

International education policymaking: A case study of Ontario's Trillium Scholarship Program

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION POLICYMAKING: A CASE STUDY OF ONTARIO'S TRILLIUM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

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Abstract

This paper explores Ontario's international education policy landscape through illuminating the discursive struggles to define international student funding policies, in particular the international doctoral students' Trillium Scholarship. Adopting Hajer's (1993, 2006) Discourse Coalition Framework, the study engages with three research questions: What paved the way to this funding policy? Who were the actors engaged in this policy landscape? How has the argumentation over this policy influenced the international education policy context in Ontario? Argumentative discourse analysis was used to analyze three data sources: news articles, policy documents, and interviews. Two storylines were identified: international student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario versus Ontario first. Whereas the first storyline achieved hegemony, the second succeeded in bringing discourses of protectionism to the forefront influencing the government's future engagement with international student funding. The paper ends with three observations on Ontario's international education policy landscape. This study contributes to our understanding of how international student funding can be highly political and influenced by non-education policy spaces and discourses.

Keywords: international education policy, international student funding, discourse coalition framework, argumentative discourse analysis, Ontario, Canada

Résumé

Cet article examine le paysage des politiques publiques en matière d'éducation internationale en Ontario en mettant en lumière les luttes discursives pour définir les politiques relatives au financement des étudiants étrangers. Il se concentre particulièrement sur le Programme de bourses ontariennes d'études Trillium (BOÉT). Adoptant le concept des coalitions discursives, la présente étude pose trois questions : Qu'est-ce qui a ouvert la voie à cette politique de financement? Qui étaient les acteurs de ce paysage politique? Comment l'argumentation sur cette politique de financement a-t-elle influencé le contexte des politiques publiques relatives à l'éducation internationale en Ontario? L'analyse du discours argumentatif a été utilisée pour analyser trois sources de données : des articles de presse, des documents de politique, et des entrevues. Deux lignes narratives sont ressorties : *Le financement des étudiants étrangers est souhaitable et bénéfique pour l'Ontario, et l'Ontario d'abord*. Alors que la première est devenue hégémonique, la seconde a réussi à mettre les discours protectionnistes au premier plan, influençant ainsi l'engagement futur du gouvernement en matière de financement des étudiants étrangers. L'article se termine par trois observations sur le paysage des politiques publiques relatives à l'éducation internationale en Ontario. Cette étude contribue à notre compréhension de la façon dont la question du financement des étudiants étrangers peut être hautement politique ainsi qu'influencée par des espaces et des discours qui ne sont pas liés à l'éducation.

Mots-clés : politique d'éducation internationale, financement des étudiants étrangers, coalitions discursives, analyse du discours argumentatif, Ontario, Canada

Introduction

On November 4, 2010, Ontarians woke to an announcement made by then-premier of Ontario Dalton McGuinty

speaking to professors and students at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in China.¹ He announced that Ontario had established the Trillium Scholarship,² providing 75 of the world's best students with

\$40,000 each year for up to four years to pursue doctoral studies at an Ontario university. This paper engages with the Trillium Scholarship as an “emblematic issue” (Hajer, 1995, p. 276) that illustrates shifts in international students’ funding policy discourse and facilitates conceptual and institutional change in the international education policy landscape in Ontario. The Trillium Scholarship represents a larger debate over international student funding. As an emblematic issue, this scholarship debate captures the complexity of international student funding policies and illustrates how biases are mobilized to influence the way in which people understand larger international education policies.

Much of the post-secondary international education policy research in Canada focuses on the role of supranational organizations (e.g., Tamtik, 2017; Viczko, 2012), the state (e.g., Cover, 2016; McCartney, 2016; Trilokekar, 2010; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2017); post-secondary education institutions (e.g., El Masri et al., 2015; Jones & Olesksiyenko, 2011; Taskoh, 2014; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016); and non-government actors (Viczko, 2012, 2013; Viczko & Tascon, 2016; Williams et al., 2015). However, very few studies have attempted to probe the relationality between actors or map international education actors more broadly. Using Hajer’s Discourse Coalition Framework (1995), this study goes beyond examining individual actors by interrogating the power of language through following discourses and examining their agency in creating new meanings and attracting diverse actors.

This paper contributes to our understanding of international students’ funding policies which can be highly political and mixed with many other policy spaces and discourses. Findings of this study empower policy actors with the knowledge of how discourses and argumentative skills influence the way people construct policy problems and solutions. This knowledge is critical for those who look to shift the course of the political struggle by mobilizing discourses that appeal to wider audiences.

This paper starts with a brief history of international student (IS) funding policies in Ontario to set the context followed by a description of the theoretical framework and research methodology. The Trillium Scholarship policy is then examined as an argumentative site that has influenced IS funding discourse in Ontario. The paper ends with three observations on Ontario’s international education policy landscape in general and IS funding in specific.

Background

In order to understand the importance of the Trillium Scholarship as a moment where routinized proceedings were interrupted and policy change emerged (Hajer, 1995), it is important to understand the history of IS funding in Ontario from the 1960s to the early 2000s, right before the scholarship was announced.

IS funding policies in Ontario can be traced to the period following the Second World War. At the time, IS did not pay any differential fees and many were funded by different federal scholarship programs such as the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship program (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019). IS were perceived as “worthy recipients of Canadian aid” and ambassadors serving Canada’s Cold War foreign policy and trade interests (McCartney, 2016, p. 1). However, in the late 1960s, parliamentarians started raising questions about the costs of funding IS using Canadian tax payers’ money (McCartney, 2016). Gradually, differential tuition fees for IS were introduced in different Canadian provinces with Ontario and Alberta leading the way in 1977 and seven provinces establishing the same by 1986 (Kim & Sondhi, 2019). The differential fees were based on a cost recovery model rationalized by the increase in IS numbers coupled with no accompanying increases in per capita educational transfers from the federal government (Kim & Sondhi, 2019). International education programs, mostly exchange programs, flourished in Ontario from the 1980s until early 1990s, yet they did not include any provincial funding for IS. The mid-1990s was the beginning of a period of cut backs for international education due to a broad expenditure restraint (Wolfe, 2000). Health coverage for IS, formerly covered under the Ontario Health Insurance Program, was eliminated (Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario, 2017) and international tuition fees were deregulated in 1996. Interest in the financial benefits of IS recruitment paved the way for increased collaboration between the federal government, the provincial governments, and post-secondary education (PSE) institutions to promote Canadian higher education internationally to recruit fee-paying IS (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019). Upon assuming office in 2005, Premier McGuinty commissioned a review of Ontario’s higher education sector. The report recommended developing “a comprehensive strategy for marketing Ontario’s higher education sector abroad” (Rae, 2005, p. 58). As a response, the Ontario government allocated \$1

million in 2006–2007, \$3 million in 2007–2008, and \$5 million in 2008–2009 and beyond to support the internationalization of Ontario's PSE sector and to sustain and enhance Ontario's competitive position in an increasingly globalized environment (Steenkamp, 2008).

To summarize, Ontario's IS tuition policies changed from full funding (prior to 1977) to a cost recovery model (1977) and then to tuition deregulation (1996). In the early 2000s, the province identified the need to increase its share of globally mobile students by further engaging in the global race for fee-paying IS recruitment. At a time when IS recruitment was perceived as an industry contributing \$4.1 billion to the Canadian economy (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, 2009, p. viii), the Ontario government announced the Trillium Scholarship for doctoral international students in 2010. This scholarship constructed IS as an investment worthy of the tax payers' money rather than merely a source of revenue. This paper asks: What paved the way to this funding policy change? Who were the actors engaged in this policy landscape? How has the argumentation over this policy influenced the international education policy context in Ontario?

Theoretical Framework

The Discourse Coalition Framework (DCF) conceptualizes politics and policies as struggles for discursive dominance where discourse facilitates and/or restricts actors in their attempt to persuade others to support their definitions of the social world (Hajer, 1995). Hajer (1995) introduces the concept of discourse coalitions to refer to "the ensemble of (1) set of story-lines; (2) the actors who utter these story-lines; and (3) the practices in which this discursive activity is based" over a particular period of time (p. 65).

Storylines work metaphorically through referring to complex and wide debates in "simplified narratives" (Bingham, 2010, p. 6). They are highly interpretive and reproductive, providing different actors with different ways of thinking about a problem (Fischer, 2003). DCF contends that actors are attracted to storylines that "sound...right" because of their plausibility and the perceived credibility of the actors mobilizing them (Hajer, 1995, p. 63).

Coalition members do not necessarily know each other, share interests, beliefs or values, or coordinate efforts, yet they adhere together around a particular way

of seeing or defining a policy problem (Fischer, 2003). Storylines create communicative networks among actors with different or, at best, overlapping perceptions and understandings, as they can mask contradictions and misunderstandings between coalition members (Hajer, 2006). DCF argues that policy making depends on the loss of meaning and multi-interpretability of the storyline that leads to the discursive closure which facilitates policy change (Fischer, 2003; Hajer, 1995). Policy change occurs when two conditions are achieved. First is *discourse structuration*, which Hajer variously defines as occurring when "a discourse starts to dominate the way a society conceptualizes the world" (Hajer, 1993, p. 46) or when "a discourse coalition...dominates the discursive space; that is, central actors are persuaded by, or forced to accept, the rhetorical power of a new discourse" (pp. 47–48). Second is *discourse institutionalization*, which is when this new discourse is "reflected in the institutional practices of that political domain; that is, the actual policy process is conducted according to the ideas of a given discourse" (p. 48). Once both discourse structuration and institutionalization are achieved, a discourse coalition is deemed dominant.

Hajer (1995) argues that certain issues within a policy landscape should be examined as case studies as they represent a "typical example of an emblem" (p. 265). The political importance of emblems is that they mobilize biases in and out of policy debates and become the issues in terms of which people understand the larger whole of the policy condition. These emblematic issues capture the complexity of the policy debate, illustrate shifts in policy discourse, and facilitate larger conceptual shifts (Bingham, 2010; Hajer, 2006).

Methodology and Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach following Hajer's (2006) steps for doing argumentative discourse analysis. This paper reports some of the findings of a larger study³ on international education policy making in Ontario from 2005 to 2017, which utilized three data sources. First was the media coverage of international education in the three highest circulation newspapers in Ontario: the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post*. Search engines were used, such as CBCA Complete (Education) and Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies. Based on a scan of the newspapers'

keywords, a list of key search words was developed. A final corpus of 415 relevant news stories was identified. As the newspaper articles were downloaded from the ProQuest Canadian Newspapers database, they did not retain their formatting and pagination. As a result, it is difficult to refer to page numbers or paragraph numbers in the in-text citations for quotes from these articles. Instead, I only refer to the author and year for each citation. Policy documents that were mentioned in the media and by the study participants were compiled and a total of 195 policy documents were accessed through interviewees, relevant organizations' websites, or access to information requests.

Study participants were identified based on the media and document analysis as well as snowball sampling. A total of 23 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, between May and October 2017, with policy actors that included federal and provincial politicians, civil servants, national and provincial special interest groups, and media. This paper focuses on data relevant to the Trillium Scholarship.

Following the principles of argumentative discourse analysis (Hajer, 2006), I examined what was said, by whom, to whom, in what context; how actors interacted with one another; and if and how actors' discourses changed and in what contexts change occurred (Hajer, 2006). Contents of the newspaper articles, policy documents, and interviews were coded identifying key discourses, those uttering them, and the socioeconomic political contexts. I started by giving a brief description (code) of sentence(s) that mobilized a certain discourse. Gradually, I started to develop a list of codes that emerged from the data (e.g., IS recruitment, revenue generation, research and innovation, and competition with international jurisdictions). Once all the texts were coded, they were reviewed to determine storylines by assembling codes that fit together into one storyline and actors mobilizing them into a discourse coalition. A chronology of events was constructed capturing the provincial, national, and global policies and events in relation to the emergence, divergence, and convergence of storylines and coalition memberships. One limitation of this research is the exclusion of audiovisual and social media data. Another limitation is the fact that the researcher was unable to access the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities archives that were not open to the public in order to retrieve policy documents relevant to this scholarship (refer to end note 5 for further details).

Findings

This section starts by examining the discursive context prior to the Trillium Scholarship announcement, followed by a discussion and analysis of the discursive struggle over IS funding focusing on the Trillium Scholarship.

Ontario's Discursive Context Pre-Trillium Scholarship Announcement

In examining the international education discourses in Ontario prior to the Trillium Scholarship announcement, it was evident that all actors and the discourses they mobilized saw international education as an imperative in the current globalized 21st century. However, actors had very diverse understandings of why and how Ontario should engage with international education in general and with international students in specific. Hence, while the study identifies one dominant storyline (*Internationalize*), three subset storylines that float in the international education policy scape were evident (for further discussion on the evolution of these storylines in context of global, national, and provincial contexts refer to El Masri, 2020):

Internationalize—it is good for the economy (Economy)

Assembling four discourses, the Economy storyline promoted internationalization as an imperative for Canada's and Ontario's economies and future prosperity. The first discourse focused on the role international education plays in enhancing Ontario's business and trade opportunities, transforming Ontario into a business hub, and enhancing "future ties with Asia [and emerging economies]" through IS recruitment, exchange programs, and partnerships with Asian companies (York, 2006). The second emphasized the role of international education in advancing Ontario's innovation and research agenda where attracting and retaining talent was crucial. This concern was amplified by a recognition that the global landscape was shifting, as countries that traditionally exported their talent were now working on attracting them back (Wheeler, 2009). The third discourse revolved around the financial incentives of international education, which gained importance with the 2009 global recession. When the government started to face financial challenges and PSE institutions were faced with shrink-

ing budgets, IS recruitment as a means to generate revenue intensified. A 2009 federally commissioned report (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, 2009) that quantified the economic contribution of IS to the Canadian economy in terms of revenue and job creation was described as a “very seminal piece” (Interview, Provincial Special Interest Group (SIG): PSE) that “shifted...how we see international students [highlighting]...economic arguments” (Interview, National SIG). The fourth discourse focused on the retention of IS as they were perceived to be an excellent source of skilled labour and a solution to Canada’s aging population and low birthrate (Taylor, 2009).

The Economy storyline attracted coalition members from different scales and spaces. This storyline was heavily mobilized by federal and provincial government agencies such as those responsible for finance, foreign affairs, PSE, industry and innovation, economic development, and trade. This storyline was also mobilized by diverse special interest groups (SIGs), both on the national and provincial levels representing PSE institutions as well as research, economy, and student recruitment agencies. Faculty and student groups were more invested in the innovation and business discourses. The Economy storyline attracted international and transnational actors such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as well as international actors from Australia, the United States, and Brazil. This storyline was mobilized by actors that are not traditionally involved in the international education policy landscape, such as employers, private talent acquisition consultancies, independent scientists and researchers, immigration lawyers, and business, foreign affairs, and science and technology journalists.

Internationalize, yet manage its risks (Risks)

While advocating for internationalization, this storyline highlighted the need to mitigate the risks associated with international education. The Risks storyline attracted three different, sometimes competing, discourses. The first discourse was concerned with protecting IS from victimization, fraud, and substandard services. Concerns were raised over the dubious and shady practices of some private “unscrupulous operators of degree mills that cater to the foreign market and don’t meet proper accreditation standards” (Cohn, 2010) and warned against treating IS as “cash cows to be milked relentlessly” (McQuaig, 2012). Coalition members expressed concern that IS were being exploited to make up

for gaps in revenue. This discourse questioned the ethics of IS recruitment, without providing them with quality services, stressing the need to “ensure that we are also good hosts rather than simply avaricious landlords to international guests who come here to study” (Di Matteo, 2010). The second discourse was concerned with protecting Canadians from non-genuine IS who use the student visa route to enter Canada and/or Ontario. Some were concerned about foreigners gaining illegal access to the immigration system through fraudulent IS status (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2010). Others, particularly some groups representing medical students, were invested in the discourse of protecting domestic students from foreign competition for university and medical residency spots. The third discourse focused on protecting the quality of the learning experience at Ontario PSE institutions by safeguarding the quality of the educational experiences for both domestic and international students and ensuring that Ontario does not “award degrees that are inferior to degrees elsewhere” (Church, 2010). This discourse frequently referred to the Australian experience and the challenges it faced in terms of declining quality, tarnished reputation, and financial instability (Cohn, 2010).

Ministries overseeing immigration and education emerged as the main champions of this storyline. Students, faculty, PSE institutions, recruitment, research, rights and freedoms lawyers and special interest groups were active mobilizers of this storyline, as well as foreign governments, parents of international students, and representatives of international recruitment agencies of sending countries calling for guarantees for IS safety and quality of their educational experiences.

Internationalize—it is Canada’s gateway to the world (Gateway)

The Gateway storyline constructed international education as fundamental to exchange knowledge, develop global citizenship, and build cultural bridges. It assembled two discourses. First is the educational discourse which emphasized the value of internationalizing PSE to help develop “leading thinkers in our global society” (Shoukri, 2010; Shoukri was then president of York University). PSE institutions are perceived to be the “safe space” where “bridging intercultural pathways and building understandings” can happen through exposing students “to different ideas and different cultures and dif-

ferent languages” (Interview, Provincial SIG: Students). Second is the global image discourse, which perceived international education as quiet diplomacy and soft power where countries, through their scholars, researchers, and students, engaged in dialogue and friendly argumentations to address conflict resolutions (McWhinney, 2010). Many participants argued that Ontario’s PSE institutions should “go out to the world” and help build the capacity of developing countries (Interview, Provincial Civil Servant). In this discourse, internationalization was connected to Ontario’s diplomatic relations with the world. It perceived “education [a]s a door to the international community” (Interview, National SIG).

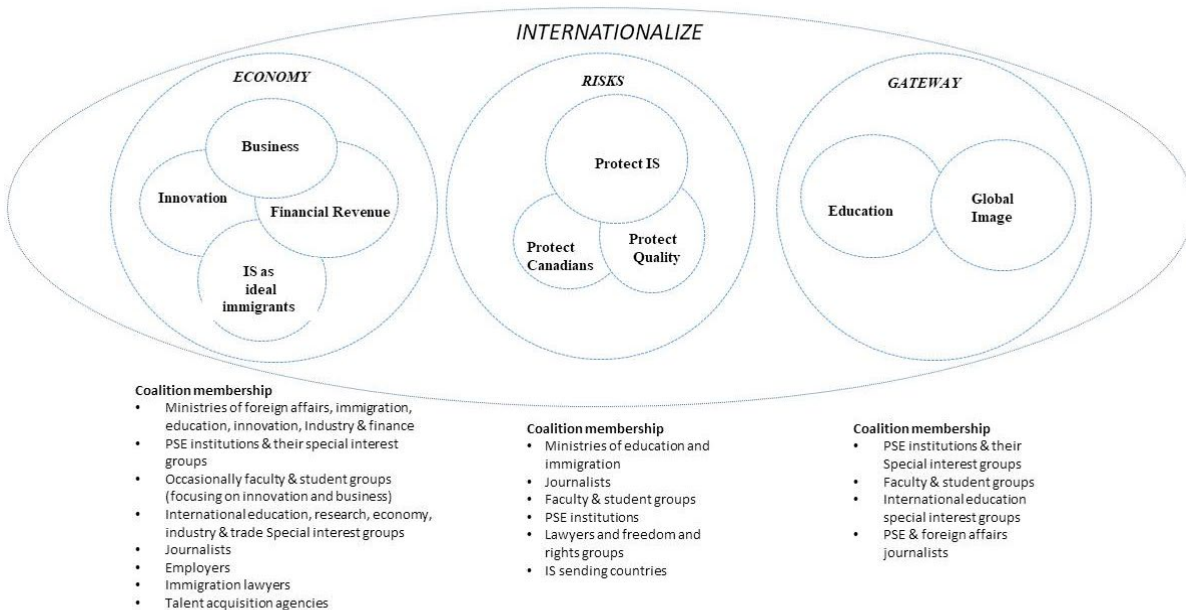
The Gateway storyline attracted the fewest coalition members as champions, in terms of number and diversity. PSE institutions (administration, faculty, and students) and a few special interest groups (faculty, students, and PSE institutions) were the primary mobilizers of this discourse. Frequently, this storyline was mobilized in support of a more dominant Economy or Risks storyline

Hence, towards the end of 2010 and prior to the announcement of the Trillium Scholarship, three main storylines were mobilized as represented in Figure 1.

The Open Ontario Plan (2010)

In 2010, Ontario, and the rest of the world, was coming out of a period of recession that had taken a toll on its economy. Ontario was arguably hit harder than other Canadian provinces due to the direct effect of the global recession on its manufacturing and forestry sectors (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2010). Ontario’s budget surplus in 2007–2008 changed into a projected \$21.3 billion budget deficit for 2009–2010 (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2010). Despite the deficit, the government invested in the PSE sector by increasing operating grants by \$310 million in 2010–2011, adding 20,000 new student spaces, and providing \$155 million to fully support enrolment growth (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2010).

The *Open Ontario Plan*, as the name indicates, reflected the goal to open up to the rest of the world. In regards to the PSE sector, the goal was to make Ontario “one of the leading jurisdictions” in the world (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2010, p. 6). To achieve this goal, Ontario aimed, following the recommendations of the report commissioned by Premier McGuinty, to “aggressively promot[e] Ontario postsecondary schools abroad to encourage the world’s best students to study here, settle here and help Ontario build a stronger economy” (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2010, p. 7). The *Open Ontario Plan* set a



The dotted lines that surround the three storylines and the discourses they assemble are meant to reflect the fact that membership of these storylines is fluid. Actors moved in and out of these storylines depending on the context and the policy site.

Figure 1. Ontario’s discursive context prior to the Trillium Scholarship announcement

goal to “increase international student numbers by 50 per cent” (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2010, p. xvii). There was a strong recognition that IS were “more financially rewarding for our postsecondary institutions than are our domestic students” (Interview, Politician: Provincial government). To support his argument, Premier McGuinty frequently referred to the 2009 federally commissioned report that quantified the economic return of IS and “started to put it in all of his speeches and discussions about how much money international students [brought to Ontario], not just money from tuition but also the kind of contribution to the economy in terms of housing and food and all of that” (Interview, Politician: Provincial government). McGuinty was also quoted frequently in the media referring to Australia’s success making international education “its third-largest industry” (Howlett, 2010).

The goal to increase the number of IS in Ontario’s PSE sector generated a lot of debate. It appealed to different coalitions for different reasons. It appealed to the Economy discourse coalition as some saw in it a chance to generate much-needed revenue for the cash-stripped PSE sector and to stimulate the economy by creating jobs (Benzie, 2010a). For others, IS represented a pool of talent that could infuse the environment of innovation at universities. Others saw this as a chance to address labour market shortages and aging population. This policy also appealed to the Gateway coalition members. Some valued exposing domestic students to diverse cultures, knowledges, and perspectives, whereas others saw it as an opportunity to establish and/or enhance Ontario’s image and ambassadorship across the world stage. However, some Risks coalition members expressed concern that IS would displace Ontario students and/or reduce the quality of Ontario’s PSE sector as institutions might attract and enrol unqualified IS to increase their revenue. Other Risks coalition members warned against treating education as a commodity and IS as “cash-cows” (Interview, Provincial SIG: PSE). However, McGuinty and his government consistently argued that IS would not crowd out domestic students, citing the *Open Ontario Plan*’s commitment to fund new spaces, as well as the McGuinty government’s commitment to increasing access to PSE. The 2010 provincial budget promised “to improve access to colleges and universities for Ontarians by subsidizing them with fees from international students” (Benzie, 2010a). Similarly, the 2011 budget set the goal to “increase international enrolment

by 50 per cent while maintaining spaces for Ontario students” (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2011, p. 41).

Trillium Scholarship: An Announcement “which caused...no end of headaches”⁴

It is within this context of heated debate over the benefits and risks of increasing the enrolment of fee-paying IS that the Trillium Scholarship was suddenly announced. McGuinty was on an official visit to China where educational ties between the two countries were on the agenda. During that visit, “he was going into a dinner and [without any prior notice] they [Chinese officials] wanted to have him announce something quite grand” (Interview, Politician: Provincial government), so he announced the Trillium Scholarship, which provides 75 of the world’s best students with \$40,000 each year for up to four years to pursue doctoral studies at an Ontario university. This announcement came as a surprise to all those involved, including the McGuinty government in Ontario. According to many participants, the Trillium Scholarship was actually part of a more comprehensive “international proposal.”⁵ However, participants agreed that there were “no plans to announce it at that time” (Interview, Politician: Provincial government). An interviewee regretted that “instead of...announcing it as part of the whole, the Premier let it slip in a scrum in China” (Interview, Provincial SIG: PSE). A participant reflected on this, saying “I mean, it wasn’t very well coordinated to roll out...it was just a last minute thing to announce in a very grand way in China without that coordination back in Ontario” (Interview, Politician: Provincial government).

The timing of this announcement is critical for two reasons. First, it was made in China and, due to the time difference between the two countries, members of the McGuinty government in Ontario were:

kind of hit [by the news as they] went into the question period [at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario the following day]...and there was one question asked [about the Premier’s announcement for which the liberal cabinet members]...didn’t have all of the facts at [their]...fingertips and the Conservative party just... went to absolute town on it. They never asked the question again...and then once...[the Liberal cabinet] had all of the facts and figures, it was too late. (Interview, Politician: Provincial government)

The second timing issue pertains to the fact that the 2011 provincial election was approaching and this scholarship “became an election issue” (Interview, Civil Servant). A participant recalled that opposition parties portrayed the scholarship as a “scandal” since the government was “spending more money on foreign students than on domestic students and they [opposition parties] would cancel the program right away [if elected]” (Interview, Civil Servant). The debate over funding IS, manifested in the argumentation over the Trillium Scholarship, intensified.

Emergence of Two Storylines

The argumentative struggle over the Trillium Scholarship led to divergences and convergences in the international education storylines in Ontario and the emergence of two storylines: International student funding is desirable and good for Ontario versus the Ontario first storyline.

The creation of the Trillium Scholarship allowed for multiple interpretations of the importance of IS funding. For the Economy coalition, international PhD students helped enhance Ontario’s research and innovation agenda, as well as build business and trade ties. The scholarship would “help Ontario universities compete with top international universities. This will help keep Ontario at the forefront of the global knowledge economy” (Office of the Premier, 2010, para. 3). It sent a message to the world that “Ontario is serious...[and] committed to achieving global ambition” and to “bolster[ing] the brainpower of existing research enterprises” at Ontarian universities (Hamdullahpur, 2010; Hamdullahpur was then the Chancellor of the University of Waterloo). These students “would become...business ambassadors for Ontario and for Canada wherever they went after they were done here” (Interview, Civil Servant). Attracting the best and brightest also enhanced “Ontario’s reputation overseas as an ideal place to get a high quality education” (Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities as quoted in Office of the Premier, 2010, para. 9). Raising Ontario’s PSE sector profile also helped attract more IS, including fee-paying students- and international scholars (Interview, Civil Servant). This construction also attracted the Gateway discourse coalition members as “opening our doors to more international students is good for our students, good for our intellectual and cultural life and good for our economy” (McGuinty as quoted in Benzie, 2010b). Furthermore, as the University of Waterloo

Chancellor argued, for Ontario to be a “fully engaged global player, we must increase the internationalization of our universities and the international students scholarships gives us a strong push” (Hamdullahpur, 2010).

This scholarship also became an emblem of different approaches to foreign affairs policy and ideology. McGuinty was perceived to embrace an “eyes and arms out” approach, (Coyle, 2010) looking to “build better relationships” with the rest of the world through international education (Ontario Finance Minister as quoted in Church, 2010). For other coalition members, this scholarship “fulfills [Ontario’s global]...responsibility; we have great institutions and the rest of the world should profit” (Interview, Provincial SIG: PSE). The scholarship is an opportunity for Ontario to contribute to “strengthen[ing] education systems everywhere” (Interview, National SIG: research). As the world “continue[s] to shrink and the potential for friction...grow[s],” this scholarship was envisioned to help “combat [global friction]...and promote understanding” and peace (Interview, Politician, Provincial government). The scholarship appealed to some of the Risks coalition, particularly faculty and students, who reiterated arguments that talented IS have positive implications on undergraduate education as they will be the teaching assistants for undergraduate students, adding diversity and quality to the classroom (Orwin, 2010). To summarize, the scholarship enriches Ontario’s intellectual capital, financial revenues, international links, economic and trade ties, quality of education, and global social commitments. While this construction of the scholarship attests to the dominance of the Economy storyline, it also suggests that the Economy and Gateway discourse coalitions as well as some members of the Risks coalition met up under the newly formed International student funding is desirable and good for Ontario storyline.

However, this scholarship did not appeal to all. Some Risks discourse coalition members constructed the scholarship differently; it is Ontario’s taxpayers’ money was spent on foreigners rather than on the more worthy domestic students who could hardly afford the cost of their education. While the McGuinty government officials and proponents of the scholarship were trying to get their act together following the sudden uncoordinated announcement of the scholarship, opposition parties “went [to]... just every call-in radio show” to mobilize the public arguing, that the government should focus on making

PSE more affordable to domestic students (Interview, Politician: Provincial government). IS were constructed as “taking places and funds away from our students” (Interview, Provincial SIG: PSE) at a time when Ontario should have invested in its own students, leading to the creation of the Ontario first storyline. Opposition parties, such as Hudak, then-Ontario Progressive Conservative opposition party leader, positioned McGuinty, and the supporters of the scholarship, as “out of touch” with recession-weary Ontario families (Bradshaw, 2010b). Similarly, Horwath, Ontario New Democratic Party opposition leader at the time, argued that

Foreign-student recruitment is not what Ontario's postsecondary education system needs right now. While the government focuses on attracting students from abroad, students from Ontario are paying the highest tuition fees in the country and still receive less funding per student than in any other province. (Church, 2010)

Hudak questioned the reasonability of funding IS “[w]hen families in Ontario today can't afford [to pay for] their kids to go to college or university without piling up huge debts, to give \$40,000 a year to foreign students? That's just wrong” (Benzie, 2010b). Opposition parties promised that they “would cancel the program right away” if they were elected (Interview, Provincial Civil Servant). This construction appealed to “a segment of our population that believes it is wasted money and they use foreigners as a derogatory term that the money shouldn't be [invested] there” (Interview, Provincial Civil Servant). A journalist argued that Hudak was using the “foreign card” against the Liberals (McGuinty government) to gain better acceptability rates with Ontarians by arguing that Ontarians should come first (Cohn, 2011). Opponents also expressed concern about foreigners who “limit...Ontarians' job prospects” (Interview, Politician: Provincial opposition). The Ontario Progressive Conservative opposition party education critic joined the Ontario first coalition arguing that the “best and brightest [are] on our own soil,” and therefore should be invested in (Bradshaw, 2010a). The Ontario first storyline enlisted the President of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, who argued that Ontario should invest in native youth who are

a story of tragic missed opportunity... While many, in-

cluding Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, are sweetening the financial pot for foreign students, native youth here still lack the funding to help fight poverty and bullying, gangs and drugs, lack of confidence and a lack of motivation and the gap is getting worse. (Brown, 2011)

On the other hand, the International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario storyline positioned the Ontario first coalition members as short-sighted and insular in their opposition of an “outward-looking innovation agenda” (Bradshaw, 2010b). They described them as “huddled inwards” perceiving Ontario as “isolated from the rest of the globe” at a time when countries were more dependent on and invested in building global ties to secure their future prosperity (Coyle, 2010). Even some domestic students expressed their concern “about opposing political parties' short-sightedness and divisiveness surrounding the issue” and called for expanding the scholarship to cover international students at colleges (Coyle, 2010). Supporters of the scholarship attempted to undermine Hudak's credibility by pointing out that, while he challenged the worthiness of the Trillium Scholarship, he himself studied in the United States on a full academic scholarship (Benzie, 2010b). A participant noted that the Conservative party, which was a strong opponent of this scholarship, ironically neglected the fact “that the [Conservative] federal government... had...[a] similar scholarship” for IS (Interview, Politician: Provincial government).

The International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario coalition members attempted to discredit the Ontario first coalition members by disputing their arguments. They referred to Ontario's investments in domestic students, going back to the Reaching Higher Plan in 2005, which created new spaces and scholarships for domestic students (Benzie, 2010b). They argued that “there is more than enough capacity in postgraduate programs to supply the demand from Canadian students, with room to spare” (Mason, 2010). To respond to the argument that the best and brightest are on Canada's soil, a PSE administrator argued that “of course we should be supporting students in Ontario, but we need to look further afield if we want to get the best and brightest... Talent is very mobile. If we don't capture these folks for our jurisdiction, they're going to go anywhere else in the world” (Bradshaw, 2010b). Coalition members quantified the federal, provincial, and institu-

tional scholarships and financial incentives available for domestic students. They argued that this scholarship, as the Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities noted, would help Ontario “compete with Harvard and Oxford and Cambridge, and all the big players” (Bradshaw, 2010b). However, they did not address concerns voiced regarding lack of investment in Indigenous youth.

University senior administrators and faculty members, who can be perceived as trustworthy authority figures in the field of PSE, voiced their support of the scholarship and contributed op-eds to newspapers, such as “Why international student scholarships are good for Canada” (Chakma, 2010); “Our choice: Spend the money or lose the brightest” (Orwin, 2010); and “Ontario wins by attracting the best international students” (Hamdullahpur, 2010). The President of the University of Waterloo, positioning himself not only as a university president but also as a taxpayer who supports this long-term investment, stated:

Investing in international students’ scholarship is an investment in our future. Too expensive, some say. We are all taxpayers, and nobody wants to see our money spent irresponsibly. But there is nothing irresponsible about supporting this investment in our future. All of us, and our children and grandchildren, will reap the benefits. (Hamdullahpur, 2010)

Graduate IS studying and conducting top-notch research in Canada shared their stories through the media. An international student, on a Connaught Scholarship, argued that scholarships were “not paying us to enjoy Canadian life; we’re working here on research that is cancer-related... If we make more discoveries, how many cancer patients could benefit in future? How can you put a price on that?” The student questioned those who critiqued the scholarship saying “Maybe a \$40,000 scholarship is not so simple to criticize... My scholarship money stays in Ontario” as it paid tuition fees, rent, and food, all contributing to the Canadian economy (Brown, 2010). Scholarship proponents cited examples of IS who “had come here and who had decided to stay and who were employers” (Interview, Politician: Provincial government).

The International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario storyline appealed to many actors. It struck a chord with Ontario employers, activating them to become political in supporting this storyline. An industry-led innovation center weighed in, argu-

ing that this scholarship would enhance innovation by “help[ing] universities do for Ontario what institutions like Stanford University have done for Silicon Valley” (Bradshaw, 2010b). Another employer argued that “It’s a war for talent... We need to always be aware that we’re one or two per cent of the world population and there’s lots of people out there that we would love to join us in Canada” (Bradshaw, 2010b). The International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario storyline appealed to national and global actors, who joined this discourse coalition. Nationally, immigration officials supported the scholarship, arguing that “It’s not just about the dollars; they [IS] help internationalize Canadian campuses and they’re an increasingly important source of labour” (Brown, 2010). The University of Alberta provost weighed in, arguing that Canada “has to look abroad” because it is not “produc[ing] enough elite Masters and PhD students” (Bradshaw, 2010b). MITACS,⁶ also joined the coalition arguing that these

smart kids...are going to start successful companies, many of them here. Even if they leave after they’ve finished school, we have a connection with someone who is going to be doing amazing things in the future. We should be building a network of the smartest people in the world who have a connection to Canada and leveraging that network. (Mason, 2010)

Internationally, the World Education Services⁷ joined the coalition, warning that Canada lagged behind in its race for globally mobile talent as it attracted only about 5.5%, noting that this scholarship would help Ontario (and Canada) compete for the best talent (Brown, 2010).

The newly formed International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario storyline succeeded in converging the Economy and Gateway storylines and attracting actors who diverted from the Risks storyline, particularly faculty and student groups, who saw the scholarship as a chance to enhance the quality of the educational sector through attracting the brightest IS and providing financial support for those who needed it (Figure 2).

The International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario storyline achieved discourse closure; that is, it became more coherent and multi-interpretive. IS funding, and in particular the Trillium Scholarship, was variously understood as desirable and beneficial because it would serve as a tool to build the

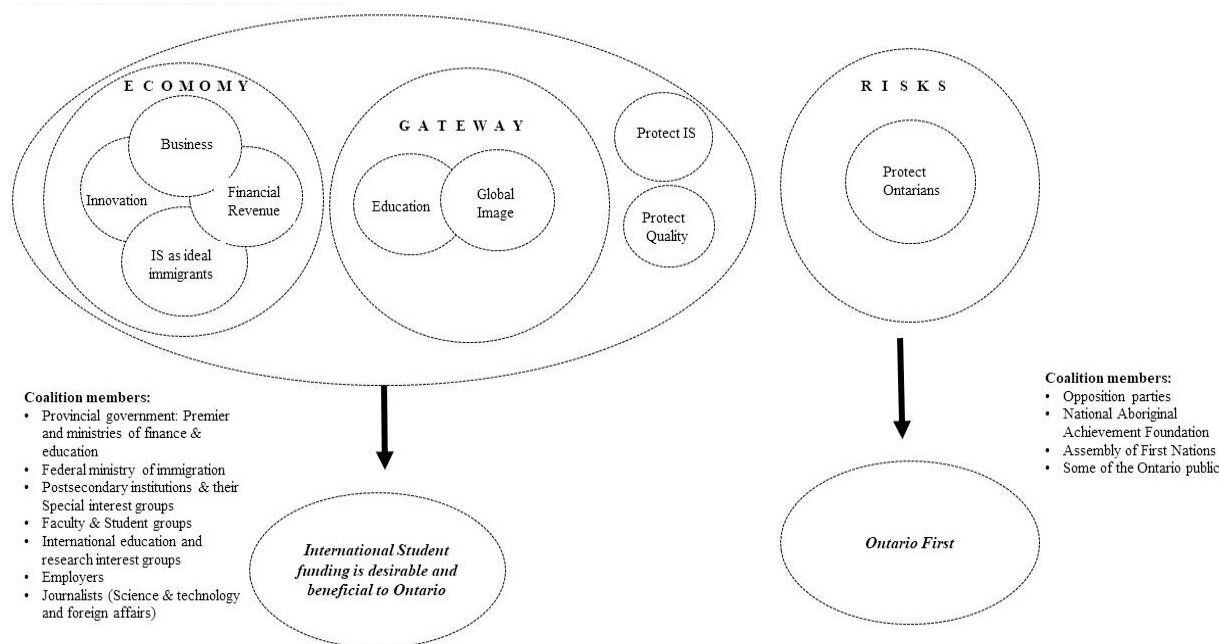


Figure 2. Trillium Scholarship discursive context

knowledge economy; a means to raise the profile and ranking of the PSE sector; a pull to attract more fee-paying students; an incentive for international scholars to join Ontario universities; a boost to Ontario's hunt for the world's best young minds, entrepreneurs, labour force, and immigrants; a way to enrich the teaching and learning experience; a chance to further enhance Ontario's global image; and an instrument to contribute to global social justice. This new coalition attracted actors from a wider variety of spaces and scales with diverse interests, values, and expertise. While coalition members had very diverse, and sometimes contradictory, understandings of the benefits of the scholarship, they agreed that it was valuable for Ontario. This is an example of a storyline becoming highly interpretive—facilitating discussion and action where agreement might not otherwise take place. The International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario discourse became the dominant meaning of the Trillium Scholarship. This discourse coalition achieved discourse structuration as it dominated the discursive space and central actors were persuaded by and/or forced to accept its rhetorical power. A wide variety of actors agreed on the importance of this scholarship despite their different perceptions of the nature of this value. This storyline drew on the support of influential actors such as politicians, civil servants, university presidents, employers, domestic and internation-

al students, national and international academics and professionals, think tanks, and special interest groups. Institutionalization was achieved as the scholarship was translated into institutional policies and practices. Ever since 2010, funds have been allocated to this scholarship through the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities as well as Ontario universities who pay 10% of the cost. This construction of IS funding as desirable and beneficial is still dominant (while also contested, as will be explained later) until today. The Trillium Scholarship still exists today⁸ with contributions from both the Ontario government and universities (2/3 to 1/3 government to institution ratio). In promoting this scholarship, it is highlighted that this scholarship is awarded “to the best doctoral students from around the world” (Government of Ontario, 2020, para. 23) “to attract” them to study at an Ontario university (University of Toronto, 2020, para. 1). It is also noted that “recipients who transition to permanent residency status will continue to be eligible for the balance of their renewable scholarship” (University of Toronto, 2020, para. 4) which addresses the goal of retaining this global talent in Ontario.

The Trillium Scholarship marked an important discursive shift in the IS funding policy landscape in Ontario. International students were no longer mere revenue-generators, they also came to be viewed as an investment of taxpayers' money in Ontario's research,

innovation, business, labour market, immigration, education, and foreign affairs. As both structuration and institutionalization are fulfilled, DCF contends that the International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario coalition achieved hegemony.

The International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario storyline was mobilized frequently afterwards. In 2015, it was mobilized in calling for extending graduate student funding to international students. The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) called on the provincial government to “provid[e] flexibility for universities to use some [funded] graduate spaces for international students” in order to “enhance the ability of universities to attract top international students [who are] so important to research and the economic growth of our province” (COU, 2015, p. 11). This change in the funding model was constructed as desirable and beneficial to Ontario as the MCU and Innovation Minister noted, “we’re always thinking about bringing foreign investments to Canada. Well, this is bringing in foreign talents,” as well as bringing in “global classmates [to] broaden Ontario students’ view of the world” (Brown, 2014). Proponents of this funding change argued that “it is impossible to talk about the best and the brightest graduate students without thinking...of international students” (Interview, Provincial Civil Servant). Some used the “excellence and quality argument” to argue for this flexibility noting that “top-notch researchers...who come from around the world and bring in expertise... you are building capacity and excellence in our institutions” (Interview, Provincial SIG: PSE). Hence, in 2015 the provincial government allowed Ontario universities to use up to 25% of allocated graduate student funding to support international students. In Ontario’s 2018 budget, the government announced the development of a provincial International Postsecondary Education Strategy. This announcement was strategically located under the “Welcoming Immigrants and Attracting International Talent” section of the budget document (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2018). The budget acknowledged that IS “have become an important part of Ontario’s college and university sector, representing Ontario’s role as a leader in international education and diversity” and estimated IS contributions to “over \$5 billion to Ontario’s economy every year” (p. 83). The International Education Strategy set a goal of “adding funding-eligible PhD spaces for international students” and “mak[ing] it easier for international talent

to come to Ontario” (p. 8). Additional investments in IS were allocated as the Ontario government announced an International Student Support Services Fund to enhance IS experiences on Ontario campuses and an expansion of programming that supports IS retention and settlement in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2018).

However, is this the end of the argumentative struggle? Although the International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario coalition managed to assume hegemony, the Ontario first coalition also succeeded in striking a chord on a controversial issue and sensitizing members of the public. The Ontario first storyline appealed to “the fear and resentment in Ontarians, not to their confidence, goodwill and awareness of global reality” (Coyle, 2010). This is consistent with DCF’s belief that the art of policy-making involves, in significant part, “giving voice to these half-articulated fears and hopes and embodying them in convincing stories about their sources and the choices they represent” (Fischer, 2003, p. 103). The Ontario first storyline succeeded in bringing this fear to the forefront, influencing the government’s future engagement with international education at large and IS funding in specific. A participant noted “you cannot overestimate how scarring an experience that was on this government politically. That made them...risk-averse in this area [investment in IS and in international education in general]” (Interview, National SIG). Ever since this debate, the Ontario government’s investments in IS funding became a sensitive issue and “everybody got kind of cold foot [sic]” (Interview, National SIG). The Trillium Scholarship which “still exists today...doesn’t get promoted the same because there is a tenuous perception about it” (Interview, Provincial Civil Servant). The decisive argumentation over this scholarship had a tangible impact on the way IS funding is approached in Ontario as no new provincial funds have been allocated to international students’ scholarships since 2010. When the above-mentioned 2015 new funding model was introduced, it was packaged differently than the Trillium Scholarship. It was highlighted that no new money was attached to the change. Instead, universities were permitted to use up to 25 percent of allocated public funding to support international graduate students. While, as discussed earlier, this funding change was argued to be desirable and beneficial for Ontario’s research innovation and economic prosperity, it was also presented as essential to keep certain graduate programs open. It was

argued that universities “could not find enough science or math or engineers to fill...graduate students’ spots. [Without international graduate students’ enrolment,] we would have to close...all of the[se] graduate programs” (Interview, Provincial SIG: PSE). Therefore, diverting limited funds to international students gave domestic students access to programs that would otherwise not be possible. While this might be interpreted as an institutionalization of the Ontario first storyline, it could also be argued that the Ontario first discourse was adopted and given a new meaning by the IS funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario coalition members as a deliberate rhetorical strategy to appeal to a wider audience. It could also reflect a different context where the meaning of IS funding is shifting. The point is that discourses, meanings, and storylines are always unstable and have to be renegotiated and recreated to remain dominant in the face of changing circumstances.

Discussion

This examination of the Trillium Scholarship as an emblematic issue in Ontario’s international student funding policies, and international education policy landscape in general, warrants the following observations.

International Education, a Policy Solution to Policy Problems Beyond the PSE Sector

To respond to the first research question, what paved the way to this funding policy, the findings of this study reveal that international education in general and international student funding is specific is not a policy problem per se, but rather is constructed as a policy solution to problems beyond the PSE sector. The discursive practices of policy making in Ontario succeeded in framing international education—and IS funding—as a policy solution to policy problems beyond the education sector such as immigration, innovation, economy, labour market, foreign affairs, and trade. Actually, it is more about these agendas than it is about education. The dominance of the Economy storyline prior to the release of the Trillium Scholarship helped in highlighting the need for international young talent to address the declining demographics and labour market shortages, enhance the province’s innovation and business agenda, and

generate revenue. This paved the way to constructing the scholarship as a tool to “expand...intellectual capital...international links with businesses...trade missions and economic ties” (Interview, Provincial SIG: students) which appealed to many actors. Since, as the Council of Ontario Universities argued, “Ontario’s productivity and competitiveness in the 21st century depend on a highly skilled and culturally diverse workforce” (Coyle, 2010), attracting IS to study and work here was perceived to be a plausible and necessary solution. While it was hoped that students would stay in Ontario, it was argued that “even if they didn’t stay they would become kind of ambassadors for Ontario and for Canada wherever they went after they were done here” (Interview, Politician: Provincial government). It was also argued that IS funding would help attract fee-paying students. International education policy landscape cannot be understood as one coherent whole. It involves discourses, actors, and knowledge from many different fields. The dominant perception of international education and international student funding is, in fact, the product of the argumentative interaction that often lies well beyond the traditional PSE sector. International education policy landscape speaks to Hajer’s argument that “policymaking moves away from purely ‘sectoral’ orientation towards an integrated or ‘area-oriented’ approach, allowing for other concerns to be taken into account as well” (2003b, p. 94).

Multiplicity and Diversity of Policy Actors

Addressing the second research question of who the actors engaged in this policy landscape were, this research, by moving away from the state and focusing on storylines, revealed a wide range of international education policy actors that previous international education policy studies did not account for. While previous studies focused on the role of the state, PSE institutions, media, and a few national special interest groups, this research highlights the fact that international education attracts actors from many diverse scales, levels, disciplines, and contexts; all of whom contribute to the construction of international education and its related policies. These are: the state (federal and provincial governments with their different agencies including but not limited to immigration, education, trade, foreign affairs, industry and innovation); PSE institutions (administration, faculty,

and students); national and foreign media; national and provincial education, economy, innovation, trade and foreign affairs think tanks and special interests groups; the private sector including employers, investment and talent acquisition companies, and lawyers; the public; international actors and transnational organizations. This speaks to Hajer's (2003a) argument that boundaries between the national and provincial, provincial and institutional, institutional and social, and national and international are "redrawn," if not dissolving (p. 180). Within this fragmented landscape, it is challenging to identify the actors who are contributing to the policy making process in Ontario's PSE sector in general and IS funding in specific. International education presents a case where "decision making is dispersed" and the "locus of power has become unclear" (Hajer, 2003a, pp. 178–179). Within this multi-actor policy context, the voices of (international) education scholars were the least present in the three data sources (particularly media and policy documents). They were perceived by the study participants as highly entrenched in their specific areas of study deeming their arguments to be irrelevant or uninteresting.

Ontario First – Is it an Emerging Nationalistic Discourse?

In examining how the argumentation over this policy influenced the international education policy context in Ontario, this research reveals a shift in the way international students are constructed in Ontario. The International student funding is desirable and beneficial to Ontario constructed IS as an investment worthy of the taxpayers' money rather than merely a source of revenue. However, The Ontario first storyline constructed international students as competitors with the more worthy Ontarians, a storyline that may represent an (emerging) undercurrent of nationalism. Ontario first shared discursive space with the economy focused discourses in acknowledging and championing the economic benefits of international students. For example, an interviewee who adamantly mobilized the Ontario first storyline noted that "the quality of our institutions and the relative job prospects should be attractive enough to bring fee-paying international students into our province" who would help generate revenue and address labour market needs (Interview, Politician: Provincial opposition). However, the Ontario first storyline diverted from the

Economy storyline whenever there was a perception of prioritizing foreigners over Ontarians. The Ontario first storyline saw internationalization as a tool to benefit Ontarians and not the other way around (Ontarians benefiting the international community). For the Ontario first coalition members, no international education activity should put Ontarians in competition with foreigners. Similar discourses have recently emerged in different international jurisdictions, such as the United States and some European nations, with different anti-immigration and nationalistic discourse and resultant policies. The question here is whether the Ontario first storyline is an undercurrent for a more nationalistic parochial discourse that may develop into a stronger storyline in the future. Whether or not this storyline signals the rise of populism in Ontario is an issue that internationalization scholars, practitioners, and policy makers need to be wary of as it threatens the core principles of internationalization. This highlights the need for (international) education scholars to contribute more robustly to the public international education discursive map to reclaim the debate over international education. Education scholars in general, and international education scholars specifically, need to start experimenting with new ways of arguing and communication to better appeal to other policy actors and the public.

Conclusion

The Trillium Scholarship captures a moment when international student funding became a battleground for internationalization versus nationalism. This emblem shifted the construction of international students from mere revenue generators to brain-gain that Ontario is to invest in. Through the argumentation over the Trillium Scholarship—and IS funding in general—the Ontario first storyline emerged. While perceiving some aspects of internationalization favourably, the Ontario first storyline highlighted the need to ensure that Ontarians have the priority and the advantage over foreigners. By moving away from individual actors and focusing on storylines, this research revealed that international education policies in Ontario are constructed as a solution to multiple non-education problems. While highlighting the multiplicity of actors in this policy landscape, this research draws attention to the need for international education scholars to contribute more actively to the international

education discursive map in Ontario. Finally, the study warns against a rise in nationalist discourses that undermine the core values of internationalization.

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Notes

- 1 While acknowledging the current tension and ongoing debate between China and Hong Kong, reference is made here to China to be consistent with the media coverage at the time of this scholarship and the interviewees’ accounts.
- 2 The trillium flower is the official flower and logo for Ontario.
- 3 This study is part of a doctoral dissertation entitled “International Education as Policy: A Discourse Coalition Framework Analysis of the Construction, Context, and Empowerment of Ontario’s International Education Storylines” (El Masri, 2019).
- 4 Interview, Politician: Provincial government.
- 5 When the McGuinty government assumed office, one of its goals was developing an international education strategy for Ontario. The 2005 Ontario budget allocated funds to support developing a new strategy focused on attracting more IS, encouraging study abroad for Ontario students, and raising Ontario’s profile as an international research center (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2005). In 2008 Phillip Steenkamp, then-Deputy Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities announced (in an article published in the Canadian e-Magazine of International Education) the creation of an advisory committee made up of representatives from the Council of Ontario Universities and Ministry staff. While Steenkamp referred to a

provincial “*current international strategy*” (Steenkamp, 2008, para. 10, emphasis added), this document is not publically available and access to the ministry’s archive was not possible at the time of conducting this research. However, study participants noted that the Trillium Scholarship was part of that Strategy and argued that following the Trillium debacle, the McGuinty government “got kind of cold foot” with regards to the international education file; hence the strategy was not released (Interview, National SIG).

- 6 A national, not-for-profit organization that is committed to supporting research-based innovation through working closely with partners in industry, academia, and government.
- 7 A non-profit organization that reviews international credentials and studies global education.
- 8 The scholarship survived different governments since 2010: a Liberal majority and minority governments as well as, most recently, a Conservative majority government.