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From Class Assignment to Friendship: Enhancing the Intercultural Competence of Domestic and International Students through Experiential Learning

Passer des devoirs en classe à l'amitié : Améliorer les compétences interculturelles des étudiants locaux et internationaux à travers l'apprentissage expérientiel

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Abstract

This study explored growth in the intercultural competence of domestic and international students who participated in an intercultural experiential learning initiative for academic credit. The initiative paired Canadian students in a second-year multiculturalism class at Wilfrid Laurier University with international students enrolled in the Laurier English and Academic Foundation (LEAF) program. Qualitative data derived from the oral and written reflections of three cohorts of students inform the study. The data were coded using pre-existing codes derived from learning objectives and reflection questions based on Deardorff's (2006) Elements of Intercultural Competence Model. The findings suggest that while exposure to different cultural values and practices deepens domestic and international students' knowledge and challenges their assumptions about each other, creating optimal conditions for meaningful intercultural contact between the students at a university may not adequately reflect everyday contact between them in complex real-life situations.

Résumé

Cette étude explore l'augmentation des compétences interculturelles des étudiants locaux et internationaux inscrits dans une initiative interculturelle et expérientielle d'apprentissage pour des crédits académiques. L'initiative a jumelé des étudiants canadiens d'une classe de multiculturalisme de deuxième année de l'Université Wilfrid Laurier à des étudiants internationaux inscrits dans le programme de Laurier anglais et de la Fondation académique (LEAF). Les données qualitatives sont tirées des réflexions orales et écrites de trois cohortes d'étudiants. Les données ont été codifiées en utilisant des codes préexistants issus des objectifs d'apprentissages et des questions de réflexion basées sur les éléments du modèle interculturel de Deardorff's (2006). Les résultats suggèrent que l'exposition à des valeurs et à des pratiques culturelles différentes permet d'approfondir les connaissances des étudiants locaux et internationaux et mettent au défi leurs présupposés mutuels, créant ainsi des conditions optimales pour des contacts interculturels significatifs entre les étudiants à l'université. Cependant, ces résultats peuvent ne pas représenter adéquatement les contacts qu'ont les étudiants au jour le jour dans des situations complexes de la vie réelle.

Introduction

Canadian universities increasingly recognize the importance of expanding student learning outcomes to include intercultural competence defined as “the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 247). While the best way to develop intercultural competence is to “pack a pillow and blanket and see as much of the world as you can” (Lahiri, 2003), only 2.3% of Canadian undergraduate students actually studied abroad in 2014–2015 (CBIE, 2016). Therefore, as Canadian universities engage in activities aimed at building intercultural competence, the onus is on them to ensure that all students have multiple, substantive, and intentional encounters with global perspectives (Killick, 2012; Urban & Bierlein Palmer, 2014; Harrison, 2015; Grayson, 2008). “Internationalization at home” refers to initiatives aimed at fostering an international higher education experience despite students' own

lack of opportunities to study abroad (Harrison, 2015; Beelen & Jones, 2015). In the academic realm, it involves at least two domains: internationalizing content and internationalizing learning and teaching processes (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Arkoudis, 2006). While internationalizing content is easier to address in some academic disciplines than in others, the greater challenge has involved internationalizing teaching and learning strategies, and especially increasing interaction between domestic and international students in and outside the classroom (Arkoudis et al., 2010).

There is growing consensus in the academic literature on intercultural learning that domestic and international students cannot simply be put together in a classroom or on a campus and be expected to learn from each other (Garson, 2016; Kimmel & Volet, 2012; Summers & Volet, 2008; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Volet & Ang, 1998). Despite this consensus, few studies examine how intercultural interaction between domestic and international students should be fostered or the roles that university faculty and staff members play in that process. Furthermore, a growing body of research examines the educational experiences and outcomes of international students, with numerous studies highlighting isolation, homesickness, and higher levels of stress and anxiety (for example, Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016; Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Mori, 2000), but few studies explore how domestic students' thoughts and attitudes might be changed through deep engagement with international peers (Prieto-Flores, Feu, & Casademont, 2016; Soria & Troisi, 2014; Bennett, Volet, & Fozdar, 2013).

This article presents findings from a qualitative study of the oral and written reflections of three cohorts of domestic and international students who participated in an intercultural experiential learning initiative at Wilfrid Laurier University's Brantford Ontario campus. The initiative paired a culturally diverse group of Canadian undergraduate students in a second-year multiculturalism class (HR261) with international students enrolled in the upper intermediate class (Level 4) of the Laurier English and Academic Foundation (LEAF) Program. It was developed in response to two challenges: (1) an ongoing concern expressed by international student advisors that international students in the LEAF Program were marginalized on the Brantford campus with little opportunity to speak English outside of the classroom, hindering their successful transition to degree programs; and (2) a detachment that many HR 261 students demonstrated toward the cultural diversity and migration theories they were learning about in class.

Unlike university programs that match domestic student volunteers with international students, the intercultural initiative informing this study is innovative in that (1) it is an academic credit requirement built into the design of the two courses; (2) both international and domestic students receive intercultural communication training in advance; (3) the interaction is planned and managed using specific intercultural learning objectives and reflection questions; (4) the experience takes place on as equal terms as possible such that the domestic and international students are required to learn about each other; and (5) the experience is reflected on and debriefed in class. While spending a mandatory 20 hours together over a semester performing community service and getting to know each other, the domestic and international students were asked to reflect on the experience with the aim of developing new skills, new attitudes, and new ways of thinking (Lewis & Williams, 1994). The study examined changes in the students' perceptions of each other over the 12-week semester and growth in their intercultural competence as outlined in Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence. Our findings suggest that exposure to different cultural values and practices deepened the domestic and international students' knowledge of each other. However, purposefully creating optimal conditions for meaningful intercultural contact between the two groups at a university may not adequately reflect everyday contact in complex real-life situations (see Peng & Wu, 2016 for a similar finding). Additionally, we are aware that this exercise was merely a first step on a life-long journey of

intercultural learning. There is a continued need for students to expose themselves to more cultural diversity and take more risks for further growth and development.

Conceptual Framework for Examining Intercultural Competence

Definitions of intercultural competence in the academic literature generally coalesce around five dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, skills, internal outcomes (self-reported feelings), and external outcomes (observed behaviours) (Deardorff, 2006; Bennett, 2012; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Heyward, 2002; Hiller & Wozniak, 2009; Liu, 2016). These dimensions are developed and refined through engagement with diverse individuals and through reflections that encourage empathy or the ability to understand different world views (Deardorff, 2011). Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence was used as a conceptual frame for our study because it focuses equally on process and results, and therefore lends itself well to the development of specific learning outcomes for students to fulfil in their class assignments. The model consists of (1) Attitudes of respect, openness, curiosity and discovery, with these attitudes implying a willingness to risk and to move beyond one's comfort zone; (2) Knowledge of cultural self-awareness (i.e., the ways in which one's culture has influenced one's identity and worldview), culture-specific knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness; (3) Skills including observation, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating; (4) An internal outcome that consists of flexibility, adaptability, and ethno-relative perspective and empathy. (At this point, individuals are able to see from others' perspectives and to respond to them according to the way in which the other person desires to be treated); and (5) The sum of the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal outcomes, demonstrated through the behaviour and communication of the individual, which become the visible external outcomes of intercultural competence as observed by others (Deardorff, 2006, pp. 254–256). Research suggests, however, that if the element of reflection is absent, an individual may fail to make meaning out of an intercultural experience and such outcomes will not be achieved (Einbeck, 2002; Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Montrose, 2002; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2015; Peckenpaugh, 2014).

Experiential learning involves activities designed for student engagement using experimentation, reflection, and thinking (Kolb, 1984). It is rooted in constructivist theories of teaching and collective cooperative learning, which suggest that “knowledge is constructed individually and collectively, as people reflect upon their experiences, thereby transforming experience into knowledge” (Geary, 1995, as cited in Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2015, p. 44). This model of learning begins with a concrete experience, which is followed by observation and reflection, and then the formation of new knowledge. Students will then test out this new knowledge in a new situation, thus restarting the cycle (Peckenpaugh, 2014). We used Pries' (Revised 2016) Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle, based on Moon's (2004) *Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice* to guide domestic and international student reflections throughout the 12-week semester. The reflection process provides students with the opportunity to unpack their intercultural experiences and explore the experiences from different angles to make proper sense of them. Students also learn from their mistakes for smoother intercultural engagement in the future. The process is divided into three stages using the analogy of different parts of a bicycle. Part 1 is the front wheel at the beginning of the course and focuses on self-assessment via journaling with the order of action, reflection, theoretical analysis, integration and revised analysis. Part 2 is the crank shift and pedals, which moves the bike. At this stage, the focus is on engagement and processing the reflective assessment with peers and the course instructor. Finally, in Part 3, the rear wheel, students are instructed to observe more broadly, and to engage in interpretation and judgement. Like Pries' bicycle, the journals, discussions, and final reflective report focus on students'

heightened self-awareness, ability to observe and discern what is objective and subjective, and they encourage the students to develop a mindful approach to their interactions and to consider alternative stories outside of their own experiences.

Literature Review: Making Intercultural Contact Meaningful

The most common performance indicator used in the internationalization of higher education is the number of international students enrolled at a particular institution. The number of international students studying at Canadian universities has increased from 114,093 in 2000 to 356,574 in 2015 with Canada's International Education Strategy aiming for more than 450,000 by 2022 (Global Affairs Canada, 2014). International students now represent 6.1% of total enrollments in Wilfrid Laurier University in 2015 as compared to 1.6% in 2005 and the number of exchange students coming to Wilfrid Laurier University has increased from 77 in 2012 to 114 in 2015 (Guhr, 2016). Attracting international students is part of a broader global engagement strategy at the university that entails "forging global connections, building intercultural competencies and ensuring that all students have multiple, substantive and intentional encounters with global perspectives" (WLU, 2015). The LEAF program, for its part, has attracted 200 students each year since 2010 to the Brantford campus, with the majority of the students arriving from China. LEAF is an English for academic purposes preparatory program where international students complete five levels of English before entering the degree programs, in which they have been conditionally accepted. The decision was made to house the LEAF Program in Brantford because the campus is integrated into the city's small downtown, providing more opportunities for international students to practise speaking English with local people in addition to university students. This fairly robust international student presence at Wilfrid Laurier University therefore has the potential for the development of internationalization-at-home strategies through what is known as "internationalization by proximity" (Myles, 2014). That is, "if there is enough diversity at the university, domestic and international students will presumably mix and the outcome will be better understanding and communication between cultural groups" (Myles, 2014, p. 3). However, as will be argued later in this article, diversity without intentional facilitation by faculty and staff may not necessarily result in positive outcomes.

Despite their relatively high numbers, international students are a largely untapped source of opportunities for cross-cultural communication and the enhancement of intercultural knowledge and skills (Geelhoed, Abe, & Talbot, 2003). While universities in North America, including Wilfrid Laurier University, offer several programs to connect domestic and international peers, many students still remain largely segmented into their own cultural groups and do not actively participate in cross-national interactions on campus (Yefanova, Baird, & Montgomery, 2015). This observation is consistent with literature from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (for example, Denson & Zhang, 2010; Kimmel & Volet, 2012; Summers & Volet, 2008; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). One merely has to observe international students consistently and quietly sitting in their cultural/linguistic groups in classrooms to agree with Garson's (2016) conclusion that internationalization at home might be "optimistic and not necessarily grounded in the reality of students negotiating intercultural tensions in our classrooms and on our campuses" (p. 21). The objective of the internationalization of higher education to produce graduates who possess intercultural competencies is therefore yet to be fully realized (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Worse still, Garson (2016) warns that "without careful and intentional curricula and pedagogy to promote learning across difference we may actually be producing graduates with more biases and stereotypes than when they entered our institutions" (p. 21).

Minimal interaction between domestic and international students in university learning environments can be partially explained by intergroup contact theory. Allport (1954) developed the hypothesis that under the right conditions increased contact between people of different cultural backgrounds will lead to a decrease in prejudicial attitudes. Allport was aware that contact between people, whether in a community or a classroom setting, in itself is not enough to reduce prejudice so he qualified his hypothesis with four specific conditions: (a) equal status within a situation, (b) intergroup cooperation, (c) common goals, and (d) support by social and institutional authorities. Kenworthy and colleagues (2005) later changed common goals to the more specific perception of similarity and friendship between two groups (Kenworthy, Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2005, p. 279). Other researchers, Pettigrew (1998) in particular, identified friendship potential as a fifth condition. If these conditions are not in place, then a reinforcement of stereotypes and prejudice is likely to occur. Intergroup contact theory has been criticized in numerous studies because it tends to restrict “the nature and causes of racism and ethnic divisions to individual ignorance and misunderstanding without giving adequate attention to the central role played by broader social structures and institutions” (Connolly, 2000, p. 170). Yet, the theory still offers a reasonable explanation for why domestic and international students limit their interactions. Consistent with Allport’s optimal conditions for contact, the following obstacles to meaningful contact appear in the literature.

First and most importantly, domestic students clearly have the positional advantage with respect to speaking the dominant language (English) and being part of the dominant culture. Even if the “domestic” students are themselves immigrants, they have still been in Canada long enough to pursue their university studies in English and absorb the dominant culture. Researchers have documented that international students, particularly those from China, do not believe they possess adequate language ability to easily strike up conversations with students from the host country (Cheng & Erben, 2012; Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008). International students in a study by Hsieh (2011), for example, reported that they had hoped to improve their language proficiency and acquire a deeper understanding of the local culture, but became disillusioned when they were not given the chance to communicate with local people. A power imbalance became noticeable when the students realized that “in a society where the expectation is that you will speak ‘good’ English as defined by the dominant group, anyone who does not speak ‘good’ English is then positioned as deficient” (Zhang & Beck, 2014, np). At the same time, domestic students in a study by Harrison and Peacock (2010) reported feeling resentful when international students sat together in class and spoke their own language. In another study by Volet and Ang (1998) domestic students regarded Chinese students as a barrier to group work success because of their limited English and different cultural backgrounds and they thought the international students would compromise their grades.

Second, students generally feel more comfortable forming friendship groups and interacting with others from similar backgrounds (Dunne, 2009). Harrison (2015) notes that “dissimilarities in culture, however subjective, are likely to make intercultural interactions between home and international students more practically challenging and emotionally strained given fewer shared reference points and conflicting perspectives” (Harrison, 2015, p. 414). Some of the cultural distance reported by students might result from high and low context communication styles. Communication styles are the ways “one verbally, non-verbally, and para-verbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood” (Norton, 1983, p. 58). Gudykunst (2001) conceptualized high context communication to include “being indirect, inferring meaning, interpersonal sensitivity, using feelings to guide behaviour, and using silence.” Low context communication, according to Gudykunst, includes “being

dramatic, dominant, animated, relaxed, attentive, open, and friendly” (as cited in Park & Kim, 2008, p. 47). Since Asian cultures tend to adhere to high context communication styles and European cultures tend to be more low context, quiet but attentive international students from China may be perceived as withdrawn by domestic classmates, and frequent interruptions to lectures by domestic students may be seen as rude by their Chinese classmates (Ward, 2001). Domestic students often think that international students stick together and do not want to integrate while international students often perceive their domestic peers as uninformed and disinterested in their cultures (Ward, 2001). Social class is another perceived dissimilarity. In contrast to international students who are often “drawn from financial or power elites with the resources and disposition to seek an international education, domestic students are drawn from a relatively wide cross-section of society with variable enthusiasm for intercultural experiences” (Harrison, 2015, p. 418).

Third, university administrators can implement internationalization-at-home strategies from above, but “unless faculty members are on board, all the international student services in the world won’t be enough” (Harrison, 2015, p. 414). Faculty, like students, exhibit varying interests and skills in dealing with cultural diversity. Unless their subject matter is international in nature, many faculty have shown little interest in internationalization at home. Urban and Bierlein Palmer (2014) reported that faculty perceived internationalization-at-home expectations as exceeding their roles and believed that students should be more self-reliant in building their own social networks. In contrast, Lilly, Barker, and Harris (2015) observed that some faculty have an existing cosmopolitan predisposition and will assume a natural role as “cultural travellers,” “acting simultaneously as source of knowledge, participant in meaning-making and positive role model” (p. 235).

The last obstacle is the lack of a common goal that might assist in preparing the students to work across differences. Allport (1954) hypothesized that for people to connect in meaningful ways they need to have a purpose, which becomes the focus of shared work, undertaken with equal status (Harrison, 2015). Therefore, efforts to provide the types of positive interactions envisaged by Allport in the university classroom tend to focus on group-based project work. Rienties, Alcott, and Jindal-Snape (2014) observed that “when students have to work together in teams for a substantial period on authentic but complex group products, students seem to be able to develop sufficient coping strategies to overcome initial cultural differences” (p. 79). To optimize intercultural interaction, groups are assigned by the instructor and the task to be accomplished requires interdependence so that no individual student can complete the assignment alone (Davis, 1999).

Methodology

Our study relied on qualitative data derived from the oral and written reflections of three cohorts (N=60) of domestic undergraduate students enrolled in HR261 Multiculturalism and three cohorts (N=50) of international students enrolled in the upper intermediate level (Level 4 of 5 levels) of the LEAF Program. HR261 attracts a heterogeneous group of students from rural and urban backgrounds. About half of these domestic students are from Brantford and the surrounding rural counties. They are often the first in their families to attend university, are mostly of white Anglo-Saxon background, and they generally have had little exposure to different cultures. The rest of the domestic students commute from the Greater Toronto Area. Many of these students are themselves immigrants or the children of immigrants and racialized. Students enrolled in the upper-immediate class of LEAF are primarily from China, with the occasional students registered from South Korea, Japan, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia. International

students in the LEAF program tend to be from affluent families, economically dependent on their parents, and respectful of their parents' decision to pursue a career in Business Administration.

In fall 2014, 2015, 2016 we organized the students into triads of two LEAF students and one HR261 student, or two HR261 students and one LEAF student depending on the numbers of students in each class. It was also common for the LEAF students to bring co-ethnic friends along to organized activities, hence enlarging the groups. The students received intercultural communication training early in the semester by completing four modules of an in-house Intercultural Certificate that introduced them to concepts of culture, exploring one's own culture, intercultural communication, and exploring difference. They also logged their hours together on a university portal and posted selfies on a class Twitter feed with a caption and the date of their activity. In fall 2016 a community service component was added to the initiative whereby the students worked towards a common goal the city of Brantford by, for example, serving Thanksgiving dinner and preparing meat pies at a soup kitchen and chaperoning children at festivals and community centres in low-income neighbourhoods.

Data Collection and Analysis

Discussion sessions with the students in HR261 took place at mid-semester and end of semester and were recorded by Laurier International staff using hand-written notes. The mid-semester discussion kept the domestic and international students in the same room resulting in the LEAF students either not speaking at all or whispering their responses to their HR261 partners who would then speak for them. To avoid this perceived inequality in English language proficiency, we separated the domestic and international in different classrooms for the end of semester discussion. Upon completing their 20 hours together, the students wrote reflection reports in which they answered a series of questions (Table 2) about their experiences based on Learning Outcomes drawn from Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence and Pries' (Revised 2016) Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle. They also collected their thoughts and observations in journals, which formed much of the content in their written reports. Research Ethics Board clearance (#5042) and written consent from the students was received to use the data. The qualitative data were coded by the lead author following pre-existing codes derived from the learning objectives and reflection questions. Given the a priori nature of the codes, data analysis consisted of overlaying the pre-existing categories/codes on top of the data collected from the students and looking for ways in which the data did not fit these categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since the data consists of the students' self-reported thoughts and observations collected over a short 12-week period and not long-term observations of their behaviour by others, Deardorff's "external outcomes" were excluded from the analysis.

Table 1

HR261/LEAF Intercultural Learning Objectives

Upon completing the required hours, students who participate in the intercultural experiential learning option should be well on their way to being able to:

- ✓ Initiate meaningful interaction with people from other cultures in the context of a complex problem or opportunity in the community
- ✓ Articulate their own values in the context of personal identities and recognize diverse and potentially conflicting positions vis-à-vis complex social and civic problems
- ✓ Explore and bridge conflicts as you work together towards achieving a common goal
- ✓ Develop a deeper awareness of cross-cultural differences
- ✓ Develop knowledge of appropriate behaviours when working with people from different cultures
- ✓ Learn phrases from another language and increase understanding of the difficulties involved in learning a language

Table 2

HR261/LEAF Reflection Questions (expanded and made more specific in 2016)

1. Describe what you saw, heard, tasted, and felt during this activity with your partners.
2. Did you observe how your partners interacts with others? Did you observe how other people in the community of Brantford interacted with your partners?
3. Provide examples of things you learned about your partners' culture and society.
4. How did you feel about your partners' behaviour during the activity? Was there something you found unusual about this behaviour?
5. How has the experience with your partners influenced your own values, identity, or the way you see the world?
6. What assumptions of your own (stereotypes, prejudices) have you become aware of? How were your actions influenced by ideas you had about your partners?
7. How has your experience reinforced or challenged those assumptions or beliefs?
8. What skills, strengths or personality traits have been assets in this experience?
9. How comfortable are you with the opinions and values expressed by your partners?
10. How much did you know about your partners' culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices when this initiative began? How much do you know now?
11. How has this experience influenced your openness and curiosity to learn about new cultures?
12. How did you communicate verbally and in writing with your partners? Did you have to change anything about the way you speak and write?
13. What has this experience done to your flexibility and adaptability when handling new situations?
14. Describe your experience volunteering together in the community.
15. How would the experience have been different if you did it on your own?
16. How did your perceptions of volunteering in the community differ from those of your partners?
17. How did it feel to work toward a common goal together?
18. What goals did you accomplish together that you could not have accomplished on your own?

Findings

In this section we summarize the main findings from the self-reported evidence of three cohorts of domestic students enrolled in HR261 multiculturalism, and international students enrolled in the upper intermediate Level 4 class of the Laurier English and Academic Foundations (LEAF) Program. Themes are organized according to four dimensions of intercultural competence: Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills, and self-identified Internal Outcomes.

1. Attitudes: Respect, Openness, Curiosity and Discovery

When reflecting on their intercultural experience over the 12-week semester, many HR261 and LEAF students expressed initial apprehension about being matched for academic credit. We have observed that domestic undergraduate students are generally most comfortable, albeit most disengaged, in a lecture hall writing notes with the assistance of visual aids such as power point slides. Moving away from a lecture format to experiential learning pushes the students outside of their comfort zone and compels them to be more engaged. The international students in the LEAF Program for their part are accustomed to being together in a separate classroom with professional ESL instructors, though they do occasionally attend mainstream university lectures in preparation for their degree studies. The data collected from the reflections suggest that the hours spent together plunged the domestic and international students into an exciting new realm of curiosity and discovery. In the words of one HR261 student:

I can confidently assert that I would not have done this experience on my own. It is a concept that is completely out of my comfort zone, but having successfully completed the initiative I can say that it was a truly unforgettable experience that I feel fortunate to have been a part of. Reflecting back to the beginning of the term I was apprehensive and even considered dropping the course because I did not understand the concept of being graded on spending time with an international student. I now understand that the source of my apprehensiveness was not knowing where to begin or how to initiate the process. I believe that not knowing how to start deters a lot of students from interacting with international students. In my personal experience meeting and becoming friends with M and Z did not feel like an obligation but a privilege. (HR261 F, 2016)

And according to this LEAF student, being pushed out of one's comfort zone can be surprisingly rewarding:

In LEAF as you know, international students find it really hard to get a friend when we come to Canada for the first time. Our English is poor and we just know some culture from websites. Thus, some of the Canadian students think we are stupid, rude, weird, and would not like to talk with us, evermore to be our friends. However, we got this wonderful chance. At first I thought spending so many hours with a Canadian student will be uncomfortable and take up time. But I learned a lot. Actually, I think all of us will never forget this experience. (LEAF A, 2014)

Attempting to put preconceived biases and stereotypes aside as the semester progressed, the HR 261 students began to respect and envy their LEAF partners' ability to travel internationally. Many were able to contrast their own mono-cultural experiences with what they regarded as the rich intercultural learning of their partners. They perceived their partners as courageous for travelling by themselves and for pursuing university studies in a new language. This offered the HR 261 students a new perspective on migrant motivation and determination, and ignited their curiosity about the world outside of Ontario:

I have always wanted to travel or study abroad, but I have never really taken much action. I found myself getting jealous of the LEAF students talking about their travel experiences and the things

that they have learned. They make me want to be more independent and I admire their bravery and strength for doing this on a regular basis. (HR261 G, 2014)

The LEAF students admired their HR261 partners for their financial independence, especially their ability to earn money at various part-time jobs and to budget their earnings. While the part-time jobs caused substantial scheduling conflicts (i.e., LEAF students are in class from 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. and can only meet with their HR261 partners on evenings and weekends, but HR261 students tend to work evenings and weekends) they also provided the LEAF students with a learning opportunity. By way of illustration, having spent time with his HR261 partner, one LEAF student reflected on his own upbringing and dependence on his parents and questioned his own behaviour:

I think about my identity and values from the meeting. When we invited H to go to have buffet with us, he said he would not spend \$20 on a meal because it is too expensive and will ruin his financial plan. Then I thought about myself and that maybe \$20 is too much for me to spend on the meal. If I can make a financial plan like H and carry it out, I can have a better quality of life. This meeting with my partner influenced my value a lot. The money I spend now comes from my parents. I should not use a lot because it does not belong to me. If I want to pay more on the meal or something else, I should use my own money. When I become a freshman and get permission to work in Canada, I should find a part-time job to earn my own money. (LEAF B, 2015)

This observation motivated the LEAF student to, in his words “stand on my own feet and learn how to solve my troubles independently” (LEAF B, 2015). And while the HR261 students remarked favourably on their LEAF partners’ attachment to and respect for their parents, the LEAF students questioned that attachment upon realizing that the HR261 students were able to choose career paths that made them happy rather than those that pleased their parents.

2. Knowledge: Cultural Self-Awareness and See the World from Others’ Perspectives

The HR261 reflection reports describe in rich detail an increase in sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge of China and the other countries represented in the LEAF Program. The most powerful outcome in this theme for the domestic students, however, is their heightened ability to understand where their own values come from. For example, prior to the time spent with her LEAF partner, HR261 student B had not given a great deal of thought to her own identity, values, and goals:

Initially, I assumed that I would just meet with my LEAF partner, complete the requested hours to get an easy grade, but after meeting and getting to know Q my assumptions were proven wrong. I feel as though at the end of this experience I not only have a new friend but also a new perspective on so many things—things that without meeting Q I would have remained blind to seeing and understanding. While allowing Q to get to know me, I also developed a new understanding of who I am as well as what role my cultural background plays in my identity, personal values and goals. (HR261 B, 2015)

Individuals need to be aware of their own culture because it can keep them from projecting their values onto others. When individuals are unaware of the values that drive them, they will be unable to distinguish their values from those held by other cultures. It is only through self-awareness that we can then attempt to see the world from others’ perspectives. Such self-awareness was not as obvious in the international student reflections, but their perceptions of

Canadians clearly evolved over the duration of the semester through their search for common ground with their domestic peers:

Before I came here, I thought Canadian people are closed, which means they do not really want to talk with the people from another country. That is why I chose to ignore them, and only make Chinese friends. But right now, I found that it was wrong. Majority of them are friendly and they want to make friends with us. But the first thing we need to do is to talk and show respect from both sides (LEAF R, 2015).

The LEAF students from China also demonstrated increased awareness of how the political situation in their country is perceived by Canadian university students. According to LEAF U:

My partner's major is history. He knows a lot about China. We talked about Tiananmen Square even. I learned more details and the truth about this event that were totally different from our textbook. At first I thought my partner made a mistake but then I read more about the Tiananmen Square event. I wondered why or textbook gives different details? (LEAF U, 2014)

Another outcome within the theme of knowledge acquisition is the self-reflection experienced by those HR261 students who are first and second generation immigrants and the LEAF students' realization that they have a lot in common with them. This finding reminds us that the binary between domestic and international students in Canada is an artificial one (Ippolito, 2007); something we must keep in mind when working on internationalization-at-home strategies. By way of illustration, by comparing the cultural adaptation experiences of her LEAF partner with the process of acculturation that her mother endured after immigrating to Canada, Student R could better empathize with her mother. In doing so, she experienced growth in terms of her own ethnic identity construction:

Being born to immigrant parents I always told my mother that she came to such a wonderful country and yet she didn't bother to learn English when she had many opportunities to do so. I always get frustrated when I hear her struggle to speak English and claim that she did not want to integrate into Canada. I now understand that it was not that she did not want to learn English; she didn't know how. My mom felt like a misfit and an alien. I am now deeply ashamed that I felt that way about her. (HR261 R, 2015)

LEAF Student V, for her part became aware of a deeply troubling racially charged stereotype that she had about African Canadians to find a shared migration experience:

I used to think African people are rude and untouchable, but after I have communicated with P I knew that I shouldn't judge people who are from a different country.... Since my partner is an immigrant and I am a foreigner in Canada, we are similar to some extent, and he told me that it is easier for him to understand what I was going through which made me feel so warm and more likely to chat with him. (LEAF V, 2014)

These findings suggest that immigrant students in Canadian universities constitute a much needed bridge between domestic and international students on Canadian university campuses.

3. Skills: Observation, Listening, Evaluating, Analyzing, Interpreting, and Relating

Coordinating schedules, agreeing on activities to partake in, finding common areas in which to relate, and communicating, were all lessons in flexibility, compromise and patience. Some of the more astute HR261 students also strengthened their ability to observe, listen, interpret, and analyze when they did not fully understand what was happening around them. One HR261 student, for example, was able to pick up on her partner's non-verbal cues:

Quite a few times I noticed that K seemed to be embarrassed about his answers, covering his face with his hands while speaking. He did this a lot whenever he needed to repeat something we did not understand or when he had to stop to think of the words to use. This reminded me of a point brought up during our intercultural competency training in class. We were told how sometimes students learning English are embarrassed to talk to native speakers because of their lower skill level. It was interesting for me to hear about this concept in class then actually see it play out a few hours later. (HR261 M, 2016)

The observations reported by the LEAF students were more cultural in nature, such as observing how their partners ordered food at restaurants: “I found some differences in several aspects of culture,” said LEAF D. “For example, when we order in China, we just say it directly, like ‘I want this soup.’ But Canadian will say ‘May I have this soup please’; because asking directly is so rude to do. That’s a big difference from my own culture, and I want to learn more about the other cultural differences.” (LEAF D, 2014)

4. Internal Outcomes

By the end of the intercultural experience, the domestic and international students reported that they could empathize with people from different backgrounds. However, their reflections suggest that inequality and power imbalances may have delayed the development of an actual ethno-relative perspective (i.e. being comfortable with many standards and customs and able to adapt one’s behaviour and judgments to many interpersonal settings (Deane, 1991). Empathy is not sympathy. The purpose of the intercultural experiential learning initiative is not for domestic students to take care of, mentor, or help international students assimilate into local norms. We want them to put themselves in their partners’ shoes and genuinely understand what it is like to attend university in a different society and culture, and learn in a different language.

Mid-semester reflections nevertheless revealed that some HR261 students were taking care of and speaking for their LEAF partners, which exacerbated the inequality of the partnerships. In this respect, the consistent (and rather unfortunate) theme that carries through many domestic student reflections is the realization that their international student partners are often not treated with a great deal of respect outside of the university. This observation became especially apparent in fall 2016 when the students were sent off campus to volunteer with various community organizations in Brantford. Most of these organizations served children, adults, and seniors in low-income neighbourhoods. It was at this point when the HR261 students reflected on the discrimination experienced by international students in the broader community:

J and I were assigned to supervise a bouncy castle, but before we could do so we had to sign forms. After I signed mine, J politely asked if she should sign in her Chinese name or English name. When I told her that she could write her Chinese name, the man who was “supervising” us, snickered at me and rolled his eyes, as if I was in on the joke. (HR261 O, 2016)

Not only were my partners rarely being spoken to unless they were being asked to be quiet, but the people seemed to avoid wanting to engage with them all together. They [the community organizers] spoke in slower tones and after our volunteering was done, the coordinator approached me and proceeded to commend how charitable my actions were. She treated my time with my LEAF partners as though it were a burden. (HR261 P, 2016)

These reflections demonstrated the growth in intercultural competence that had occurred since the beginning of the semester. The domestic students were criticizing community members for having behaved on feelings that they themselves had had before starting the course—fear and discomfort of interacting with people who are “different.” The HR261 students also expressed

dismay on the micro-aggressions aimed at their international partners, which either went largely unnoticed or ignored by their partners. Here we noticed a substantial difference between the reflections of the white Canadian-born domestic students and the racialized immigrant or second generation domestic students. The racialized domestic students expressed no surprise at the treatment of their international partners, stating that they had already perceived and/or experienced the less than welcoming attitude of the campus and larger Brantford community towards the ethnic minority students. At this point in the reflections, some of the racialized domestic students recognized their common position as minority individuals and “Others” in the predominantly white Brantford setting. This recognition subsequently deepened their interactions with their LEAF partners allowing for an enhanced intercultural experience.

These reflections further demonstrate that Allport’s optimal conditions for meaningful intercultural contact are almost impossible to recreate outside of the university classroom. The LEAF students were already at a disadvantage when communicating verbally and in writing in English in the classroom setting (as evident in their limited oral and written reflections in English). Sending them into the wider community to accomplish a common goal with their HR261 partners may have intensified that disadvantage. Although most of the international students were introduced to community service learning in the LEAF program, the idea of unpaid labour did not sit well with many of them. Having in many instances grown up without younger siblings and cousins, the Chinese LEAF students in particular were uncomfortable around children and weary of interacting with clients in low-income neighbourhoods that they perceived as unsafe. Discomfort notwithstanding, volunteering presented the international students with an excellent opportunity to leave the sheltered classroom setting and gain the real world experience that will prepare them for their degree studies in Canada.

Discussion

By the end of the 12-week semester, the domestic students’ were able to develop some of the same skills and knowledge that are acquired by students who study abroad. The students reported a belief in their own ability to face challenges and achieve goals; improved intergroup understanding, enhanced problem-solving and leadership skills; stronger communication skills; and greater flexibility, patience, and the willingness to compromise (Treleaven et al., 2007; Murray Brux & Fry, 2010; Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa, 2006; Deardorff, 2006, 2011; Nelson Laird, 2005). All of these skills are thought to lead to greater employability in the long term (CBIE, 2013). The international students were not able to articulate in English comparable progress, but did clearly state that their knowledge of Canadian culture increased and the cultural distance they had initially felt gradually narrowed. Some of the domestic and international student reflections showed the early stages of a cosmopolitan mindset whereby individuals were beginning to free themselves from provincial attitudes and prejudices and were becoming more open to intercultural experiences.

As previously noted, only two of Allport’s (1954) conditions for meaningful intercultural contact could be replicated outside of the classroom setting. Levelling the playing field on which the initiative took place is something we could not do, but continually strive toward. Giving the students a common goal to work towards in Brantford may have resulted in tilting that playing field even more. Nevertheless, the intercultural experiential learning initiative had strong institutional support behind it with internationalization at home prioritized in Wilfrid Laurier University’s strategic academic plan. Most importantly, the findings revealed changing perceptions of similarity amongst the students. By the end of the semester each cohort of domestic and international students realized that “we are more alike than we are different”:

On a superficial level we couldn't be more different. We are studying different things, speak different languages, look different, were raised in different ways, and have vastly different life experiences. But once I started talking to my LEAF partners, I realized that despite these differences, we actually are quite alike. The problems and worries that Canadian students face are also faced by my partners (HR261J, 2016)

Furthermore, although this experiment was not voluntary or organic (which is the ideal scenario), the students reported that they are more receptive to forming friendships with each other. In the words of one LEAF student: "I do not just say I learn many talking skills. I really want to say I have my first Canadian friend. Sometimes I felt she is my Canadian sister." (LEAF K, 2015)

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in important ways. First, the findings present unbalanced qualitative data. While many of the international students who participated in the intercultural initiative reflected on their experience, their English levels limited the depth of their oral and written answers. When asked to reflect on their experience together at the mid-semester discussion session, for example, the HR261 students tended to speak on behalf of their LEAF partners who quietly whispered their answers in their partners' ears. It is also important to emphasize that the reflection questions were framed by an open-ended Western-style of reflective analysis, which may not have been culturally appropriate for primarily Chinese students. Therefore, while the data obtained from the international students is extremely valuable, there is not enough of it to make strong comparisons. With further refinement of the parameters of this project, we hope to be able to include richer qualitative data from international students in our analysis in the future. Second, the students' growth in intercultural competence could be measured only with respect to their own perceptions, i.e., "this is how I felt at the beginning of the semester and this is how I felt at the end" rather than external observation of their behaviour. Furthermore, following the recommendations of Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill (2009), we will need to conduct interviews directly with students in future offerings of the intercultural experiential learning initiative to investigate more deeply why they view their progress in their learning and development in the way that they do. The domestic and international students clearly became aware of cultural differences and the domestic students in particular demonstrated many of the learning outcomes documented by Deardorff (2006). However, the students' reflections were not profound enough to fulfill the three parts of Pries' Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle. Complexity was not highly evident in the way they approached their thinking, especially how they interpreted and made judgements about what they observed and experienced (see Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009 for a similar finding). Finally, the data were susceptible to a researcher's effect in that the first author of this article was both the class instructor in HR261 and primary investigator. The reflections were prepared for academic credit so it is possible that the HR261 students emphasized the positive to receive good grades.

Limitations aside, this study provides an example of how a university campus can creatively provide undergraduate students with an opportunity to experience international and intercultural encounters and develop global perspectives through academic programming. The data reveal that a substantial amount of learning took place amongst the students, at least at a surface level. Deeper learning will presumably occur as the students take advantage of more intercultural opportunities, including study abroad. Our findings are consistent with growing research evidence that positive learning and intercultural outcomes result when faculty and staff design focused, intentional multicultural experiences for students (Milem, Chang, & Lising

Antonio, 2005). Intentional institutional policies and programs that encourage high quality interactions coupled with a diverse student population, improve educational experiences for all students (Chang, 2001).

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