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Intercultural encounters: Intertwined complexities and opportunities in international students' experience

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Abstract

International students who study overseas for a finite period (regarded as learners in 'mainstream' international education) constitute the largest group of students engaged in international education. This chapter discusses the opportunities and challenges inherent in the educational sojourn experience of these learners. The discussion, underpinned by a theoretical framework based upon a developmental theory promulgated by Urie Bronfenbrenner, offers a psychological perspective on the distinctive processes entailed in an educational sojourn. Likewise, Jin Li's mind-virtue orientation dichotomy illuminates the likely consequential effects of moving from one academic culture to another. A focus on the less explored perspective of academic acculturation offers invaluable insight into the factors that are arguably central to the quality of students' educational experience that are often closely connected to their engagement or disengagement. Supported by the strategic priority given by universities to the internationalisation agenda, a greater appreciation of intertwined complexities and opportunities that underpin the claimed transformative international experience raises questions about the roles played by the institutions, staff and students themselves in maximising what international education can offer, not only to educational sojourners but equally, in realising 'internationalisation at home'.

Introduction

Knight (2013) postulates that internationalisation is behind the transformation of the higher education landscape around the world. As an illustration, the combination of the traditional route whereby student sojourners decide to pursue their education abroad, more numerous programme articulation agreements, e.g. dual or joint degree programmes involving two or more universities, the presence of *foreign* university campuses in Malaysia, Singapore and China for example, and other forms of student and staff mobility schemes are an attestation to what appears to be a flourishing development in university internationalisation. Despite research on internationalisation starting in the 1950s (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001), it can be argued that this area requires greater attention than ever, primarily because although "internationalizing the curriculum" has become embedded in a number of universities' strategic agendas globally (Leask, 2015), there remains an observable dearth of information about the specific nature of internationalised or intercultural curricula (e.g. Dunne, 2011; see also further discussion and critique by Simonsen, Hammershoy & Miller in Chapter 6). In this respect, since student experience is arguably central to this notion of educational mobility in higher education, an

appreciation of the factors that underlie student understanding of learning, and subsequently the quality of their learning experience in the host country is arguably crucial (Montgomery, 2010; van Egmond, Kuhnen & Li, 2013). Of international education's many recognised attractions, the educational sojourn is typically regarded as a gateway enabling intercultural encounters and enhancing cross-cultural awareness, among other things (e.g. see Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping & John, 2008). Nevertheless, what might be regarded as an ideal venture is not without its challenges (also discussed in Simonsen et al.'s Chapter 6 and Fukada's Chapter 9). These distinct challenges are substantiated by a large number of empirical studies in the area of intercultural experiences, academic socialisation, and transitional experiences, often investigating requisite adjustments and academic learning support that cater for the needs of the international student community (e.g. Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Ulriksen, 2009). Such challenges are, at times, exacerbated by a sense of loneliness, confusion, frustration and even depression resulting in radically different intercultural encounters from those expected (Sawir et al., 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003). It can, therefore, be argued that in order for sojourners truly to experience high quality and rich intercultural encounters that are also meant to increase cross-cultural appreciation, having a mere awareness of what an educational sojourn can offer is insufficient. Instead, it necessitates a continuous contemplation and investigation of several uncharted psychological areas inherent in this distinct educational sojourn. Consequently, an appreciation of educational sojourn also involves recognising its dynamic links with the personal, societal, cultural and academic components informing the entire academic acculturation process (see Elliot, Reid & Baumfield, 2016c; Li, 2005; van Egmond, Kuhnen & Li, 2013). Prior to further discussion, we will turn to an academic acculturation model through a psychological lens.

A new perspective on academic acculturation

In our proposed model of academic acculturation, which was based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems framework, we elucidated how the different systems (i.e. micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem) from the learners' original ecology (i.e. home country) offer a layered perspective that is reciprocal and complementary in explaining factors contributory to an individual's overall growth and development, including learning development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994; 2005). It is explained in this developmental psychology framework that the ecology

takes into account direct and indirect (or peripheral) sources of influence from the individual's immediate interactions (e.g. with family, school and close friends situated within the micro- and mesosystem) to influences acquired from being part of smaller (i.e. exosystem) and larger (i.e. macrosystem) communities. The macrosystem's influences are extended to national influences (e.g. laws of the land, religious beliefs, cultural norms), which in turn also permeate the rest of the inner systems (micro-, meso-, exosystem) and subsequently lead to the development of one's sense of identity – complete with the values and behavioural manifestations associated with that identity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994; 2005).

It is important to stress that the systemic nature of the bio-ecological framework implies that each system exists interdependently of the others. Much of learning and development occur through learners' direct and indirect interactions from the smallest (i.e. family) to the largest communities (i.e. country) via these bidirectional interlaced, nested systems. Bronfenbrenner's proposition seems to mirror part of Vygotskian ideologies on the acquisition process underlying the formation of societal beliefs, values, behavior patterns, habits and accumulated societal knowledge through child-rearing and education, while acknowledging learners' role in “actively shap[ing] the very forces that are active in shaping them” (Daniels, 2016, p. 1; Vygotsky, 1978). Li (2005) adds that part of understanding the role of culture in moulding learners' learning beliefs and behaviours, entails recognising that these cultural influences begin early, and tend to be deeply impressed on learners' conceptualisation of learning, and all the expectations associated with such conceptualisation.

It can be strongly argued that for educational sojourners, understanding academic acculturation necessitates a sound appreciation of the two learning contexts, i.e. distinctions between the home and host country. Taking into account van Egmond, Kuhnen and Li's (2013) conjecture, that the “meaning of learning” is situated within the “overarching cultural meanings” (p. 215) suggests that a deeper conceptualisation of academic acculturation compels consideration of the dynamics within the original (home) ecological system, the temporal (host) ecological system and interactions between the two ecological systems (Elliot et al., 2016b, 2016c). The original multilevel ecological system, which up to the point of the learners' departure to study and live in a foreign context has always been accepted as *the norm*, continues to exert a powerful influence on the sojourning learners, even after joining another

multilevel ecological system. This then leads to the co-existence of two ecological systems from which the individual's interactions inform as well as being largely informed by these ecological systems. (For further exposition of this proposed academic acculturation model, see also – (Elliot et al., 2016c). To such intricate interactions, we now turn.

Simultaneous existence of two multilevel ecological systems

A strong argument can therefore be proposed, i.e. that it is the simultaneous interplay of two ecological systems that underpins the intertwined complexities and opportunities arising from the learners' experience of intercultural encounters via the educational sojourn. In the learning realm, it can also be suggested that the greater the discrepancy between the two ecological systems, including the dominant learning orientations (see Li, 2005), the greater and more complex the challenges this might pose to educational sojourners. Despite ecological systems' existence being confined to the person's subliminal consciousness, it may nevertheless instigate psychological challenges, confusion, but also fun and serendipity. Although learners might be physically away from the original ecological system that was previously accepted as *the norm*, it does not come as a surprise that its pull remains strong even in the new context. This, however, can at times trigger conflict, particularly when learners are expected to conform to a different learning orientation, together with new expectations and new assessment standards. Living under the influence of two ecological systems can then be likened to living, engaging and interacting with different ideas, practices and players from *two different worlds*. This condition can perhaps help explain many sojourning learners' deep longing to recreate their original but now distant microsystem (considered as the innermost core in the layered system, particularly, the direct interactions with their significant others) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994; 2005). Seemingly, there is that tacit appeal to befriend individuals from the new ecological context who might offer the desired familiarity of the original microsystem, via preference towards speaking the same language, longing for the same food and activities, and/or pursuit of opportunities associated with a shared macrosystem in the previous ecological system (see also Gomes 2015; Montgomery, 2010).

Delving further into the academic domain, van Egmond, Kuhnen and Li's (2013, p. 209-210) effort to understand "the distinct, but often tacit and taken for granted cultural assumptions that underlie the concept of learning" led to the

conceptualisation of cultural models of learning – the mind and the virtue orientation. A detailed analysis of cultural differences surrounding learning practices led to a theoretical framework where the “mind orientation” is proposed to be associated with the Western philosophical tradition while the beliefs and practices in learning predominantly observed in East Asian contexts characterise the “virtue orientation” model of learning. The differences in these cultural models of learning are argued to manifest themselves in four domains: a) learners’ perceived purpose of learning; b) processes entailed by learning; c) underpinning motivation for learning; and d) the link between learning and social perception. Each domain explains and demonstrates the qualitative differences between these two models. As a case in point, maintaining that “thinking [is] the most central element of learning” must lead to the development of a critical thinker, as well as character, attitudes and dispositions that exhibit logical reasoning principles in a learner are the primary goals in the “mind orientation” model (see also Egege & Kutieleh, 2004). By contrast, East Asian scholarship is generally informed by the Confucian concept of “ren”, which refers to the ultimate pursuit for “the most genuine, sincere and humane person” one is capable of becoming (van Egmond, Kuhnen & Li, 2013, p. 210). It is then suggested that whereas Western learning puts more emphasis on the “mind”, Oriental learning gives priority to “personal virtues” that largely inform students’ overall learning experience (Li, 2005).

The mind-virtue orientation dichotomy is particularly relevant to the discussion of academic acculturation. This is not to suggest that one orientation is superior to the other but the underpinning argument is that a healthy appreciation of learning orientational differences can assist in evaluating what adjustments and new skills are needed, with a view to facilitating sojourners’ effective transitions. Irrespective of whether the sojourners move from the *mind to virtue* or from the *virtue to mind* orientation, they almost have no option but to adapt to the context of the host environment. Doing so, inevitably involves managing the simultaneous existence of two multilevel ecological systems. This is because sojourners “must become adept in the culture of the host country as well as the university they find themselves studying in, in order to develop their levels of thinking” and in turn, make the most of their educational experience and complete their education successfully (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004, p. 77).

A common feature in the early stage of the educational sojourn is learners’ inherent difficulty in recognising and acknowledging the differing learning

orientations in various cultural or societal settings. For instance, a learner with a virtue orientation moving to a mind-orientated academic context is likely to experience, metaphorically, psychological turmoil in the new learning context although the difficulty is often perceived to be linked to a change of environment, weather, language, food or social company. In a study undertaken with international students in the UK, Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2010) observed that students find it a lot more difficult to adapt to academic culture rather than to a new social and cultural environment. Li (2005, p. 192) offered a potential explanation: a new ecological system with a “mind orientation” stresses “the importance of verbal expression in the Western learning model”, but it tends to oppose “the Asian belief that speaking interferes with learning” along with a preference for the “essential learning virtue of concentration”. Since Western learning orientation generally requires active classroom participation and collaborative working models, student adjustment may involve more than simply changing one’s practices but also an authentic reflection on the mind-virtue orientation dichotomy to accommodate successfully the learning orientation model in the new ecological system. This could lead to negotiating between the norms and practices the student has religiously followed prior to the sojourn, and the standard norms being practised in the new ecological system (Elliot, Baumfield, Reid & Makara, 2016b), which at times may lead to cognitive dissonance, or a feeling of discomfort due to conflicting feelings, beliefs or behaviours (for a comprehensive discussion on cognitive dissonance, see Kenworthy, Miller, Collins, Read & Earleywine, 2011). In this connection, critical insight is crucial should there be instances where students hypothetically feel that these two ecological systems compete for attention or influence. Although very often, such awkward experiences are regarded simplistically as culture shock, there is an argument to suggest that it is more likely to be an unrecognised tension and confusion arising from two invisible ecological forces that influence a sojourning learner’s thoughts, decisions and behaviours (Furnham, 2004; Lombard, 2014).

Interlink between personal, societal and academic experiences

It is also worth stressing that although the aim of educational sojourners is primarily focused on formal learning and attaining a qualification, often at a higher education level, both the bio-ecological system framework (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1994; 2005) and the extended academic acculturation model (Elliot et al., 2016c) explicitly point out the reciprocal interlink between personal, academic and societal

experiences during the sojourn. Accepting this proposed connection implies recognising the other modes of meaningful learning that can take place outwith the academic setting and arguably can be found in every personal and societal interaction.

The argument still stands that learning through each of the subsystems within one's original ecological model can also take place even without any educational sojourn (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1994; 2005), as shown in the earlier discussion of learning development via direct and indirect interactions within the ecological system. While accepting the validity of that claim, it can also be contended that the learning opportunities during an educational sojourn tend to double and escalate as students are given access to countless opportunities for learning interactions from the various systems (i.e. micro-, meso-, exo-, macrosystems) in the new ecological model while retaining earlier connections with their original ecological model. This is what can be regarded as the inherent opportunities in the educational sojourn! Taken together, it can therefore be proposed that the entire educational sojourn is indeed a gateway to rich intercultural encounters, potentially taking place at either the personal, or academic or societal levels, and not solely restricted to the educational contexts. Since many of the layered systems (i.e. exo-, macro- and chronosystem) are geared for interactions outwith academia, this posits that a number of meaningful learning interactions are more likely to take place beyond formal educational experience (Bengtson, 2016). This claim accords with the proposition not only about the richness, variety and complexity of sojourn-related experiences but also with respect to the availability of resources to assist one's capacity for coping, enjoying and maximising the opportunities presented by the educational sojourn itself (e.g. in Chapter 9, this is realised through active creation of "musical affinity spaces" while Simonsen et al. in Chapter 6 highlight the value brought about by the "socialisation process"). In the next section, I will consider my personal reflection on my educational sojourn experience with respect to the mind-virtue orientation dichotomy with a view to shedding light on the notion of academic acculturation, including the complexities and opportunities presented by the sojourn.

Lessons gleaned from reflection on personal educational sojourns

The literature-based discussion, to date, will be complemented by both the author's accumulated observations and lived experience as a result of studying, working and living in both the East and the West. This will also be substantiated with exemplars from our research investigations undertaken in the area of academic

acculturation. In a blog entry for the University of Glasgow's doctoral students community, I shared my own academic acculturation journey following a decision to undertake a PhD in the United Kingdom (<https://uofgpgblog.com/an-invisible-storm-reflections-on-my-intercultural-academic-transitions/>). Coming from the Far East and owing to the initial privilege of being able to study my Master's degree in another South East Asian country, I judged it to be ideal preparation for embarking on a PhD educational sojourn in the UK. Societally speaking, there were adjustments that I needed to make because despite coming from a neighbouring country, there were also a number of distinct cultural differences characterising the two countries – language, religious beliefs and societal values – to name but a few. Irrespective of these societal differences, I enjoyed my postgraduate education, mingling with a group of international academics and scholars alike, and so I regarded my life as an international student in Thailand to be smooth sailing. Moreover, it neither imposed any radical changes in the way that I had always learned nor challenged my conceptions of what was expected for me to attain learning excellence. This was because the academic culture and the prevailing learning orientations from both my home country and Thailand were very similar, when viewed using the mind-virtue orientation dichotomy (Li, 2005; van Egmond, Kuhnen & Li, 2013). It was my general familiarity with the rules of the game for virtue orientation learning, which made my educational sojourn in this Asian country a relatively easy experience, overall.

By contrast, it was the mind learning orientations and expectations of the British system that challenged, baffled and subsequently redefined my conception of what excellent learning is, including the expectations and standards to be met (Li, 2005). Even my confidence and enthusiasm boosted by the knowledge that I had already experienced being an international student was only initially reassuring. By and large, it did not help that I was still functioning under learning virtues – that personal dedication, “diligence, persistence, and concentration” are the ultimate key to performing well (Li, 2005, p. 192), just as when I was a learner in Asia. For my part I overlooked the highly different learning orientations comprising academic culture, teaching, learning and assessment practices and relationships between teachers and learners, which characterised the general expectations in the new learning environment. This exemplifies an earlier discussion of the strong influence of my original ecological model – i.e. a year after my second educational sojourn, I was

still operating under my previous ecological system in both the societal and academic arenas. As predicted, although most people did not see what I experienced to be a personal struggle (or cognitive dissonance), the struggle nevertheless manifested itself in my thoughts, disinclinations, fears, and ultimately on my academic performance as a postgraduate research student.

...my biggest adjustment involved things unseen. I lodged with an elderly English lady who insisted that I address her by her first name. I never did that, but I knew that I offended her by not doing so. How could I? My upbringing told me that it was unacceptable! Likewise, my supervisors stressed the importance of thinking reflectively, analytically and critically through academic writing. This was easier said than done, because what others did not see (including my own supervisors) was the psychological barrier inhibiting me from carrying out the tasks. My thoughts were constantly plagued by “Who am I to criticise the experts in the field? I am a ‘nobody’, a mere student”. Panic started to set in – how could I apply critical thinking? After a long struggle, I had to learn one very important lesson that contradicted the sum total of all my previous learning experience: academics and theorists are not my superiors, but my equals.

What my own educational journeys reinforced is the crucial value of critical reflection on the powerful pressures or influences coming from either of the two ecological systems. As a result of the sojourn, these influences become part of who we are, who we become; they inform, develop and continue to develop our identity (Lombard, 2014; Montgomery, 2010). Arguably, only through reflection on and appreciation of their nature and then evaluating their strengths and weaknesses can we effectively appreciate where we are in the educational sojourn and what we require to do as we endeavour to complete the journey successfully. This can then lead to learners managing the influences generated by the two ecological systems with a view to benefiting from both (Elliot et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c), and avoiding cognitive dissonance. Consideration of the effect of each ecological system, particularly in meeting new objectives that have further implications for personal or professional growth and development, may therefore involve courageous negotiation and management of these influences. For example, if following reflection, the realisation that some of these ecological influences serve as constraints rather than facilitators to academic adjustment and acculturation, this may prompt a careful reassessment, even

challenging and confronting one's accepted understanding of how things ought to be, as informed by one's original ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994; 2005). In sum, there is a strong argument that learners' deep reflection, open-mindedness and a desire to broaden previous learning experiences, are necessary tools with which each educational sojourner needs to equip themselves as they embark on a sojourn. According to the literature, my experience is not unique. Instead, literature that supports both the complexities and hidden learning opportunities characterising the distinct experiences during an educational sojourn abounds (e.g. Bengtson, 2016; Marambe, Vermunt & Boshuizen, 2012). In the same vein, in our recent study of international doctoral students, their educational sojourn is portrayed as a mixture of serendipity and amusement as well as puzzlement and challenges (Elliot et al., 2016a). In examining further the complexities entailed by the sojourn as well as the hidden opportunities it presents, it would be best to delineate one after the other.

Inherent complexities

It is widely acknowledged that educational sojourners' discernible primary objective when undertaking international education is to pursue a formal learning experience in a foreign context. As previously discussed, although this sounds obvious and very simple, the act of leaving behind one's ecological system (and everything one is familiar with and recognises as *the norm*) for the purpose of developing academically while being immersed in another ecological system, i.e. by the host societal and academic culture's, is psychologically speaking, a unique and significant challenge, even a tall order for many educational sojourners. It is not, therefore, surprising that educational sojourns are often associated with and may bring forth loneliness, culture shock, feelings of estrangement or alienation and acculturative stress (Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Sawir et al., 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Predictably, these challenges can pose greater implications for educational sojourners' wider emotional, psychological and general wellbeing. Such experiences of being detached from one's original ecological system can arguably have a profound impact – often more than educational sojourners perhaps initially anticipated.

It is worth noting that despite notable similarities with the experience of other groups of sojourners, there are also distinct differences (see Brislin, 1986). For example, when compared to immigrants from other nations, many educational sojourners to the US and UK for example, only anticipate a temporary stay in the host

country. Whereas immigrants might be more prepared to embrace fully a new ecological system, that is rarely the stance taken by educational sojourners who are certain of the finite nature of their stay. Additionally, when taking other groups into account, e.g. asylum seekers, educational sojourners' decisions to travel and leave their ecological systems were not provoked by any hazards prompting them to flee. Instead, an educational sojourn is usually a deliberate decision on the part of the learners, with the full support of their family and friends. Relative to other groups (i.e. immigrants and asylum seekers) whose journeys might be underpinned by very strong intentions to leave their former ecological systems, there is arguably less pressure from educational sojourners to embrace fully the new ecological system that they are presented with in the host country. Nevertheless, it can be strongly contended that learners' success in the new academic culture and environment will first and foremost stem from a disposition to be open-minded leading to an intrinsic desire to broaden one's knowledge and experience, particularly experiences beyond academia.

As conceptually explored earlier, what adds to the complexity inherent in the sojourn is the intertwined nature of the acculturation factors. Reiterating the proposition that with respect to acculturation, personal, academic and societal experiences are interlinked with each other, several participants in a research study that our team carried out explicitly expressed views pertaining to the inherent difficulty in separating the personal from the academic or the academic from societal experiences (Elliot et al., 2016c, p. 2204). This point is highlighted by Nigel – a research participant:

Nigel found the concept of academic acculturation challenging. In his words: "I found it difficult to differentiate between my experience in the UK higher education institution [and] my experience in the UK as a whole, so, for example, I took a picture of tennis court, but that's not really [the university] per se. I played tennis and I felt that continuing to do this in the foreign country...is part of becoming accustomed to life here, meeting people, being part of tournaments and competitions...but that wasn't really my experience of the university. The two are linked...I still find it difficult to differentiate the two".

Nigel stresses the value placed on the sense of readiness and ability to adjust to a new learning environment, culture and setting as these strongly inform learners' engagement and disengagement both in the academic and societal contexts, and

subsequently, their educational sojourns' success or failure. Such demands are viewed as integral to one's capacity to succeed in a new academic environment, regardless of whether they are viewed as complexities or opportunities awaiting educational sojourners as discussed in the next section.

Hidden opportunities

In the same way that leaving one's ecological system creates a lot of challenges for educational sojourners, the act of joining another ecological system also offers distinct advantages (Elliot et al., 2016b). More specifically, this paves the way for greater and more diverse opportunities for learning, developing relationships and membership of different communities. As previously asserted, despite formal education being the core concern of the sojourn, the opportunities educational sojourners are presented with often go far beyond what takes place within the four walls of the classroom. Consequently, it arguably makes every interaction a potential source of valuable learning, whether it takes place within or outwith academia. If we were to accept this premise, there will be no shortage of opportunities for interaction in every layer of the new ecological system, not to mention that there are still continuing, albeit restricted, interactions going on with respect to the original ecological system. Moreover, shared interactions with people from both old and new ecological systems are also possible and again, all these can foster further enrichment of sojourners' overall experience.

As we argued elsewhere, since family, relatives and friends from one's home country are at a distance, the sojourn then provides learners with a golden opportunity for finding and nurturing new relationships, initially in the new microsystem and mesosystem. This can lead not only to shared activities with one's new inner circle, but also to establishing meaningful relationships that can be sources of personal and psychological strength (Elliot et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Likewise, the feelings of estrangement and foreignness arising from unfamiliar environments, culture and surrounding communities encourage the prospect of finding niche communities (e.g. a sports community, a church community) to assist in building a sense of belonging with a group of people who share the same interests and with whom learners can freely engage as in Nigel's case, for example. Finally, whereas the macrosystem tends to emphasise the differences, even conflicting cultures, customs and practices between the two ecological systems concerned, the macrosystem also tends to be the layer where a lot of informal but meaningful and advantageous learning takes place.

A particular example given by the participants was that their pursuit of personal interests led to active and meaningful engagement with non-educational activities; equally, this then had a valuable impact on their enriched microsystem and a heightened sense of belonging within their exosystem. Moreover, there was evidence to suggest that these meaningful interactions contributed even to the academic component of the student's experience in the new ecological system. Taken from our paper (Elliot et al., 2016b, p. 745), Oscar's experience elucidates the connections not only among personal, societal and academic components of educational sojourners' experiences but also highlights the interactions within the different systems:

In Oscar's case, he was initially concerned about his ability to speak and understand English. His regular social interactions with the locals not only generated meaningful relationships and offered a supportive bond, they also offered opportunities for improving his command of English. These educational components of the hidden curriculum can apply to many student sojourners for whom increased understanding of jokes and idioms enhances their confidence and encourages them to express their thoughts. Additionally, entering into friendly arguments and debates is likely to facilitate the development of critical thinking....

Implications of maximising opportunities in meaningful learning encounters

A sound understanding of the mind-virtue orientation dichotomy becomes critical as it helps elucidate the modes of support (academic and non-academic) geared to assist educational sojourners in their transition from one learning orientation to another. It is worth asserting, however, that what can help make such support more effective is the complementarity between the institutional support provision and educational sojourners' understanding of and openness to the new learning orientation (either mind or virtue) complemented by the acquisition of new learning strategies and approaches that the host country's prevailing learning orientation entails (Li, 2005; van Egmond, Kuhnen & Li, 2013). Very often, the main drawback observed among students transitioning from one academic culture to another is not necessarily lack of skills but lack of awareness of expectations in the new learning context, which subsequently prevents successful adaptation (Williams & Daborn, 2008). In-depth reflection on this requisite shift is likely to embolden learners and scaffold their actions to operate in and to adapt successfully to the new learning orientations.

Consequently, a sojourner's personally fulfilling intercultural encounters may

lead to a cascading effect creating a synergy between international students' overall educational experience (within and outwith academia) and the promotion of a dynamic and truly intercultural classroom learning that subsequently benefits the whole class – international and local students alike – and therefore, bringing forth internationalisation at home (Montgomery, 2010). Notably, a greater understanding of different learners' conceptualisations of learning and the processes underpinning student sojourners' academic acculturation (Li, 2005; van Egmond, Kuhnen & Li, 2013) could offer both theoretical knowledge and practical utility that would be beneficial not only to the student sojourners themselves, but also to the key players in the new ecological system – fellow international students, domestic students, members of staff who teach, advise and support (directly or indirectly) international students, and the greater communities within and outwith academic institutions (Bennett, 2004; Montgomery, 2010). This is because when educational sojourners join a new ecological system, not only do they become part, but even more importantly, they become key contributors to that system. Therefore, their enriched experience arguably generates a more meaningful experience not just for their benefit but also for the people with whom they interact – largely contributing to the notion of realising a high quality experience of internationalisation at home (Montgomery, 2010).

Although the discussion to date mainly considers the students' perspectives and their sense of agency, success in an educational sojourn is a matter of interest shared by a number of stakeholders including the higher education institutions and organisations, teaching and support staff members and local students. In addressing concerns with a global significance such as this, there is little doubt that a holistic approach needs to be the preferred approach. This then raises the question: What are the roles played by each of these stakeholders in enhancing, enriching and contributing to the host ecological system that is more welcoming, supportive, and interactive with the kind of interaction that propagates knowledge, creates a strong sense of belonging and transforms the overall experience of educational sojourners? More importantly, how can stakeholders' individual efforts be harnessed to create such a holistic synergy? Whereas Simonsen et al. in Chapter 6 argue for lecturers being “change agents” in international students' learning, it can also be contended that each stakeholder has a crucial contribution to realise a holistic, and arguably a more effective approach to internationalisation. This is also crucial since experiences of

educational sojourn might be interlinked with students' career vision and pathways, as explored by Sakurai in Chapter 12.

In the age where higher education institutions are focused on internationalisation on a global scale, there is warrant for continuous investigation of the means by which different stakeholders can exercise their capacity to contribute towards a maximised international education experience for all sojourners – either individually or using a holistic, joined-up approach. Using the academic acculturation model as a conceptual framework gives the leverage for exploring interactions within and beyond academia as well as the lasting and transformative impact of these interactions both during and beyond the educational sojourn.

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