International Student Engagement in Post-Secondary Education

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Published in the United States of America by
IGI Global Scientific Publishing
701 East Chocolate Avenue
Hershey, PA, 17033, USA
Tel: 717-533-8845 | Fax: 717-533-7115
Website: https://www.igi-global.com E-mail: cust@igi-global.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Smith, Clayton, 1959- editor
Title: International student engagement in post-secondary education / [edited by] Clayton Smith.
Description: Hershey, PA : IGI Global Scientific Publishing, [2026] | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "This book will provide research on international student engagement in post-secondary educational institutions from throughout the world, particularly expanding our knowledge of international student engagement to include a wider set of national and transnational experiences"-- Provided by publisher.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025053794 (print) | LCCN 2025053795 (ebook) | ISBN 9798337353982 hardcover | ISBN 9798337353999 paperback | ISBN 9798337354002 ebook
Subjects: LCSH: Foreign study | Students, Foreign--Services for | Education, Higher--International cooperation
Classification: LCC LB2375 .I578 2026 (print) | LCC LB2375 (ebook)
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025053794
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025053795

British Cataloguing in Publication Data
A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

Chapter 10
Canada's International Student Surge and Decline:
Rethinking Pedagogy in a Changing Higher Education Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Canadian postsecondary institutions experienced rapid growth in international student enrolment over the past decade, followed by a sudden decline resulting from recent federal immigration reforms. This shift reveals the sector's vulnerability to regulation and has created a climate of uncertainty for institutions that rely on international tuition and global recruitment. In this context of demographic expansion and regulatory pressure, the need for culturally responsive pedagogy becomes increasingly important. This chapter examines how faculty are adapting their teaching to support multilingual, multicultural classrooms, and how instructors often act as informal cultural mediators performing significant but largely invisible pedagogical labour without formal training or recognition. This work argues that

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-5398-2.ch010

the convergence of economic dependency, student investment, and policy change creates an ethical imperative for pedagogical innovation that supports diverse learners and strengthens inclusive learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

Post-secondary institutions have become a focal point in Canada's international immigration and educational landscape, reflecting both the promise and the challenges of globalized learning. Over the past decade, provincial systems witnessed a dramatic surge in international student enrollment that fundamentally reshaped classroom demographics, institutional priorities, and teaching practices (Arumuhathas, 2022; Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2022). The scale of this transformation was substantial: in 2022, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) received 715,000 study permit applications (IRCC, 2024) creating significant opportunities and financial dependencies for institutions across Canada. Federal immigration policy changes subsequently caused a reduction to 437,000 international study permits in 2025, representing a decline of 38.88% from the peak (IRCC, 2025). This contraction, coinciding with similar policy-driven restrictions of international student access in Australia and the United Kingdom, signals a global inflection point in how major destination countries are reconceptualizing the relationship between international student recruitment, institutional sustainability, and the obligations of the host education system (OECD, 2024).

During this period of rapid demographic expansion and contraction, post-secondary faculty have been compelled to navigate increasingly culturally diverse classrooms while simultaneously absorbing expanding pedagogical demands, evolving institutional priorities, and intensifying scrutiny of student outcomes. The central discussion of this chapter is that the response to these conditions cannot rest solely with individual faculty members. The invisible pedagogical labor that culturally responsive teaching requires is real, substantial, and currently uncompensated in ways that are neither equitable to the instructors nor sustainable for the institutions. When colleges and universities accept billions of dollars in international student investment and position themselves as gateways to academic and professional opportunity, they enter into an implicit contract that obligates them to support student success through structural reorganization and sustained investment, not merely through the professional commitment of individual instructors.

This chapter proceeds as follows. It first establishes the enrollment context and its economic dimensions. It then examines the practical implications of the policy-driven decline for classroom dynamics, student mental health, and develops the case for an institutional accountability framework grounded in the concept of the implicit

contract, before presenting a consolidated theoretical framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Practical strategies are organized under the three dimensions of this framework: institutional, personal, and instructional. The chapter concludes by establishing that the benefits of culturally sustaining practice extend to all students, domestic and international, and to the institutions committed to realizing them.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS IN ONTARIO COLLEGES

Ontario has emerged as the primary destination for international students in Canada, hosting over half of the country's international student population. In 2022, Ontario accounted for 51.2% of all international students in the country, significantly outpacing British Columbia (22.1%) and Quebec (12.1%), reflecting the province's position as Canada's educational hub for international learners (Kunin, 2023). The growth in Ontario's international student numbers was particularly evident in the college sector, where between 2013/2014 and 2022/2023, international enrolment in Canadian colleges nearly quadrupled, jumping from 54,738 to 205,242 students. Ontario drove much of this expansion, adding nearly 121,000 more international students between 2021 and 2022 alone, a 41% increase in a single year (Government of Canada, 2020).

By 2022/2023, international students represented 21.2% of all postsecondary lments across Canada, with colleges experiencing the largest demographic shifts. Concurrently, a 4% decline in domestic student enrollment contributed to an increasingly multicultural campus environment. South Asia was the primary driver of this trend, accounting for 56.1% of all international college enrollments, with its numbers growing by 31.6% in the 2022/2023 academic year alone (Statistics Canada, 2024). Other significant source countries included China, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Kenya. This demographic breadth is important to acknowledge because the pedagogical implications of international student diversity extend well beyond any single regional or educational system. According to the OECD (2024), Asian students constitute approximately 58% of all internationally mobile students across OECD countries, reflecting a diversity of educational backgrounds, linguistic traditions, and cultural expectations that require correspondingly sophisticated institutional and instructional responses.

The economic significance of this enrollment boom was equally substantial. International student spending in Canada more than doubled between 2016 and 2022, surging from $15.5 billion to $37.3 billion, representing an average annual increase of approximately 15.7% (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). By 2022, international student expenditures accounted for 1.2% of Canada's total GDP and represented

23.1% of the nation's total service exports, positioning international education as a major component of national economic stability (Kunin, 2023). These expenditures flowed through numerous sectors of the economy, extending well beyond educational institutions to benefit housing providers, food services, retail establishments, and transportation networks. For many students from developing economies, this investment represented years of family savings, substantial loan obligations, and considerable personal risk, creating what this chapter identifies as the foundation of an implicit institutional contract.

THE POLICY-DRIVEN DECLINE: COMPARATIVE CONTEXT AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

An International Pattern of Restriction

Canada's reduction of study permits to 437,000 in 2025 is not an isolated policy event but is part of a broader pattern of restriction affecting major international student destination countries simultaneously. Australia proposed enrollment caps on new international students beginning in January 2025, targeting a reduction to approximately 270,000 new students per year, with individual caps assigned at the provider level (ICEF Monitor, 2024), while the United Kingdom introduced more stringent post-study work permit requirements and financial eligibility thresholds that the Northern Consortium of UK Universities estimated discouraged approximately 12% of prospective international student applicants (Marcus, 2025). The convergence of these policies across Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom reflects a shared set of political pressures related to housing markets, immigration volumes, and public perception, but it also creates a globally competitive context in which any single country's restrictive turn may redirect prospective students toward more welcoming alternatives.

The comparative evidence is instructive for Canadian institutions for several reasons. Australia's experience demonstrates that enrollment caps imposed at the provider level, without corresponding investment in student support infrastructure, create institutional instability without necessarily improving the conditions for student success (ICEF Monitor, 2024). The United Kingdom's experience reveals that tightened immigration pathways affect not only the volume of international students but also the academic preparation profile of those who do arrive, as higher financial barriers disproportionately exclude students from lower-economic backgrounds in major sending countries. Both cases underscore that the pedagogical and institutional challenges of supporting international students do not diminish in proportion to declining enrollment numbers; rather, the students who do enroll under restricted

permit regimes often arrive with heightened expectations, greater financial precarity, and more acute immigration stakes attached to their academic performance.

Implications for Classroom Dynamics and Program Sustainability

The practical implications of declining enrollments for the pedagogical strategies advocated in this chapter are direct and require honest institutional analysis. Many of the instructional investments recommended, including peer mentoring programs, professional development workshops in intercultural competence, and curriculum design support, depend on stable and protected funding streams. These are precisely the institutional expenditures most likely to face budget pressure when international enrollment contracts, because they are often categorized as discretionary professional development or student services expenditures rather than as core academic infrastructure. The irony is structural: declining enrollments reduce the revenue that funds the very support systems on which international student success depends, at a moment when institutional accountability for that success is intensifying through the permit allocation frameworks that IRCC has linked to student outcome metrics.

The global comparative evidence reinforces the urgency of this analysis. Marcus (2025) documented that university budget cuts and faculty layoffs followed enrollment declines across multiple major destination countries, with the consequences falling disproportionately on programs and services serving international student populations. In Australia, the combination of policy-driven enrollment contraction and reduced support investment created conditions in which international students experienced deteriorating service quality precisely when their academic precarity was increasing (ICEF Monitor, 2024). Canadian institutions should treat this evidence as a structural warning rather than a distant cautionary tale, since the policy and economic dynamics driving these outcomes are shared across jurisdictions.

Institutions that respond to enrollment decline by reducing support infrastructure will undermine the student success outcomes on which their future permit allocations depend. The pedagogically sound response to enrollment contraction is to protect investment in culturally sustaining support and to use any reduction in class sizes, where they occur, as an opportunity to deepen the quality of educational engagement rather than to reduce the resources devoted to it. Faculty facing smaller but more academically heterogeneous cohorts of high-stakes international students will require more sophisticated pedagogical tools, not fewer institutional supports. Program leaders and academic administrators should therefore resist the temptation to treat declining enrollment as an opportunity for proportional cost reduction and instead plan for the intensification of individual students' support needs that a restricted-permit enrollment environment predictably produces.

International Student Mental Health and Well-Being in a Context of Precarity

The mental health dimensions of international student precarity deserve substantive and specific attention that goes beyond general acknowledgment of the challenges of cross-cultural adjustment. Research consistently identifies acculturative stress as the strongest predictor of depressive symptoms among international students, followed by limited social support, reduced social connectedness, and language barriers (Rudakova & Lal, 2025). A systematic review by Maharaj et al. (2025), while focused on the Australian context, identified elevated rates of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, loneliness, financial strain, and experiences of discrimination among international students, with loneliness reported by 60 to 65% of participants and financial strain reported by a range of 15.4 to 95% across studies, reflecting the enormous variability in international students' economic circumstances.

In the Canadian context, research reported by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (Chatoor et al., 2023) found that students experiencing housing insecurity, a condition to which international students are particularly vulnerable, given their lack of local social networks and knowledge of tenancy rights, have a 40% likelihood of depression compared to 29% among students with secure housing. The Canadian Mental Health Association has documented wait times for psychotherapy of between six and 24 months in some Ontario jurisdictions, representing a near-complete absence of timely institutional mental health support for students in acute distress. (King et al., 2023) found that international students in Canadian universities had poorer mental health and academic outcomes over the first year at university compared to domestic students, with acculturative stress and limited access to culturally competent support identified as primary mediating factors.

These findings have direct pedagogical relevance. Faculty who encounter students who appear disengaged, non-participatory, or performing below expectations should understand that these behaviors may reflect the psychological weight of precarity, homesickness, financial anxiety, and social isolation rather than a lack of effort, preparation, or academic capability. The mental health burden carried by international students is not a background condition that institutions can address separately from pedagogy; it is a dimension of the learning environment that instructors encounter in every class session and that institutions must address through accessible, culturally competent, and proactively delivered mental health and advising services.

The intersection of mental health vulnerability and immigration precarity creates a particularly acute form of academic risk that is specific to international students, and that has no precise domestic analogue. For a student whose continued legal status in Canada is contingent on satisfactory academic standing, a failing grade is not simply a disappointing academic outcome; it may trigger a cascade of consequences that

include loss of study permit, loss of post-graduation work permit eligibility, inability to repay family debts, and the collapse of long-term immigration plans that have organized a family's financial decisions for years. Faculty and institutional advisors who understand this structural reality are better positioned to provide support that addresses the actual stakes of academic difficulty for international students, and to design early-alert and intervention systems that engage students before academic performance deteriorates to the point of permit risk. Institutional advising services should be actively designed to communicate this understanding to students from the beginning of their programs, normalizing help-seeking as a strategic and proactive behavior rather than a sign of inadequacy.

THE IMPLICIT CONTRACT AND THE CASE FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The $37.3 billion invested by international students in Canadian education in 2022 is not simply an economic statistic; it is the empirical foundation of an institutional obligation. When colleges and universities accept this level of financial commitment from students, the overwhelming majority of whom have assumed considerable personal and familial risk to attend, they have entered into an implicit contract that extends well beyond the delivery of course content. That contract encompasses the responsibility to ensure that instruction is genuinely accessible and effective across linguistic and cultural differences, that support services are adequately funded and staffed to serve diverse student populations, and that the invisible pedagogical labor performed by faculty in service of international student success is formally recognized and compensated rather than silently expected as a standard extension of the teaching role.

The concept of the implicit contract is not merely rhetorical. Institutions market themselves in countries where students and their families make decisions based on the quality of education they represent and the conditions of the student experience. When the reality of institutional support does not match the marketed promise, the breach is experienced not only as a disappointment but as a betrayal of a financial and personal commitment that cannot be easily reversed. In this context, institutional accountability requires more than the production of diversity and inclusion policy statements; it requires that those commitments be operationalized in staffing, in workload formulas, in professional development investment, and in the design of support services that international students can actually access without months-long waiting periods or cultural barriers to help-seeking.

The current model, in which culturally sustaining teaching is largely accomplished through the individual effort, humility, and professional commitment of faculty

who receive neither formal training nor workload recognition for this work, is not sustainable. Hochschild's (2012) foundational analysis of emotional labor, and its application to higher education by Bellas (1999) and Viz Leutwiler et al. (2024), demonstrates that affective and relational work is real, taxing, and consequential. When cultural mediation is treated as a natural extension of a faculty member's passion for teaching rather than as a formally recognized professional function, institutions benefit from this labor at the expense of the individuals performing it. The solution is not to encourage faculty to perform this work with greater resilience; it is to restructure institutional systems so that the labor is distributed, resourced, and recognized.

REQUIRED INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Addressing invisible pedagogical labor requires structural reorganization at the institutional level across several interconnected domains. First, institutions should formally recognize cultural mediation in faculty workload formulas, acknowledging that the additional time and expertise required to support linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms constitutes a distinct and quantifiable professional function. Faculty carrying a demonstrably higher invisible labor burden could be eligible for course releases, reduced administrative service requirements, or supplementary professional development allocations. This recognition serves both equity and quality objectives and acknowledges the contribution faculty are already making, creating the conditions for that contribution to be made more consistently and sustainably.

Second, institutions should establish or expand curriculum design units with explicit mandates to support faculty teaching in internationalized classrooms. These units should provide individualized course redesign consultation, culturally sustaining assessment design support, and access to multilingual instructional resources, thus reducing the expectation that each faculty member must independently develop expertise in areas that require sustained professional development and specialist knowledge. Third, the implementation of international student offices should be mandated and resourced to provide proactive, embedded support rather than reactive crisis intervention. This includes culturally competent academic advising, peer mentoring program coordination, mental health services delivered by counselors with intercultural training, and regular structured engagement with academic departments. Fourth, institutions should review their recruitment practices to ensure that the number and preparation profile of students admitted to programs are aligned with the institution's demonstrable capacity to support their success. Recruitment driven by revenue imperatives that exceed support capacity is incompatible with the terms of the implicit contract.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY

Culturally responsive pedagogy represents a comprehensive instructional framework that has evolved significantly since its emergence in educational research during the 1980s and 1990s. Geneva Gay defined culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them (Gay, 2018). This approach fundamentally recognizes that culture is a powerful force shaping how students perceive themselves and the world, and that effective teaching must acknowledge and leverage cultural frameworks rather than treating them as obstacles to learning. Gloria Ladson-Billings proposed three foundational components of culturally relevant pedagogy: a focus on student learning and academic success, developing students' cultural competence to support positive ethnic and social identities, and supporting students' critical consciousness, or their ability to recognise and critique societal inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

It is important to acknowledge that Ladson-Billings has herself subsequently evolved this framework. In her 2014 Harvard Educational Review article, she introduced the concept of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, arguing that the aspiration should not merely be to be relevant to students' cultures but actively to sustain them, recognizing that cultural knowledge and identity are not simply resources for academic engagement but values worth preserving in their own right (Ladson-Billings, 2014). This chapter adopts the term culturally sustaining pedagogy to recognize this evolution while drawing on the foundational theoretical contributions of both Gay and Ladson-Billings.

The theoretical foundation of culturally sustaining pedagogy comprises three interconnected dimensions: institutional, personal, and instructional (Richards et al., 2007). Arasaratnam-Smith and Deardorf (2022) have further developed the intercultural competence dimensions of this framework, arguing that effective educational responses to international student diversity require not only cultural awareness but also a structured, developmental approach to intercultural learning that faculty must themselves undergo before they can facilitate it in their students. Deardorff's (2006) pyramid model of intercultural competence identifies requisite attitudes, including openness, curiosity, and respect, as foundational elements that must precede the development of skills and knowledge, and that can only be assessed meaningfully through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. This developmental understanding of intercultural competence has direct implications for how institutions design professional development programs for faculty, since single-session workshops focused on cultural awareness cannot produce the attitudinal and dispositional shifts that genuine intercultural competence requires.

The three dimensions of culturally sustaining pedagogy provide the central organizing structure for the practical strategies section of this chapter. Rather than presenting teaching recommendations as a collection of discrete techniques, the strategies below are grouped under each dimension to make explicit how institutional, personal, and instructional factors must align for culturally sustaining pedagogy to be genuinely implemented rather than superficially adopted. Table 1 summarizes this framework.

Table 1. Summary of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Strategies by Dimension

Dimension	Focus	Key Strategies
Institutional	Policies, structures, workload recognition, and formal support systems	Workload recognition of invisible labor; reduced class sizes; international office mandates; curriculum design units; AI equity access policies; culturally competent mental health services
Personal	Faculty self-reflection, intercultural competence development, and cultural humility	Examining implicit bias; intercultural competence workshops (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2022); peer faculty mentoring; equity-focused pedagogical reflection
Instructional	Classroom delivery, assessment design, inclusive pedagogy, and digital tool integration	Transparent learning objectives; authentic assessments; stair-stepped assignments; collaborative structures; Generative AI pedagogy; multilingual scaffolding; peer mentoring

Note. Adapted from Richards et al. (2007) and Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith (2022).

FACULTY AS UNINTENTIONAL CULTURAL MEDIATORS: INVISIBLE PEDAGOGICAL LABOR

The demographic transformation of Canadian institutions has fundamentally altered faculty roles in ways that extend well beyond traditional instructional responsibilities. Faculty now function as de facto cultural mediators and educational translators, navigating between profoundly different educational worldviews, epistemological frameworks, and academic expectations. This mediation work represents a significant expansion of professional duties that most faculty neither anticipated when entering the profession nor received formal preparation to undertake. The role emerged not through deliberate institutional planning or revised position descriptions but through the immediate pragmatic demands of classroom management and the pressing need to support student success in increasingly diverse learning environments.

The concept of invisible pedagogical labor, as articulated through Staudt Willet and He's (2023) systematic review, captures the uncredited cognitive and emotional work that extends far beyond traditional teaching responsibilities. They observe

that "the hidden and overlooked nature of many of educators' professional activities complicates the already difficult task of supporting educators' labour" (p. 1). Faculty simultaneously teach course content while decoding cultural miscommunications, interpreting assignment expectations through multiple cultural lenses, and building trust across significant power-distance gaps. The sociological literature on emotional labor offers important theoretical grounding for understanding what is at stake. Hochschild's (2012) foundational analysis, and its subsequent application to higher education by Bellas (1999) and Viz Leutwiler et al. (2024), demonstrates that affective and relational work in academic settings is real, taxing, and consequential when it is performed without institutional acknowledgment or compensation.

Invisible pedagogical labor also encompasses a dimension that is rarely named explicitly: the intellectual work of acquiring and continuously updating cultural knowledge about students' diverse educational backgrounds. Faculty who encounter students from Indian higher education systems, Confucian-based East Asian systems, anglophone West African systems, and Latin American systems within the same classroom are expected to understand how each of these contexts has shaped students' expectations of teacher authority, appropriate participation, academic writing conventions, and help-seeking behavior. This knowledge does not emerge through intuition or goodwill; it requires sustained learning, access to relevant scholarship, and opportunities for structured reflection with colleagues. Institutions that provide none of these conditions, yet expect culturally responsive teaching, are requiring expertise they have not invested in developing.

The cumulative burden of invisible pedagogical labor is not distributed evenly across faculties or departments. Faculty who teach in programs with disproportionately high concentrations of international students, as is common in business, technology, and health sciences in Canadian colleges, carry a significantly larger invisible labor burden than colleagues in programs with predominantly domestic cohorts. This inequity is rarely acknowledged in workload allocation processes, creating conditions in which some faculty members subsidize the institution's international education commitments through their personal and professional resources, without recognition or compensation. A structurally just institutional response to this inequity begins with data: institutions should undertake systematic assessments of the cultural mediation demands embedded in different program contexts and use these assessments as the basis for workload equity adjustments.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PRACTICE

Institutional Dimension: Policies, Structures, and Formal Recognition

The institutional dimension of culturally sustaining pedagogy encompasses the decisions made above the level of the individual classroom that determine whether culturally responsive practice is supported, resourced, and sustained over time. Professional development in intercultural competence is one of the most consistently evidence-supported institutional investments in international student persistence (Yeh et al., 2021). Arasaratnam-Smith and Deardorf (2022) argue that effective intercultural competence development is longitudinal, requiring iterative exposure, structured reflection, and application across multiple cultural encounters before attitudinal and dispositional shifts become durable. Programs designed as single professional development events, however well-designed, cannot achieve the depth of transformation that sustained engagement with intercultural pedagogy requires.

Institutions should also ensure that academic integrity and plagiarism detection policies applied in internationalized classrooms are designed with awareness of the linguistic and cultural dimensions of academic communication. Policies calibrated for domestic students with full fluency in the conventions of Anglo-American academic writing may systematically disadvantage international students who are simultaneously learning both the content and the academic discourse conventions. A culturally sustaining institutional approach distinguishes between the intent to deceive and the lack of familiarity with citation and argumentation conventions, and provides formative rather than punitive responses to the latter. Similarly, recruitment practices should be reviewed to ensure that the academic preparation and language proficiency profile of admitted students is aligned with the institution's demonstrated capacity to support their learning, rather than being driven solely by revenue targets that exceed sustainable support thresholds.

Institutions should further consider how their program completion and academic standing policies affect international students specifically. Policies that do not account for the additional time some international students require to reach proficiency in the academic discourse conventions of their programs may produce significant academic attrition that is structurally driven rather than reflective of individual capability. Academic standing appeals processes, deferred assessment policies, and course withdrawal provisions should all be reviewed through the lens of the particular precarity that international students carry into every academic decision, so that institutional policy does not inadvertently amplify the very vulnerabilities that culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to address.

PERSONAL DIMENSION: FACULTY REFLECTION AND INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The personal dimension of culturally sustaining pedagogy concerns the reflective and developmental work that faculty must undertake as individuals. This is not a prerequisite to be completed before culturally sustaining practice can begin; it is an ongoing and iterative process that accompanies and deepens in response to teaching experience. Deardorff's (2006) Model of Intercultural Competence identifies openness, curiosity, and respect as foundational attitudinal requirements, noting that these dispositions cannot be assumed to be present in faculty simply because they are well-intentioned or experienced. Faculty are encouraged to examine their own educational histories and the cultural assumptions embedded in their understandings of effective teaching, appropriate student behavior, and legitimate forms of academic knowledge. Practices that feel natural or self-evidently correct to faculty formed in particular educational traditions may carry profoundly different meanings for students formed in others.

Building authentic relationships with students across cultural differences is itself a form of professional practice. Faculty who dedicate time before and after class to informal conversation, who learn the correct pronunciation of students' names, and who communicate genuine curiosity about students' perspectives and experiences create conditions in which trust can develop across power-distance gaps that formal institutional authority would otherwise reinforce. Research on faculty as cultural mediators confirms that the relational dimension of teaching carries particular weight for international students, for whom faculty may represent the primary access point to the academic environment of a foreign institution (Glass et al., 2017). The faculty member who treats cultural and linguistic diversity as an intellectual asset rather than an instructional inconvenience models a form of academic engagement that directly affects international students' sense of belonging and willingness to take the academic risks that deep learning requires.

Faculty should also be attentive to the ways in which their own disciplinary cultures carry implicit cultural assumptions that are often invisible to those formed within them. The conventions of argumentation, evidence, citation, and intellectual authority that structure academic discourse in business, the health sciences, information technology, and design are not culturally neutral; they are historically situated conventions that reflect particular traditions of knowledge-making and professional communication. Students whose prior education did not prepare them for these conventions are not deficient; they are being asked to assimilate into a professional discourse community whose rules were never made explicit to them. Faculty who make these rules visible, who teach them directly alongside course content rather

than assuming their prior acquisition, are performing some of the most important intellectual work in culturally sustaining pedagogy.

INSTRUCTIONAL DIMENSION: CLASSROOM PRACTICE ACROSS DIVERSE CONTEXTS

Understanding Diverse Educational Backgrounds

Effective pedagogical practice in multicultural classrooms begins with explicit acknowledgment that students enter postsecondary education with fundamentally different educational experiences and cultural frameworks for understanding the nature of learning itself. Students educated in systems that emphasize rote memorization, deference to instructors' expertise, and examination-based assessment may initially struggle with pedagogical approaches that prioritize critical thinking, independent analysis, student-led discussion, and formative assessment. These differences are not indicators of inequitable academic preparation but reflections of culturally situated perceptions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge and appropriate learning behavior (Macgregor & Folinazzo, 2018).

Because India accounts for 56.1% of all international college lments in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2024), faculty should develop specific familiarity with the academic preparation profile of students from Indian higher education institutions. Students from India often bring strong technical and quantitative preparation, experience with large lecture-format instruction, and familiarity with high-stakes examination cultures, but may have had limited exposure to participatory seminar discussion, collaborative assessment, and the expectation of challenging instructors' positions in academic discourse. Faculty who understand this profile can design entry points into these practices that build from existing strengths rather than treating unfamiliarity with North American pedagogical conventions as a deficiency. Students educated within Confucian-based educational traditions common to China, Japan, South Korea, and other East Asian contexts often bring different understandings of classroom authority, appropriate silence, and the relationship between individual expression and collective harmony. Research on Japanese students has documented comfort with extended silence as a thoughtful response to questions (Kim et al., 2016), while Chinese students studying abroad have reported conflict between the North American expectation of public questioning and cultural norms that associate such questioning with causing embarrassment for themselves or the instructor (Zhou et al., 2021).

International students from sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America represent significant and growing populations in Canadian institutions,

yet they receive comparatively little attention in the pedagogy literature, which has historically been dominated by studies of East Asian student experiences. Faculty should approach cultural context as a useful starting point for understanding, without treating it as a deterministic explanation for individual student behavior. Cultural generalizations, when applied without sensitivity or nuance, risk becoming a form of stereotyping that undermines the very relationships culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to build. The goal of cultural knowledge is to expand the range of possible interpretations a faculty member brings to classroom interactions, not to reduce students to predictable cultural types.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE, AND ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Effective cross-cultural communication in the classroom requires faculty to traverse communication patterns bidirectionally, both interpreting the diverse interaction styles that international students bring to the classroom and helping students understand the expectations of Canadian academic discourse. Language cannot be held as the sole challenge faced by international students; effective pedagogical approaches recognize the complex interplay of cultural, social, economic, behavioral, and psychological factors that inform all forms of engagement with education (Glass et al., 2017). Students with strong technical English skills may nevertheless struggle to process content delivered rapidly, follow discussions that assume familiarity with Canadian cultural references, or decode the implicit rhetorical expectations of academic writing in disciplines that value different forms of argumentation.

Digital communication can play an important role in alleviating language barriers by offering students alternative channels in which to communicate with peers and instructors, both as part of real-time class activities (Kim et al., 2016) and as tools to support academic success (Dean & Men, 2024). Faculty can effectively support comprehension by providing visual reinforcement of key concepts, ensuring course materials are available in advance to allow necessary preview, incorporating regular comprehension checks, allowing additional processing time during discussions, and minimizing idiomatic or culturally specific language that may confuse students from other discourse communities. These practices benefit all students, not only those for whom English is an additional language, by creating multiple pathways to understanding and reducing the cognitive load associated with processing new information in challenging formats.

Generative AI, Digital Tools, and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

The rapid integration of emerging technologies such as Generative AI into students' academic practices represents one of the most significant developments in the current higher education landscape, and its pedagogical implications for international students are both substantial and underexplored. Students are increasingly turning to tools such as ChatGPT and other large language model applications for language support, structural writing assistance, content comprehension, and academic communication. For international students navigating the dual challenges of content learning and English language development, Generative AI presents a genuinely useful resource: it can assist with grammar checking, sentence restructuring, translation support, and the clarification of complex academic concepts in ways that reduce the anxiety and cognitive overload associated with academic work in a second language.

However, the adoption of Generative AI in academic contexts also presents risks that are particularly consequential for international students committed to genuine language and critical thinking development. When AI tools complete communicative tasks that students should be building competency in, they may produce satisfactory academic outputs without the developmental growth the task was designed to generate. Faculty who incorporate discussion of how AI tools function, their cultural and linguistic biases, and how to critically evaluate AI-generated content are providing genuinely useful digital literacy instruction. The training data of most widely used large language models reflects a strong Anglo-American cultural and linguistic bias, meaning that responses generated in response to culturally specific prompts may not reflect the epistemological frameworks or rhetorical conventions relevant to students from other educational traditions. Teaching students to identify and critically interrogate this bias is itself a form of culturally sustaining instruction.

Authentic assessments represent the most effective pedagogical response to the presence of AI in student academic practice. When assessments require students to demonstrate thinking that is specific to their individual experience, to engage in dialogue with peers or instructors, or to apply knowledge in context-dependent ways that cannot be easily replicated by a prompt, they serve the dual purpose of maintaining academic integrity and creating genuine learning opportunities. Portfolio assessments, process-documented assignments, reflective journals, and structured oral assessments are all examples of authentic assessment formats that engage meaningfully with cultural diversity while remaining resistant to AI substitution by design. Faculty should also be attentive to equity dimensions of AI access: not all international students have equivalent financial access to premium AI tools, and

institutional policies that assume uniform access will inadvertently create new forms of educational inequality among an already economically precarious population.

Collaborative Learning in Multicultural Classrooms

Collaborative learning activities offer valuable opportunities for international students to learn from diverse perspectives, develop intercultural communication skills, and build supportive academic communities. Poorly structured collaborative activities, however, can inadvertently reinforce existing social divisions, marginalize students less comfortable with North American participation norms, or create unequal learning experiences where some students contribute disproportionately. Intentional structuring with clear roles, defined responsibilities, and individual accountability mechanisms reduces these risks and creates conditions for the collaborative benefits of multicultural groupings to be realized (Edmead, 2013). Faculty should provide explicit guidance on collaboration across cultural differences and monitor group dynamics to ensure equitable participation.

Peer mentoring represents a particularly valuable form of structured support for international students. Students from collectivist or high power-distance cultures often view fellow students as important allies in their academic success and may be more comfortable seeking guidance from peers than from instructors (Zhao et al., 2013). Institutional peer mentoring programs that pair experienced students with newly arrived international students extend the support network beyond the classroom and reduce the demand on individual faculty to serve as the primary, and often only, point of contact for all student challenges. These programs also create intercultural learning opportunities for domestic students who serve as mentors, developing the intercultural competencies that will serve them in increasingly diverse professional environments.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

Assessment practices in multicultural classrooms must be designed to authentically measure student learning rather than students' familiarity with culturally specific communication conventions or their comfort with particular assessment formats. Traditional assessment methods that privilege certain forms of expression, emphasize speed over depth of understanding, or assume familiarity with Western rhetorical structures may systematically disadvantage students from different educational backgrounds, even when those students possess strong conceptual knowledge (Ryan & Viete, 2009). Culturally sustaining assessment involves diversifying evaluation methods to include multiple ways for students to demonstrate knowledge, provid-

ing clear criteria and exemplars that make implicit expectations explicit, offering opportunities for revision and improvement based on formative feedback, and distinguishing between content knowledge and language proficiency in evaluation.

Stair-stepped assignments that break complex tasks into manageable components with iterative feedback serve international students particularly well by providing structured opportunities to develop understanding progressively rather than attempting to demonstrate mastery in a single high-stakes submission. Clear rubrics that define what constitutes successful performance while allowing flexibility in how students meet those standards reduce the anxiety associated with unfamiliar assessment formats and make the implicit criteria of Canadian academic culture visible and learnable. Providing students with choices in how they demonstrate their learning, including portfolio options, oral presentations, practical demonstrations, and creative formats, further reduces the barrier between students' actual capabilities and what conventional assessment formats allow them to show.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR GRADUATE AND POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS

The pedagogical strategies described in this chapter apply across postsecondary levels, but graduate and post-graduate international students face a distinct set of cultural expectations and engagement challenges that warrant specific consideration. Graduate students in research programs are typically expected to exercise a high degree of intellectual independence, to challenge the positions of their supervisors and colleagues, and to contribute original thinking to scholarly conversations. These expectations may conflict significantly with the academic socialization of students from systems in which the supervisor-student relationship is understood as hierarchical and in which deference to established scholarly authority is the norm. Supervisors and graduate instructors should explicitly discuss these expectations and provide structured opportunities for students to develop their scholarly voice in low-stakes contexts before being evaluated on it in high-stakes ones.

Post-graduate students enrolled in professional programs face the additional challenge of navigating work placement and practicum requirements in Canadian workplace cultures that carry their own implicit norms around communication, authority, initiative, and professional conduct. Institutional supports for post-graduate international students should include preparation for workplace cultural expectations as well as academic ones. Faculty supervisors should be equipped to provide guidance in this area or to connect students with the relevant institutional resources. The absence of this preparation contributes to the gap between academic performance and workplace integration that affects many international graduates'

post-graduation success, which in turn reflects on institutional performance metrics and permits allocation outcomes.

CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY AS A BENEFIT FOR ALL STUDENTS

The pedagogical investments advocated in this chapter are sometimes perceived as accommodations for international students at the expense of domestic students, or as a lowering of academic standards in the service of inclusion. This perception is both empirically incorrect and strategically counterproductive for those seeking to build institutional support for culturally sustaining practice, and addressing it early and explicitly is therefore important. When faculty approach teaching with genuine curiosity about the diverse educational experiences students bring, explicitly teach the conventions of Canadian academic discourse that domestic students also often assume rather than fully understand, and design assessments that require authentic demonstration of learning rather than familiarity with conventional academic formats, they create conditions that benefit all students in the classroom.

Domestic students who learn and work alongside international students in classrooms structured for genuine intercultural engagement develop the intercultural competencies that Arasaratnam-Smith and Deardorf (2022) identify as increasingly essential for professional success in globalized workplaces and communities. The exposure to diverse perspectives, communication styles, and epistemological frameworks that characterize a well-managed multicultural classroom challenges domestic students' assumptions, broadens their analytical repertoires, and prepares them for the kinds of cross-cultural collaboration that will define much of their professional lives. Faculty who design instruction that recognizes cultural diversity as a pedagogical strength rather than an instructional burden create learning communities where all students can thrive academically while developing the critical consciousness necessary for engaged citizenship in multicultural societies. The argument for culturally sustaining practice is therefore not a special interest argument on behalf of a subset of students; it is an argument for educational quality that benefits every member of the learning community.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that the pedagogical challenges created by Canada's international student surge, compounded by the policy-driven decline and the global pattern of restrictions it reflects, require a response that is both instructional and

structural. The invisible labor of culturally sustaining pedagogy is real, substantial, and currently uncompensated in ways that are neither equitable to faculty nor sustainable for institutions. The implicit contract established when students invest in Canadian education demands more than individual instructor commitment; it demands institutional accountability expressed through policy change, workload recognition, resource allocation, and the structural reorganization of support services.

The evidence from comparable contexts, including Australia and the United Kingdom, demonstrates that policy-driven enrollment contraction does not diminish the pedagogical complexity of serving diverse international student populations; it intensifies it by concentrating financial and immigration precarity among those who do l, reducing the institutional revenue available for support investment at precisely the moment that accountability for student success intensifies. Canadian institutions would benefit from engaging with this comparative evidence as a proactive planning resource rather than waiting to encounter these dynamics reactively.

The instructional strategies described in this chapter offer faculty genuinely effective tools for supporting international student success across a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Transparent learning objectives, authentic and AI-resistant assessments, scaffolded assignments, collaborative structures that build genuine intercultural engagement, and the formal acknowledgment of digital tools, including Generative AI as part of the pedagogical landscape, are all practices that serve the chapter's central argument: that international students deserve instruction designed to maximize their genuine learning, not merely their compliance with conventions they were never taught. The development of intercultural competence in both faculty and students, understood as a developmental and longitudinal process in the tradition of Deardorff's (2006) process model, is the foundational investment on which all other pedagogical strategies depend. This competence cannot be transmitted through a single professional development workshop or satisfied by a generic diversity training module; it must be embedded in the institution's ongoing professional life as a sustained commitment to educational quality.

The global comparative evidence examined in this chapter suggests that the current period of enrollment restriction, while creating genuine financial and operational challenges for Canadian institutions, also presents an opportunity for strategic repositioning. Institutions that use this period to deepen their investment in culturally sustaining pedagogy, to formalize their recognition of invisible pedagogical labor, and to restructure their support services around the documented needs of international students will be better positioned to attract and retain high-calibre international students when permit conditions stabilize or expand. Those that respond to enrollment contraction primarily through cost reduction will emerge from this period with diminished pedagogical capacity and a weaker claim on the institutional obligations implicit in the contract. The choice between these trajectories is

not merely an administrative decision; it is a statement of institutional values with consequences for every student, domestic and international, who passes through the institution's programs.

The benefits of this approach extend to all students and to the institutions that commit to it. As Canada's international student landscape continues to evolve in response to policy, demographic, and economic pressures, the institutions best positioned to fulfil their obligations under the implicit contract will be those that have invested deliberately and structurally in the conditions for culturally sustaining practice, and that have treated international student success not as a downstream consequence of enrollment management but as the central educational purpose for which these institutions exist.

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