equally get involve with communities of practice, children, schools and teachers, then we cannot expect them to listen to us, to validate our voices and to participate in our spaces. Then, we might not state that we write for them and want to be more inclusive of their experiences and voices.

## **Cultural inclusivity?**

The second issue that I identified with is that of language, and more generally, that of the underrepresentation of non-English speaking cultures in academia and academic publications. I found this issue connected with several causes including that of power structures and stratified voices within the academia at different levels, including during the production and publishing of journals as described by the three forum papers. To expand on this I start with an experience I had which, although is not directly connected with publishing in journals, it is equally exposing the different levels of power and therefore the issue of silencing some voices.

Not long ago a small group of scholars and I, after a discussion about multicultural views of science, agreed on the need of creating a space to further debate the issue of multicultural science in an open space with anyone interested. We decided to contact the organizers of a science education conference to ask about the possibility of publicizing the forum as a free pre-conference workshop. I volunteered to find out whom to contact and send out a first email to explore the viability of this. As I have participated in previous pre-

conference workshops I believed it was going to be an easy task. Not only I found it almost impossible to identify the board members of the conference as they did not appear in the conference website, but also the conference organizers for the following year did not show support to our initiative. We were explained that pre-conference workshops were not supported and were not part of the history of the conference. Despite our efforts and several emails to different members, we did not find any possibility for exploring any alternative. Not only I felt discouraged and disempowered to present my ideas, but also as an early career researcher I felt worried that those ideas that emerged from a group of academics at a conference had no echo.

The biggest surprise came when we received an invitation from the conference association members to participate in a forum organized by some of the board members. We felt our voices were of no value. Some of the other scholars decided they were not interested in participating in the conference in the coming years and they were exploring other possible spaces for their voices to be heard. In my case, I am still trying to understand this experience, to understand why this situation occurred. After this experience and after reading papers such as the three in this forum it is clear to me that we need to understand who decides which voices to be heard, which spaces to offer and which ideas to support and expose to others. So far I have no answer for any of these questions. At times I feel discouraged by a field and path I was initially so passionate about.

Ludovic is right when he describes that a reviewing procedure cannot be assessed according to how close or far it is from an ideal procedure (one used by the most influential journals and which could be considered a standard). This can apply to all levels of academia, including conferences and professional organizations. For many of us within the minority groups such as academics from non-English speaking countries, early career researchers and academics whose ideas and voices challenge most others, the struggle is to find those spaces where we can be heard and still be accepted within the larger community. The authors in this forum have described different struggles for creating or redesigning journals from non-English speaking countries so that they are valued and validated in an international community. I echo their concerns and extend their discussion to ask whether we, the minorities in the academic world, are sacrificing too much of our own voices, culture, language and ideas to be heard by the 'international' community.

I finish this paper with a reflection regarding the underrepresentation of non-English speaking cultures and authors in the science education international journals and overall within the field of science education. For this purpose, the study carried by Min-Hsien Lee, Ying-Tien Wu and Chin-Chung Tsai (2009) presents an interesting and confronting map of the cultural diversity (or lack of it) in the field. They identified that a vast majority of the authors in Science education international journals with the highest impact factors came from Canada, United States, Australia and UK. For example for JRST between 1998 and 2002 these four countries made up for 86 % of the total number of authors. Similarly, despite numerous programs and efforts from countries such as US and Australia to increase the cultural diversity within science, white western researchers, academics, educators, administrators and policy makers in science have consistently and probably still are significantly higher than all the other groups combined (Massey 1992). This represents a major concern for all of us interested in constructing an inclusive and multicultural view of science education, and particularly to those young academics that come from those underrepresented cultures.

Deborah Pomeroy's (1994) study carried out almost two decades ago resonates with what the three papers in this forum have described. In her study she argues that 'a homogenous population of scientists will have a fairly uniform, hence limited, approach to

the definition and solution of increasingly complex scientific problems' (Pomeroy 1994, p. 50). This concern is directed towards scientific research, but could well be extended to the field of science education as not only most authors are from English speaking countries but also those national journals from other countries face the issue of validation of their publications in the international context if they do not publish in English. As a result of this validation and internationalization many voices which could challenge the views and approaches that most western and English speaking countries present are silenced. Moreover, many of the studies carried in non-English speaking countries which reach the international journals end up been those carried by English speaking academics instead of local academics who are more understanding and representative of the needs, perspectives and interest of schools in other countries and the local communities.

Before I continue searching around for answers for those questions that the authors have generated in me, I prefer to stop for a moment and breath. Breath the air of my memories, my culture, my own experience and more than anything, breath the same air that inspired me to become an academic so I can continue this journey with passion and faith in the future despite all the struggles that anyone from a minority group will have to face.

Maybe, when we could rethink education and those who are underrepresented can find more spaces to be heard we can create a more heterogeneous world with a diversity of solutions to the contemporary issues that diverse communities and particularly our academic community face.

## References

- Barone, T., Berliner, D. C., Blanchard, J., Casanova, U., & McGowan, T. (1996). A future for teacher education. In J. Sikula (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed., pp. 1108–1149). New York: Macmillan.
- Boyd, P., & Harris, K. (2010). Becoming a university lecturer in teacher education: Expert school teachers reconstructing their pedagogy and identity. *Professional Development in Education*, 36(1–2), 9–24. doi:10.1080/19415250903454767.
- Feldman, A. (1993). Promoting equitable collaboration between university researchers and school teachers. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 6(4), 341–357. doi:10.1080/0951839930060406.
- Fwu, B. J., & Wang, H. H. (2002). The social status of teachers in Taiwan. *Comparative Education*, 38(2), 211–224. doi:10.1080/03050060220140584.
- Lee, M. H., Wu, Y. T., & Tsai, C. C. (2009). Research trends in science education from 2003 to 2007: A content analysis of publications in selected journals. *International Journal of Science Education*, 31(15), 1999–2020. doi:10.1080/09500690802314876.
- Massey, W. (1992). A success story amid decades of disappointment. *Science*, 258:5085, 1177–1177. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/213535934?accountid=8194>. doi: 10.1126/science.258.5085.1177.
- Pomeroy, D. (1994). Science education and cultural diversity: Mapping the field. 24(1), 49–73.

**Carolina Castano Rodriguez** is a lecturer in science and environmental education at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, Australia, and team leader of the research support team: Transformative Science. She has carried diverse science education research projects in Australia, Colombia and Ecuador, exploring the relevance of science within socioeconomic disadvantaged populations. Her main interest is in the link between science education, social justice and ecojustice, including the role of science in promoting or addressing violence. Her current research focuses on how to promote an ethics of care in science classes and the multicultural perspectives of science and nature and its implication for science education.