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A Tale of Two Scholars: Developing Transculturally Through Dialogue and Writing

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Short term international exchanges offer worldwide collaborative research and cultural training opportunities for graduate students. However, the ability to develop transcultural competencies in these exchanges is often hampered by time constraints. This inquiry uses a collaborative, multi-sited autoethnographic approach to explore the potential of forging a transcultural relationship through the act of writing an academic article for publication, post-seminar. Two doctoral scholars, one originally from China, pursuing a doctorate at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia, and one from the University of Calgary, Canada, use multiple connected sites (face-to-face, WeChat, Google docs, email) to further their transcultural development through professional and personal collaboration. The authors used Slimbach's (2005) transcultural competencies as a framework to guide this inquiry. Based on insights developed through the process, the authors present recommendations for future international doctoral seminar participants.

Keywords: International Doctoral Seminar; transcultural

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Universities of today express a desire for graduate students to develop transculturally, that is, to find shared connections and values across cultures while addressing complex global issues (Slimbach, 2005). To that end, international graduate exchanges have been conceived as “a form of deliberate research training and induction into the culture of international networks and collaborations” (McLeod & Bloch, 2010, p. 270). In order to evolve transculturally, students are required to develop competencies in perspective taking; ethnographic documentation; awareness of world cultures, conditions, histories, and communication; as well as demonstrating those personal qualities necessary for connection (Slimbach, 2005). Given the constraints of time and place, this is not always feasible. Often the exchanges are short term in nature, so the process of seeing the world and therefore ourselves in new ways (Slimbach, 2005), presents challenges.

A short term transcultural doctoral seminar including the authors, Sandra and Melody, was held in November 2017 at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia. Sixteen doctoral students, from the host university, QUT, Beijing Normal University (BNU), and the University of Calgary (UC) gathered to participate in a cultural exchange of ideas, which included the presentation of their doctoral research.

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Though there was some time spent in systematic dialogue, a significant part of the seminar involved participants engaging in less structured activities. These included a school visit, trips to a wildlife sanctuary, a nature preserve, and dinners out. Time at these locations and while walking and riding to and from locales provided opportunities for students from the three universities to get to know each other on a more personal level. It was during these activities that we, the two authors, one a student from QUT, but originally from China, and one from the UC engaged in conversation, not specifically about our doctoral work, but more about our personal lives as implicated by our cultural upbringings.

In discussions we came to see, though we were different in many ways, we also shared personal connections. Our conversations centred around universal matters such as family, gender, and career and life plans. We also speculated about the long-term benefits of the doctoral seminar. Given the distance, cultural differences, and cost, we wondered if the experience achieved what it set out to do. We questioned whether transcultural relationships could be sustained once participants returned home, and if so, how?

The purpose of this research was to probe the potential of an explicit endeavor to foster a transcultural relationship. We asked the question: Can dialogue and writing develop and deepen transcultural connections during and following a face-to-face short term doctoral idea exchange? We focused on our face-to-face and online discussions and our collaborative writing in an attempt to reach clarity about the feasibility of this approach.

This article is divided into four parts. First we present a review of two aspects of the related literature: 1) the success rate of international graduate student exchanges and 2) how we might map transcultural development, particularly through Slimbach's (2005) transcultural competencies. Next, we describe our methodology, multi-sited collaborative autoethnography, including a description of the methods we used to gather data. Then we connect our chosen Slimbach competencies to the autoethnographic data we collected. Finally, we present recommendations for deepening transcultural relationships in future short-term doctoral seminars.

What have we learned from international graduate student exchange programs?

Against the backdrop of globalization, graduate students have more opportunities to participate in various international exchange programs. Positive outcomes of these programs have been well documented. The advantages include increased specific knowledge (Jones & Hill, 2001), the promotion of language proficiency (Sowa, 2002), the enhancement of academic abilities (Eyler & Giles, 1999), the improvement of interpersonal skills (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Sax, 1997), and the establishment of transcultural awareness and a global mindset (Black & Duhon, 2006; Jenkins, 1996; Sutton & Rubin, 2004; Williams, 2005). The benefits are not only for individuals, but also for host institutions in terms of potential student recruitment, alumni network building, and extra funds and financial supports (Jenkins, 1996; Sowa, 2002).

International exchanges, due to their documented benefits, are becoming increasingly diverse. Exchanges are mainly categorized as short-term and long-term based on their duration. However, the definition of short-term and long-term has yet to reach consensus in academia. Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus, and Skendall (2012) contended that short-term programs are characterized by brevity in duration and specific design targets that are usually less than one month, while Kehl and Morris (2008) view programs less than eight weeks as short-term. Although short-term programs are conducive to forming new understandings of self and others through reflective personal experience (Jones, et al., 2012), the positive outcomes of short-term programs are inconclusive. Compared with long-term programs, the benefits of short-term programs are widely

known to be weaker than their long-term counterparts, especially as related to intercultural sensitivity (Kehl & Morris, 2008). In addition, short term programs have also been criticized because of their substantial cost, disruption to normal academic study routines, and mediocre experience owing to weak institutional linkages or poor personal preparation (Jenkins, 1996; Sowa, 2002).

A cognitive roadmap for transcultural development

When it comes to cultural development, scholars have focused on experiencing and expanding awareness of other cultures, while maintaining connection to our own (Aldridge, Kilgo, Christensen, 2014; Slimbach, 2005). Critics have suggested that structured educational cultural opportunities have focused too much “on how we are products of culture and not enough on how we are producers of culture” (Aldridge et al., 2014, p.117). Furthermore, Aldridge et al. (2014) proposed that in order to be producers of cultures we must aim for transcultural transcendence, all the while accepting the continual fluctuations that are the cultural dynamic.

Slimbach’s (2005) model of ten propositions to guide learners in the path of transcultural competency supports this movement to transcendence. Learners adopt what they know within their own culture, to generate affiliations across cultures, leading to the “transculturally-competent person” (Slimbach, 2005, p. 207). According to Slimbach, this work must be “immersed, immediate, and emotional” (2005, p. 207) and must take place in the context of community. It is within these conditions that we originate our study.

Methodology

Given the nature of our locales and our developing relationship, we selected multi-sited, collaborative autoethnography as our methodology. The multi-sited perspective is in concurrence with Marcus (1995) who stated that “single-sited research can no longer be located in a world system perspective” (p. 98). Multi-sited ethnography establishes a network that links several sites by bridging “geographically dispersed but socially connected spaces” (Wolff, 2015, p. 61). By using multi-sited ethnography, we hoped to build a “multi-layered narrative” (Gatson, 2011, p. 514) that developed over time and place. In so doing, we acknowledge that our learning moved beyond our initial face-to-face meeting and continued in various virtual social environments (Hernández-Hernández, Fendler, & Gil, 2013).

Additionally, it was our aim to collectively study our individual autobiographical histories in the context of a transcultural group of two (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). This was for the specific purpose of developing and learning about ourselves and each other in a transcultural community building process (Chang et al., 2013).

In order to actualize the methodology, we began by sharing ideas via email. This email discussion included personal anecdotes, as well as initial thoughts around methodology, theoretical frameworks, and content. Next, to track our research process, we created a Google Doc, an online authoring tool that was a running thread of our ideas. It was through this Google Doc that the article began to take form. Determining a theoretical framework was critical. The team from Sandra’s university had been introduced to Slimbach’s (2005) transcultural competencies prior to the doctoral seminar, so we explored Slimbach’s ideas for their relevance to our experience. After sharing, reading, and reflecting on Slimbach’s work as a potential framework, we selected the competencies that resonated with our face-to-face experience in Brisbane to guide our writing process on the Google doc. The writing was interspersed with conversations on WeChat, an instant messaging and communication platform which included text, recorded voice, and video

conversations. Writing responsively to a framework using the comment feature and coloured text enabled us to converge on ideas and promoted dialogic opportunities in various multimodal forms within the context of drafting the paper. We addressed clarification of cultural misunderstandings in writing, audio messaging, and video conferencing throughout the collaboration.

For the purposes of this paper, we selected six propositions (Slimbach, 2005) to guide our initial writing. These included the first proposition, which serves to introduce us, and sets the stage for our inaugural linkage where we shared our common humanity with each other. We chose the second proposition, describing the unique circumstances of our childhood, so that we might come to understand the multi-faceted nature of ourselves and each other. This was followed by proposition three, where we desired to explore with each other, a time when we have questioned our own cultural truths. Next, we concentrated on proposition six as a method of delving into cultural inequities; a theme that arose for both of us in our doctoral research. Proposition seven prompted us to probe the notion of exodus within a transcultural journey. Finally, we selected proposition nine, attempting to determine if our study assisted us in moving toward the conception of new selves.

Findings

Introducing Melody and Sandra: Sharing our humanity begins the transcultural process

At the time of seminar, both of us had experienced vastly different personal histories and motivations for doctoral research. Melody is a young woman from China who is pursuing her doctorate in a different country. Up to now, she has not had any full-time work experience due to continuous study from undergraduate to PhD degrees. Her career aspiration is to become an academic staff member in a university to share her expertise and experience with people.

Sandra is a much older woman from Calgary who was an elementary classroom teacher and teacher librarian for many years. She is pursuing a doctorate as a result of a topic of interest that arose in her teaching practice. She is also exploring how she might live a rich, scholarly, contributory life outside the constraints of a structured career path. There are significant variances in age, cultural and family background, area of doctoral study, life experience, and language abilities between us, yet these differences became talking points for arriving at our shared humanity.

Slimbach (2005) suggested that what we identified as differences are indeed aspects of a universal human nature and point to the “deep structure underlying the world’s order and the nature of humanity” (p. 209). Though we grew up in different times and in different places, by sharing our common experience of family and life experience, we were able to explore how we each made sense of the world. This led us to understand new and different ways of being. But is understanding enough? Through our transcultural collaboration, we were looking not only to understand, but to transcend our individual cultures by using our cultural identities, or ways of seeing the world, to build new schemas (Aldridge et al., 2014). Sharing our humanity became the starting point for this process. As Melody stated:

We are alike but different. This idea laid the foundation of our cooperation. The commonalities as human beings made it possible to communicate with each other, and the differences led to the desire to further understand each other.

Sharing ourselves: We are alike but different

Sharing our personal backgrounds allowed us to develop transcultural awareness.

In the complex intertwining of self exists our personal histories related to nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, and class (Slimbach, 2005). Along with that, embedded in our personas are the values, customs, and beliefs around notions of work and leisure, time and space, and social structures and hierarchies (Slimbach, 2005). By articulating and attending to the multi-faceted nature of each others' stories, we not only pushed ourselves to develop a "chameleon sense of self without losing one's cultural center" (Slimbach, 2005, p. 211), we came to know that through transcultural diversity we could transcend "rigid cultural identities" (Epstein, 2009, p. 349).

Melody

I was born into a capital city of a developed eastern coast province of China. Both my parents worked in the state-owned factories. When they were in their twenties, their jobs were usually envied by others in the planned economy. Neither of them received higher education but they had good social status because workers were regarded as glorious at that time. However, my father's factory failed to adapt to the market economy, and quickly went bankrupt. He had to seek other positions in emerging private sectors. Fortunately, my father was a skilled electrician and easily hunted for another job, earning a similar level salary or even more. However, within the short period of losing his job, my father became very depressed. That was the only time I could feel the financial pressure of my family. My mother stayed in her factory until she retired. In sum, I was from an ordinary family who was never concerned about financial problems but never enjoyed any luxury. My parents are both kind people, and they tried to create a cozy family atmosphere for me. I was a lucky girl with a bright and easy childhood.

Sandra

My grandparents on both my mother and father's side came from the United Kingdom to Canada at the turn of the 20th century and brought with them the colonial attitudes that were prevalent in that day. The notion of subtle superiority was passed down, particularly in my maternal grandmother's family who felt the privilege of financial and social status in England. My mother was intelligent. She went to business college and loved being a career woman, but at age 20 she married, and by age 24, she had three girls. She was not a happy stay-at-home mother, which was the only option for her at that time. Our father grew up in a dysfunctional home, and by our mother's family's standards was beneath her in social standing. He did not complete high school. He was, however, hard working and over the years he was able to purchase a business, which led to our family joining the middle class. I would not describe either of them as kind, nor were they demonstrative. Growing up, we were rarely hugged.

In both narratives, the themes of work and social hierarchies emerge. What stands out as different are the descriptions of our childhoods. Questions emerged for both of us around these themes. We pondered separately and together, how much of our childhood experience was the result of cultural norms and economic determinations? How much related to the individual characteristics of our family members and ourselves? It was through the writing process that we came to learn more about ourselves as "culturally conditioned human beings" (Slimbach, 2005, p. 212). This was made clear for Sandra when she assumed that because Melody's father had a level of education, he was easily able to seek different employment. Melody's response moved her to see outside her own cultural box.

Melody

Sandra, that my father could quickly find another job after the bankruptcy of his factory was not because of his education level. He had a senior secondary school degree and did not attend university. In the China of that time, the worker was the most glorious and the intellectuals were looked down upon; could you imagine? So although my father was an intelligent student in his school, he did not choose to go to university when there was a position in a state-owned factory. The reason he could get another job smoothly was because he was very skillful. He learned and practiced a lot while working in that factory. The financial status of my family seemed to be closely associated with national policy. Within the backdrop of the Open-up Policy, initiated to develop economic growth in China, my father's state-owned factory became bankrupt immediately, which caused short-term financial anxiety. Compared with your father, Sandra, hard-work and courage might be the determining factor to become free of any financial problems.

This written dialogue with Melody pushed Sandra's understanding of her own father's success, which she originally connected more to hard work than skill or education. It became, for Sandra, a point of contention within herself, as she questioned mythical components of her country's cultural condition. Sandra's inquiry continued as she probed Melody's assumptions about Canadian family life. Sandra wondered if the fabled qualities of hard work and courage leading to freedom from financial problems that Melody wrote about were part of the Chinese cultural mythology.

Sandra

Melody, I had never thought of my father's acts as courageous, just necessary in order to support his wife and four children. Also, I never considered our family free from financial problems. Though we always had a home and enough food to eat, I remember as a child worrying about our financial well being.

Sustaining this back and forth dialogue around our unique histories, while acknowledging the quintessence of each culture, allowed us to begin a shift to a transcultural way of being. By explicitly stating the essential aspects of our cultures, while allowing for "interference with other cultures" (Epstein, 2009, p.339) we began to move past the perimeters of our reality (Slimbach, 2005).

Throughout our written and oral conversations, both of us mentioned key aspects of self as identified by Slimbach such as gender, nationality, ethnicity, class, ideology (2005, p. 211), along with our families' socio-economic status (e.g., parental education level, income and occupation). Coincidentally, at the same time, we introduced our relationships with family members, which might be a sign that we were emotionally ready to share our inner selves with each other. We both created a safe and comfortable zone to talk about personal perceptions and even secret feelings regarding intimate family members. The transcultural journey was a process to open oneself to someone else, somewhere else, and in new cognitive regimes. In this case it would seem that transculture "does not abolish but radically transforms and enriches our cultural bodies" (Epstein, 2009, p. 342).

Sharing our learning of different truths to develop humility

Our family histories equipped us with our primary lens for viewing the world. As we grew up and began to interact beyond our families, in schools, communities, and workplaces, we were exposed to disparate conceptions for perceiving truth.

Melody

I had a Pakistani classmate while studying in Beijing, and then we became good friends. The first meal I had with him surprised me because he ate with his hand. I thought this way was unclean and unhealthy, and even proposed my ideas to him. However, he defended himself with great explanations from both a scientific and cultural perspective. This experience shocked me and caused me to reflect on my previous judgement. I realized there might be many prejudices stored in my cognitive system. This kind of clash made my prejudices visible, giving me a chance to reflect on them.

Sandra

The social problems facing Indigenous people in Canada today are a direct result of their colonization. Their knowledge was seen as “savage” by colonists and many of the policies put in place were meant to eradicate their culture. Dwayne Donald (2017), a Canadian Indigenous scholar suggests that in our eyes Western liberal democracy is often seen as the pinnacle.... what every culture and country has been led to believe that they should aspire to—it is vertical, hierarchical and thus, dominant in nature. The Indigenous belief system stresses the interconnectedness of all living things, where nothing in this world, including animals, plants, inanimate beings, and humans have predominance. In listening to Dr. Donald and in conversations with other doctoral students from around the world who attend the University of Calgary I have been thinking about our truths and how we attend to them....

Sharing experiences where we grappled with notions of truth, was a way “to mine the treasures resident in the traditions of others” (Slimbach, 2005, p. 213). Questioning our previously held perspectives toward another ethnic group with each other left us open to vulnerability because we were exposing our prejudices, biases, and ignorance. We discovered this path of pursuing truth was more than simply acquiring knowledge about each other (Slimbach, 2005). Indeed, we found it might be a way for us to question long held notions of universal truths (Lewis, 2002). Transculturation offered an opportunity to continue to uproot our deeply embedded ways of seeing the world (Slimbach, 2005).

Sharing how our doctoral work addresses inequity

Our doctoral studies have become an all-encompassing aspect of our lives with much time and effort involved for both of us. It is inevitable therefore, that our doctoral work became a topic of discussion through the writing process. Furthermore, for both of us, we came to see the doctoral study itself as another aspect of the journey of transculturation wherein we both chose topics relevant to addressing issues of access to quality educational teaching and learning opportunities.

Melody

China has witnessed the largest urbanization movement throughout the entire history of the nation. Against this backdrop, social stratification has become increasingly severe with distinct gaps between rich and poor. Since all my previous living and learning experiences were in urban areas, I hoped to study education and students in rural areas in China. My research topic was about an alternative teacher recruitment program, which would deliver prestigious university graduates to teach in rural schools. These young people voluntarily gave up urban life to transfer to rural areas. This downward mobility enriched their lives. Similarly, the research about these young people and the field work in rural schools pushed me to review my own educational

experience, and the broader social context of this generation. In doing so, I realized the many social privileges I had enjoyed for so many years.

Sandra

My research on makerspaces as learning environments stems from my background and beliefs from many years in teaching. I know that our approaches to education offer limited entry points to learning and few opportunities for the development of empathy. Our assessment and grading systems create hierarchies and move students into categories based on limited ways of knowing and doing. As a teacher-librarian, I could see this was also true for teachers. The work I conducted in the makerspace actually gave me hope that together we could design learning that would, even though it is increasingly multicultural, offer learning opportunities that were more equitable for all.

Both of us were concerned with the current inequality in schools, which we felt did harm to students' overall development and limited students' future opportunities. What we shared indicated our empathy toward those students in disadvantaged situations, while developing solutions to societal problems (Slimbach, 2005).

However, the reasons why we were interested in topics related to educational equality were subtly different. Melody desired something different from the urban existence because she discerned a huge gap between rural and urban life. This curiosity led her to examine the field of rural education, thus enabling her to reflect on how much privilege she had experienced before stepping into rural areas. As for Sandra, she had been a rural practitioner in the field for many years where she later conducted her research. As a frontline teacher and teacher-librarian, the problems she noticed in practice pushed her to seek corresponding solutions through her research.

In this situation, Melody's experience was personally eye-opening, but she also brought fresh eyes from outside the field to address problems of equity in education. Sandra was well acquainted with the rural educational context in which she conducted her research, but she ran the risk of being unable to apply out-of-the-box thinking because of that familiarity.

Discussions of our research topics enabled us to open up avenues of dialogue around notions of what is equitable and what constitutes disadvantage. This also contributed to establishing our positive personal relationship and further collaboration. However, developing awareness of inequities in education is only the beginning (Gorski, 2007). Deeper discussions around the subtle aspects of cultural hegemony and who holds power in particular situations and instances have yet to take place.

Sharing our movement to a more global vision

Given our doctoral backgrounds we viewed movement to a more global vision differently. Our dialogue on the topic served to continue our transcultural development.

Melody

The true exodus does not mainly refer to the transition as geographical, but as "cultural, psychological and spiritual" (Slimbach, 2005, p. 218). Despite Slimbach's point, the geographical change seemed to be necessary to me. Although my previous university emphasized internationalization, my personal experience of leaving my home country to study abroad for almost four years in a developed Western country enabled me to experience the real exodus. Opening my mind toward all things new paved my way of adapting to a new life. I began to get used to Western food, speak English inadvertently, and use the local gestures consciously or

unconsciously. Interestingly, although I was more inclined to think in a Western way whether in my academic writing or dealing with relationships, meanwhile, I increasingly loved the beauty within my own culture, like the ancient poems and Chinese characters.

Sandra

My question is, how can I develop a more global vision, when I live in the same city I was born in, surrounded by the same people I have always known? Perhaps this doctoral journey is my “exodus?” One thing I have enjoyed about my doctoral work, is connecting with and learning from people of all ages and from many different places. How can I continue this mental migration after the completion of my doctoral studies? Is it possible for an exodus to be metaphorical in nature or is a physical exodus important? Or will I backslide into the comfortable ways of safe cultural homogeneity? This is a fear, partly because of my age.... I find in our culture, that older people are compartmentalized into certain ways of being. I see a lot of boredom with old people because so much of life here is connected to work life. When work life ends (retirement age is set at 65, but many people retire younger) many people seem to lack purpose in life. I think part of it is that old people in our culture all live together in siloed communities that are developed only for old people of the same cultural background. They don’t have different people around them to keep them questioning and thinking. I worry and wonder about how I can continue to keep learning and growing as a human being as I age.

Both of us regarded our PhD study as an exploration which was a voluntary and proactive choice made by ourselves. We saw doctoral work as a precious opportunity to expand our views and pursue our purpose in life. While Melody thought the geographic journey was a prerequisite, Sandra emphasized the mental passage, but only if she had chances to connect to diverse people within her home city. We problematized an explanation for this difference in the way we each view the transcultural journey. Melody grew up in China where the Han ethnicity makes up the vast majority (92%) of the population and most minority groups live in the border areas. She views Canada as a country of immigrants, which suggests to her that Sandra has been exposed to people from different nations and countries since she was born. Sandra sees it differently. Given that she has lived the majority of her life in rural areas, her exposure to people from different cultures has been on a superficial level. She remains cognizant of the fact that in order to continue transculturation, it will be necessary for her to seek out places where she can develop.

Sharing notions of new selves

We have come to see that each opportunity to occupy hybrid cultural spaces (Wulf, 2010) leads us to further development of a new self. Collaborating allowed us not only the ability to position ourselves transculturally at this moment in time, but also to see where we have come from and where we wish to go.

Melody

When I looked at the mirror and the photo I took ten years ago, I could not find the significant difference on my face. However, I know I have become a totally different person. I stayed in the same city for 18 years and around people quite similar to me. I had no idea of transculturation and even naively guess other places were similar to my hometown. However, the next ten years, I studied in Beijing and then in Australia. I also visited many provinces in China and other countries. All these experiences deeply influenced me as I have seemed to be more tolerant and open-minded to something different from myself and more clearly know who I am.

Sandra

Some people I know have had great difficulty transitioning from their work identity to their retirement identity, because I think they feel as if they are not making a contribution to society. Their work identity is very much wrapped in who they are as human beings and when that ends, as human beings they end. In some ways, in Western culture retiring from work is a birthing of a new self, but it is often not a new self that people are happy with. I want my whole life to be meaningful . . . and I think one way to give meaning to life is to continue to learn, to study, and to experience a global vision, to live outside my comfort zone. In that way, every day of this life journey I give birth to a new self.

Coming together has allowed us to think more critically about our research topics, while allowing us to explore ideas of self in transcultural ways. Through this work, we are transcending our notions of what it means to be a doctoral student, as related to culture, gender, and age.

Conclusion

As the result of this inquiry, the following recommendations may be of interest to those planning future doctoral seminars:

Short-term academic exchange programs have obvious advantages to expand participants' academic and cultural views with the least time and expense. However, connections between participants are easily lost since they have limited time to spend together. The formation of interpersonal relationships in their infancy have not been fully established before it is the time to leave. The two participants in a doctoral seminar have attempted to sustain a relationship to further develop the purpose of the seminar. However, without the publication deadline to ensure contact, the perpetuation of the affiliation might not have continued. Therefore, in order to continue to develop and deepen transcultural relationships it is essential to have a structure in place that ensures continued contact between participants.

Collaborative writing is a good way to maximize the benefits of a short-term academic exchange program like the doctoral forum in that it strengthens the academic perspective and the cultural perspective. Additionally, having writing deadlines promoted regular gatherings. The process of collaboratively writing an academic paper achieves McLeod and Bloch's (2010) goal of research training, and also builds transcultural competency through personal inquiry (Wulf, 2010). Organizers should encourage this approach and consider providing more facilities to realize post-program academic writing when planning short-term academic exchange programs.

We demonstrated how Slimbach's (2005) "cognitive map" might serve to guide doctoral students toward transcultural competency. Using Slimbach's theoretical framework helped us, as novice researchers build mutual connections. Within the framework of Slimbach's theory, there were many interesting possibilities for further research and discussion, including: (1) Is a geographic move the pre-requisite for cultural exodus? (2) Can the impact of exodus on an individual's perceptions of cultural heritage be positive? (3) How does the concept of transculturation assist two doctoral students with few similarities construct their views towards each other and globally? Without theoretical guidance, it would be hard for us to locate where to begin and where to end. The power and magic of theory provided a "scaffold" for collaborative writing, especially when we were just beginning to know each other and write together from scratch. We advocate for the use of a theoretical framework to facilitate transcultural work.

The use of online collaborative communication tools (WeChat for visual and text communication, Google Docs, email) promoted a continued and immediate sense of connection

between us, in that we were able to develop both intellectual and emotional bonds. Using the video feature, in particular, promoted a more personal approach to transculturation.

Aldridge and colleagues (2014) proposed that transcendent culturing is the goal of transcultural education and means a “movement toward building communities based on uniquely individual identities that contribute and benefit from the ever-changing group structures” (p. 111). As doctoral students with unique and diverse identities aiming to develop transculturally, though we have some way to go to achieve transcendence, we feel this experience has been a benefit to reaching transcultural competency.

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