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Critical Reflections in International Contexts: PolyEthnographic Accounts of an International Doctoral Research Seminar

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Abstract

As the world becomes more globally interconnected, international partnerships, including those within higher education, have increased. In an exemplar of these international partnerships from an academic standpoint, selected doctoral students and faculty from Australian, Chinese, and Canadian universities participated in an International Doctoral Research Seminar held in China in December 2015. The objective of this seminar was to have academic debate regarding educational reform. A critical by-product of this seminar was the meaning made by the participants from this experience. This paper reviews the critical polyethnographic reflections of the Canadian participants for three salient and influential topics including the role of culture, power dynamics, and organizational systems, all in relation to this international academic partnership experience. These reflections have ramifications for future programs specifically for enhancing the international development of doctoral students under the broader umbrella of international academic partnerships.

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As the world becomes more globally interconnected, international partnerships, including those within higher education, have increased. In an exemplar of these international partnerships from an academic standpoint, selected doctoral students and faculty from Australian, Chinese, and Canadian universities participated in an International Doctoral Research Seminar held in China in December 2015. The objective of this seminar was to have academic debate regarding educational reform. A critical by-product of this seminar was the meaning made by the participants from this experience. This paper reviews the critical polyethnographic reflections of the Canadian participants for three salient and influential topics including the role of culture, power dynamics, and organizational systems, all in relation to this international academic partnership experience. These reflections have ramifications for future programs specifically for enhancing the international development of doctoral students under the broader umbrella of international academic partnerships. Keywords: Polyethnography, Reflective Practice, International Seminar, Doctoral Education, Experiential Learning

Introduction

The overarching trend of globalization has rapidly changed and shaped the context of higher education in recent decades. Nerad (2010) focused on the impact of this phenomenon, specifically on doctoral education claiming that "[f]or the first time, conditions exist for the emergence of a truly international system of doctoral education; this openness to innovation and expansion holds enormous potential for advancing a more effective future-oriented PhD" (p. 1). Nerad argued that higher education institutions worldwide are now responsible for graduate education that prepares domestic and international students, inside and outside of academia, to successfully participate in international scholarship and the global knowledge economy.

As a direct example of the quest to focus on the development of international doctoral students, three universities from Australia, China, and Canada established a formal partnership in order to promote research collaborations and networking opportunities amongst selected doctoral students and faculty members. This collaborative initiative involved holding a joint annual International Doctoral Research Seminar (IDRS) hosted by partner universities in alternate years. The first annual IDRS involving the three universities, held in Beijing in 2015, provided a unique opportunity for selected doctoral students (through an application process) and faculty to engage in research relationship building in the global context as its main objective. Participants of the seminar included 18 doctoral students and four faculty members from across the three universities. Previously, a partnership existed between the Australian and Chinese institutions with the Canadian institution joining in 2015 for the first time. Focusing specifically on authors of this article, the Canadian sub-group consisted of five doctoral students and two faculty members. Our experience of this doctoral seminar can be described

as involving three phases: pre-seminar preparation, the on-site seminar, and post-seminar debriefing and writing. These three phases captured the beginning and end points of the Canadian participants' appointment to the program, showcasing a comprehensive perspective of their experience.

Prior to the actual seminar event in Beijing, the students and faculty members from the Canadian university met several times to review assigned readings focused on the education system in China, to gain an introductory awareness of cultural norms in China, and to commence reflective writing activities that explored respective hopes and expectations for the visit to Beijing. During the on-site portion of the seminar in Beijing, the doctoral students from all institutions engaged in collaborative activities, focused on the chosen theme for the seminar, which, in this case was Educational Reform in International Contexts. Activities during the on-site experience included several lectures from faculty members of the hosting university, individual student presentations focused on their doctoral research, and related cultural activities, such as a trip to the Great Wall of China and the Forbidden City, as well as several formal banquets.

While engaged in the seminar in Beijing, beyond the dissemination of interdisciplinary and collaborative research, a critical by-product arose as the Canadian representatives documented their observations, experiences, and reflective thoughts surrounding their participation in the seminar. Post-seminar, the Canadian group gathered multiple times to critically reflect on their experiences and to extract meaning from the interactions with each other and within the international group as a whole. Through the sharing of these works, three specific topics of conversation continuously emerged: the role of culture, power dynamics, and organizational similarities and differences. The aim of this article is to explore how participants made meaning from their involvement in the seminar. Our overarching research question was,

> How does a group of doctoral level academics from a Canadian university make meaning of an international doctoral research seminar and the expectations that graduate students incorporate international perspectives as part of their development as emerging scholars?

The significance of this polyethnography lends itself to ongoing academic discourse within global, collaborative research and partnerships, and the importance of international experience as part of the doctoral student journey. Locally, these reflections may provide a reference for preparation in support of various institutions of higher education as stakeholders at these institutions (e.g., university policy-makers, educators, and graduate students) consider ways to expand and/or include internationalization within graduate programs. Globally, it may offer insights into how institutions in different countries can work together to navigate cultural and organizational differences to facilitate successful partnerships.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Throughout all phases of the seminar—including academic and cultural preparation meetings, the onsite experience at the Chinese university, and post-seminar collaboration—the dominant approaches for our learning and engagement were reflection and dialogue. Theories supporting the study of reflection and dialogue indicated that instead of addressing "formality, or appearing scientific, (it) is the ability to be humane, empathic, sensitive and understanding" (Johnson, 1990, p. 28). In this sense, reflecting upon the events of the seminar allowed us to connect our meaningful experiences, which brought us together in shared discourse.

Emphasis on the significance of intentional reflection on an experience as it relates to meaningful learning and insights led Kolb (1984) to develop a theory of adult learning called

experiential learning theory, defined as "the process of gaining knowledge from experience and applying it to education, work and development. It occurs when the learner directly experiences the realities of the theory, concepts, or the fact that they are learning" (p. 40). In turn, Kolb and Kolb (2005) extended this theory to argue that the process of experiential learning is guided by six propositions: (a) learning as a process; (b) ideas drawn out, discussed, and refined; (c) exploration of perspectives through reflection, action, feeling, and thinking; (d) learning is holistic; (e) learning through interactions within the environment; and (f) learning as constructivist in nature. As we engaged in reflective writing, dialogue, and critical discourse guided by these six propositions of experiential learning, several important topics of conversation emerged, which are detailed below, after we outline our chosen research methodology, data collection and analysis.

As newcomers to the partnership with China and Australia, the Canadian group engaged, individually and together, in reflecting upon their experiences surrounding the aforementioned phases, and organically began making meaning of the seminar. This occurred through activities such as pre-reading, writing, and ongoing reflective practice including journaling and discussion as thoroughly described in the Data Collection and Analysis section of this article. Drawing upon these elements along with critical inquiry, three distinct themes arose from our reflections that encompassed the role of culture, power dynamics, and organizational systems differences.

It is not uncommon for graduate students to enter graduate school with diverse and varying abilities to communicate and interact effectively across cultural boundaries (Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen, & Meadows, 2014). Threaded into many scholarly activities and experiences in Canadian higher education today, the need to interact across cultures at home and away requires effective intercultural competence. Bennett (2004) defined this as "[t]he ability to create an alternative experience that more or less matches that of people in another culture" (p. 74). In other words, Bennett posited that engaging in a cultural experience different than one's own, increases one's ability to have greater awareness of different worldviews.

This is an important ability to possess as Mezias, Chen, and Murphy (1999) in their work on cross-cultural research claimed: "[c]ulture does more than program the values that individual actors bring to particular situations; it defines the identity of actors and provides behavioral scripts for managing relations" (p. 326). Considering the opportunities and expectations graduate students currently have to engage across cultures, successful interdisciplinary, intercultural collaborative research, and networking can create knowledge sharing, thus deeply influencing those participating in the sharing process itself (Niedergassel, Kanzler, Alvidrez, & Leker, 2011).

The factor of power dynamics comes into play as described in a conceptual framework developed by Siemens, Liu, and Smith (2014) in which disciplinary differences and equity of academic control, including academic hierarchy positions, must be navigated carefully so as to avoid miscommunication, conflict, and misunderstandings. By shifting to a predominant sub-theme that arose, language as power, Henderson (2005) explained that a key issue when working in international and/or interdisciplinary partnerships is deciding on the lingua franca, or common language used. Once agreed upon, a further issue that may be experienced is irritation by the non-native speaker of the common language whereby there is a failure to recognize or appreciate the difficulty in functioning in a different language from one's own. Common cultural phrases, slang, and innuendos may be missed creating situations of unfair advantages, loss in translation, group tensions, and miscommunication (Henderson, 2005).

A final element emerged regarding the type of organizational systems in which individuals exist. Anderson et al. (2010) proposed that novice researchers' experiences are "shaped by the systems of doctoral education, both formal and informal, in their own countries. Some aspects of these systems are virtually universal; others are distinctive features that differ

by national, regional or historical context" (p. 169). The authors further noted that should such ingrained core assumptions not be addressed in international research collaborations, this may lead to "frustration, misunderstanding, stalled progress or derailed initiatives" (p. 188). Anderson (2010) concurred with this perspective and claimed that "[r]esearch systems may differ organizationally in terms of authority structures, communication networks and decision making" (p. 3). Particularly within international collaborative research, the author suggested to be aware of challenges that lie in differences within the organization of the research systems, legal and regulatory requirements, integrity oversights, and training of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Polyethnography

In guiding our reflections of the IDRS experience we used the relatively nascent polyethnographic approach, emerging from the innovative, duoethnographic work developed by Sawyer and Norris (2004). In duoethnography the interpretations of a common phenomenon of two or more individuals are explored based on the participants' own life experiences. Moving past the hegemony of autoethnography, polyethnography allows individuals to explore their beliefs in juxtaposition to those of others who had similar experiences. In this way, taken-for-granted meanings are highlighted and areas for future growth and learning are identified. This method is employed when investigating social interactions, exploring cultural norms and practices, and/or looking at the roles of organizations (Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Creswell, 2012).

Norris and Sawyer (2012) contended that a key tenet of duoethnography is that it is "polyvocal and dialogic" (p. 13) providing autobiographical storytelling that affords a valuable opportunity for conversation to explore narratives that disrupt dominant discourses. As Nabavi and Lund (2012) noted, "[d]uoethnographies, due to their nature of examining difference and different perspectives of difference, move research to a place of ambiguity in which multiple meanings can be celebrated for their unique contributions in understanding and improving the human condition" (p. 178). Furthermore, the same authors posited that "[d]uoethnography marks a turning point in research in which the hegemony of a unified narration is replaced with multiple forms of thought that do not seek convergence but celebrate diversity" (p. 178).

Indeed, our polyvocal conversation revealed a number of topics and perspectives surrounding our IDRS experience. Before attending the seminar in Beijing, the Canadian group informally noted that although they shared many similar perspectives they also held many diverging perspectives regarding their expectations and assumptions about the IDRS. As such, we decided to reflect more formally on this Canadian perspective to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of our assumptions and how we could continue to grow and learn from this experience.

Data Collection and Analysis

Within duoethnography "one approach is the integration of data collection and analysis processes within the writing itself. The storytelling (collection) and discussion (analysis) are part of the writing process, not discrete phases" (Norris, 2008, p. 236). As such, the conversation between participants is not only the data, but is also the analysis as readers are able to view shifts in thinking and perspective as they unfold for the participants "in the moment." For the purposes of this paper, data collection consisted of conversational interviews (Blommaert & Jie, 2010), observations, photographs, and documents including field notes and reflective journal entries. Guided by Kolb and Kolb's (2005) six tenets of experiential learning theory, a dialogic cycle of analysis between the Canadian participants resulted in a co-

constructed narrative about our perspectives surrounding the topics of the role of culture, power dynamics, and organizational systems.

In duoethnography each author is expected to "simultaneously generate, interpret, and articulate data" (Norris, 2008, p. 234). We decided to concentrate on our perceptions of three periods of time that framed the IDRS experience; that is, pre-seminar, during the seminar, and post-seminar, challenging the notion that critical experiences and learnings would only be associated with the actual on-site experiences of our time spent in China. Indeed, one of the key tenets of this seminar design is that all three phases are important and come together to create a rich learning experience. As well, it is important to realize that the only time all of us as participants and authors were physically together was when we were in Beijing. Specifically, as two of the doctoral students did not live in the same city as the Canadian university, we relied on Skype to include these members within our pre-and post-Beijing seminar meetings. In addition, as part of the pre-seminar phase, an online learning space was created using our University's online learning management system. This facilitated the sharing of readings and general resources as well as our pre-seminar written reflections. Finally, emails were frequently circulated through the group when time-sensitive issues arose.

While in China, our group maintained personal reflective journals in electronic documents. Photographs taken while in China by different group members were made available through a photo sharing website. To support post-seminar collaborative and reflective writing, a shared electronic document was set up so that members could view and comment upon one another's work. Follow-up discussion continued through email and face-to-face meetings of the whole group, once again with the distant members joining by Skype.

Through our informal collaborative post-seminar conversations, recurring topics were suggested and noted by the group. As an organizational tool, Brown and Schopflocher's (1998) event cuing method allowed for the systematic identification of topics for formal discussion. The event cueing framework involved three steps; first, the authors recalled and described certain events from memory and captured cue words to summarize the events. Second, a period of time was taken to reflect upon the cue words before reengaging in a formal collaborative conversation. Third, the researchers encoded the reflections and insights to establish relationships between the cue words, thus developing formal conversational topics. Under each of these topics, we each wrote our post-seminar reflections and were able to read and respond to the others' writing, initiating the dialogic cycle of analysis. For example, through informal discussion, the authors noted returning to the idea of "culture." Before engaging in formal dialogue about culture, the authors reflected individually on the role it played in the seminar experience. In moving toward formal discussions, the authors collaboratively named "role the of culture" as a theme shared across authors and sorted their own reflections under this theme for discussion amongst authors.

Photographs were referred to in order to evoke memories of our experiences in China. All authors were invited to edit the conversational reflections as needed throughout the process. A trusting and respectful tone as well as accountability was maintained as the writing and reframing of the narratives occurred in a shared space. The dialogue was presented in a juxtapositional style in order to highlight differences in perception and to prompt further reflective discussion (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Important to note is that, as we were both the authors of this paper and the participants in the polyethnography, we had no reasonable expectation of privacy and thus this study was exempt by the local ethics review board.

The Conversation

The Canadian participants provided a brief description of their research interests in order to give context to their reflections. Lisa Fedoruk is a Ph.D. candidate looking at the lived

experiences of Chinese visiting scholars in Canada and the resulting impact on their teaching practices after returning home. Jon Woodend is a Ph.D. candidate with research interests in international career transitions. Avis Beek is a recent Ed.D. graduate who researched student international mindedness in International Baccalaureate students. Xueqin Wu, a recent Ph.D. graduate, is investigated adult beginning learners' engagement in learning Mandarin as an additional language. Sylvie Roy, a faculty member, is looking at language ideologies and power. Janet Groen, a faculty member and the Canadian coordinator of this doctoral research seminar, is looking at transformative learning and spirituality in adult learning in varied contexts. Xiang Li's Ph.D. research focused on the intersubjectivity of cultures/values projected on Chinese students living in North America.

As a reminder, the data/analysis is the actual (polyvocal) conversation, verbatim. This is important to note as it allows the readers to observe how the conversation unfolded and where shifts in thinking occur (Sawyer and Norris, 2004). In starting the polyethnography, Janet asked the group about our general experiences participating in the doctoral seminar.

The role of culture. The first topic of conversation was culture. Specifically, we discussed how culture influenced our role and participation in the seminar and what aspects of the seminar we found important in comparison to participants from China and Australia. The following conversation ensued:

Xiang: For me as a Chinese person but a participant from Canada, while the Chinese university participants showed their hospitality to our group as a whole, some personal connections started to build between the Canadian and Chinese students. We even went a step further ahead as we were willing to share our life stories with each other as old friends. It is incredible that we just got to know each other. The trust seemed to be gained automatically between Chinese participants.

Avis: From a Canadian perspective, the experience was similar; our Chinese counterparts were absolutely gracious hosts to the Australian and Canadian representatives and it was impossible not to notice the effort they put forth to make our stay comfortable. The Chinese students patiently helped us navigate the campus, politely answered our many questions, and ensured all our needs were being taken care of. When I asked Xueqin [who is of Chinese descent] about this, she said that this was "just the Chinese way."

Xueqin: That's right, I am quite familiar with the "Chinese way" of hospitality. There is a Confucius saying, "Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?" The Chinese student participants acted as multi-taskers in this seminar, both as participants and hosts. They naturally took it as part of their responsibility to make sure that students from Australian and Canadian were well taken care of throughout the seminar. For them, being a good host was as important as being a participant.

Lisa: The "Chinese way" of hosting us and the Australian students as guests was a beautiful gesture; however, I feel that such focus on our comfort took away from relationships that could have been deeper and more profound in the context of why we were visiting, namely co-constructed discourse, interdisciplinary writing, and sharing of our research and experiences as doctoral students.

Jon: I wished that the Chinese participants had been able to relinquish their host role a bit in order to further engage academically as it felt like a missed opportunity.

Sylvie: I agree with Lisa and Jon that sometimes after the initial welcome, it would have been nice to start to work together as partners. This is where I think language and communication are keys to communicate our needs and understandings but when we don't speak the language, it is difficult to understand the nonverbal or the actions part of a relationship. In addition, we didn't know as new guests what to expect and how to proceed.

Xuequin: Seeing from the Western perspective, some of the hospitality was not necessary such as preparing the tea for each student. It would have been more desirable if the

Chinese students had more free time so that I could talk to them more, be it about their research or their life.

Avis: I wonder if the Canadians or Australians would find it as instinctive to offer this level of hospitality and generosity when these seminars are held at their respective institutions.

Unpacking the role of culture. Given the increasingly globalized world, the internationalization of academic institutions is likely to continue to be a priority (Vasilopoulos, 2016). One aspect of internationalization is creating curriculum that is responsive to global perspectives while another is training students to successfully engage in international academic settings in culturally appropriate ways (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Knight, 2014). In this respect, the IDRS was an exemplary learning opportunity for the selected students. The role of culture as a predominant topic of conversation was all encompassing directly linked to the propositions of experiential learning; specifically, the Canadian participants observed, upon analysis of the narrative about, the exploration of perspectives through reflection, action, feeling, and thinking (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Initially, the conversation focused on the ethnically Chinese members of the group and their observations about a particular Chinese cultural action; the reverence of guests. As the conversation progressed, the non-ethnically Chinese members shared their perspective that the adherence to this cultural action, while greatly appreciated, came at the cost of the Chinese students engaging more fully in the academic process.

The group came together in their curiosity around how to balance respecting these cultural traditions with academic engagement, as well as wondering about the extent of hospitality a Chinese guest might expect when visiting Canada. More specifically, the Canadian participants realized that there is more to academic engagement than discussion of facts and ideas. In this case, the participants noted the need to first understand the cultural perspective and actions (i.e., reverence of guests) of their academic counterparts in China. Although a lecturer could explain this cultural tradition, experiencing this situation provided the opportunity for the Canadian participants to reflect on their own cultural practices as a process of learning and how these practices might come across or impede the engagement of people who do not share these customs. This is of critical importance since the participants began to discuss ways in which these customs could be honoured while capitalizing on the academic opportunity; a discussion that might not have occurred had the participants only engaged in the Canadian academic context.

The impact of power dynamics. As we discussed culture, an adjacent topic concerning the impact of power dynamics during the seminar emerged and became the focus of our next conversation. In this case, we defined power as the relative ability to participate and be visible during the conversation. The following discussion ensued.

Sylvie: What does power mean exactly? Who has power? I think that the three groups thought they might have some type of power at some point but we also came to Beijing prepared to learn and to be humble. But when no one is speaking and everyone wants to be nice with others, to be open and humble, people who are used to having some type of power will start to emerge and impose without knowing their ways of managing or seeing experiences.

Lisa: Great questions; for me, power is an interesting word and depending on how it is understood, each individual may have their own definition. I also feel "power" can be somatic, in that it is what an individual feels internally in certain situations. There were certainly power differentials throughout the seminar starting with English as the primary language of communication.

Xueqin: The fact that English was the lingua franca at the doctoral seminar put native English speakers in a more powerful position than the non-native speakers as far as the academic exchange was concerned. Some Chinese students did mention that some native English speakers spoke so fast during their presentations that they could hardly follow. What's more, the unfamiliar research topics added to the difficulty in comprehending the presentations.

Lisa: Understandably, having two native-level English groups engaged in discourse at times contributed to a feeling of intimidation or a loss in translation for the Chinese participants. This might have been a key reason why there was little engagement from this group.

Jon: It was unfortunate that it created an environment where the Australians and Canadians were visible participants while the Chinese participants seemed to be invisible with little representation. I agree that some of this was because the majority of the conversations were being engaged in English, the second language of the Chinese participants, creating linguistic barriers to equal participation.

Janet: The visibility of the Australians and the Canadians with little representation from the Chinese participants was felt by me immediately after the opening ceremony events when the coordinator of the Chinese group left the room. There were no faculty members from the Chinese university leading the sessions. Instead, the remaining faculty members, from Australian and Canadian universities, suddenly and unexpectedly had to shift gears moving into the role of pedagogical leaders. We worried about the fact that, while we were in a conference room at the Chinese university, it was faculty members from other institutions who were "running the seminar." And of course, all of our communication was in English.

Xueqin: That is a good point and could be one of the major reasons why we saw less participation from the Chinese students. A Chinese student noted that she barely managed to absorb the content of the presentation when the question time was over, which left her with no chance to ask any questions.

Sylvie: Power and language are always the obvious dynamic to observe when we talk about a group working together. Yes, the English language dominated during the seminar because we are used to it and expect it without even thinking of what it represented. Chinese speakers could have used their language to shift the power but being the hosts, they didn't. If we had been in another country, such as France, there would have been more people complaining and even disturbing the power relation with languages. Why is that?

Avis: I wonder if there are ways we could shift this power dynamic in terms of the dominant language of future meetings of the International Doctoral Seminar. Can we take measures to make text materials more accessible? Can we minimize time spent listening to lectures? Can we design sessions that are more collaborative and involve the co-construction of knowledge?

Unpacking the impact of power dynamics. The narrative stemming from the impact of power dynamics clearly demonstrated the emergence of the seminar's common language, English, as one element resulting in the lack of engagement by the Chinese participants. Through the process of critical reflection post-seminar, it was discovered that even though the IDRS' host city was Beijing, China, a Mandarin speaking country, the Chinese did not adapt the seminar to accommodate their own language and comprehension needs, but predominantly adapted to accommodate the needs of the guests as native English speakers (demonstrating connectivity to the aforementioned dialogue about the role of culture and reverence of guests).

As noted by Henderson (2005) a predetermined agreement pertaining to communication and language in multilingual groups is necessary to mitigate frustration, irritation, and group tension. This was overlooked when planning and engaging in the IDRS by all members of the seminar, and English as the lingua franca arose as an assumed form of communication. The appreciation to the Chinese in functioning in a different language was not fully realized until post-seminar reflective practice. Perhaps this power dynamic of the assumed lingua franca created boundaries, limitations, and potential fear, consequently inhibiting opportunities to connect and communicate which were direct purposes and learning outcomes of the seminar. As emerging scholars and seasoned faculty, the meaning made from this tacit knowledge evoked compassion and empathy and instilled a deeper sense of cultural awareness

that could be applied in future experiences of similarity. A proposition to the theory of experiential learning, ideas drawn out, discussed, and refined (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) can potentially contribute to future considerations for language processes in future seminars to alleviate power dynamics that may hinder the learning process for all involved.

The navigation of organizational systems. After discussing both culture and power, our discussion moved to the final major topic, which was navigating organizational systems. We had assumptions about the way in which academic institutions operate and how we anticipated the seminar and its attendees would conduct themselves, beyond the implications of culture and power. The reflections were as follows.

Jon: One organizational quirk that stood out to me was that, for the Australian faculty, the style of leadership differed from what students in Canada might be used to. It was more direct and there was an expectation of students to work completely independently from the coordinators rather than in a collaboratory fashion.

Lisa: Adding to that, I was most surprised that the Australian doctoral students do not engage in required classes or seminars prior to beginning their research proposal. They mostly work independently with up to four supervisors for guidance and this seminar in Beijing was the first time they actually met as a group. It was a stark contrast to the many meetings our group from Canada engaged in, in preparation for this undertaking and the meetings we still engage in after returning home.

Jon: From a Canadian standpoint, I am used to working in concert with faculty rather than existing within a structured and visible hierarchy. For example, having faculty contribute to the conversation in mutually respectful ways to further ideas. I was a bit taken aback by these differences, particularly between the Australian and Canadian coordinator's styles, as I had assumed that, since we share a cultural history, the styles would be fairly similar.

Lisa: That stood out to me too; at Canadian universities there seems to be more of an equal acceptance of doctoral students and faculty to work together to co-create discourse and engage in research.

Avis: Likewise, there seemed to be an assumed hierarchy with greater division between faculty and students in China. I first sensed this tone when the visiting faculty and doctoral students were housed in separate accommodations. The procedural formality of the welcome dinner only seemed to further reinforce this shift. As the days progressed, it seemed our team had been set into a power structure that I found unfamiliar and even uncomfortable. I have a lot to learn about the system of influence in academic work, and how this system is interpreted across cultures.

Xueqin: What strikes me most was that the Australian university did not allow international students to apply for this doctoral seminar. It is unfair to international students especially when considering that international students are paying double tuition fees in Australian universities. Allan Luke's article (2011) mentioned that the revenue generated from international students has been an important source of income to cross-subsidise the education of local students in many Western universities. It is surprising to see how international students can still be treated unfairly considering how much they are contributing to the university's income.

Sylvie: For me, institutions have different rules, so I wasn't surprised. What I noticed are the similarities; specifically, that students presented their work in the same fashion. The world of presenting at conferences is global using steps from research questions to methodology to results. I didn't see any differences in terms of presentations, no other interpretations of data than what we are used to. There are not too many others ways to share knowledge. For me, it demonstrates how institutions, even with different practices, do have the same way of disseminating knowledge.

Unpacking of the navigation of organizational systems. Reviewing the dialogue of navigating organizational systems brought about an opportunity to critically engage our similarities and contrasts between reflective thoughts. This supported experiential learning as holistic and constructivist in nature; holistic as coming full circle through engagement in a diverse group dialogue and constructive in how meaning was made through our interpretations of the IDRS experience in terms of evident similarities and differences.

This supported the claim that Anderson et al. (2010) proposed when emphasising that emerging researchers and scholars' experiences are taken up through formal and informal doctoral educations systems present in their countries of origin. The authors claimed that certain elements are universal across global systems while others are bound by factors that relate directly to cultural or historical contexts of the particular region. This was evident as noted by Xueqin, where more similarities were observed when referencing organizational systems within the IDRS experience, rather than the majority of the Canadian group recognizing more differences.

Further engagement in the learning process through use of reflective group discussion revealed an emergence of our own "taken-for-granted" assumptions about how systems ought to work to be successful, fair, and just. However, the obvious question arose as to what system works best when involving oneself in international research collaborations. How meaning was made through thoughtful reflection and a re-visitation of the previous narrative involving the role of culture, was a linkage to our understanding of cultural competence and awareness that challenges exist between and within organizational systems globally. This awareness is important for emerging scholars to consider while contributing to a current international system of doctoral education, international scholarship, and success in the global knowledge economy (Nerad, 2010).

Summary

Taken together, the three key themes that the Canadian participants in the IDRS reflect upon point to critical advances in graduate student training. Namely, the participants noted having experiences and nuanced discussions about topics that they likely would not have encountered in a traditional classroom setting. This experiential learning not only impacted the participants in regards to their engagement within the IDRS, but also had carry-over implications for their academics careers. Specifically, the participants shared a sense of questioning previous assumptions and wonderment about how to engage in a scholarly manner that is both inclusive and culturally respectful. Many graduate students become faculty members and act as ambassadors for their institutions. By providing graduate student training that prepares these future academics for engagement in an increasingly globalized world, institutions can distinguish themselves as leaders on a worldwide stage.

Discussion

As we look back at our experiences within the three phases of this international doctoral research seminar and the impact it has had on us as emerging scholars, we have come to realize that our key learnings have not been so much focused on the content of this experience; rather they are mostly located within the processes and relational aspects of the seminar. We acknowledge that we learned much about the educational system in China and we were able to explore, with our colleagues in Australia and China what Educational Reform meant for each of us in our respective contents. At the same time, the real richness of the seminar and the impact it has had on us has been in the unexpected surprises, challenges, and pleasures of trying

to engage across our differences and similarities to come up with new understandings of how we can relate to each other as emerging scholars.

In order to understand the multiple dimensions of learning that were occurring, we return to the field of adult learning and more specifically the significance of informal learning. To elaborate, we often equate learning to that which occurs in structured and defined events, described as formal learning. Formal learning, often associated with learning associated within institutional settings, is linked to externally determined learning objectives and structured learning activities; in this this case the type of learning associated with the various presentations provided by the doctoral students and the faculty members. In contrast, "informal learning. . .is not confined to the structures of formal adult learning environments. . .is more aligned with the acquisition of tacit knowledge" (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014, p. 17). This type of knowledge encompasses the learning that we all can and often do acquire when we observe others, try new things, travel, and pay attention to our emotions.

Also under the umbrella of informal learning is incidental learning, which refers to "unexpected learning that comes along when we are involved in formal. . .learning activities - what we come to know accidentally or unexpectedly" (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014, p. 17). Whether we focus on tacit knowledge or incidental learning, it is in the process of critical reflection or the experiential learning process that we first make these "hidden learnings" explicit and in turn, consider their tremendous potential in shaping our learning journey.

Limitations and Future Directions for Exploration

While the reflection of the Canadian participants is a critical step in understanding the experiential and informal learning that can occur when graduate programs incorporate international education opportunities for beginning scholars, a key limitation to the current reflection is that it is focused on one group in a three-way partnership. In order to gain a more comprehensive appreciation for the learning that can occur when graduate students participate in an international partnership, perspectives from all parties are needed. Furthermore, the reflections in this article represent the short-term outcomes from this international education opportunity and do not showcase the more long-term effects of, or lack thereof, participation. As such, future research could seek to include multiple perspectives (i.e., all parties involved) as well as to revisit these reflections at later times to see what, if any, long-term effects exist.

The current article explored the reflections of Canadian participants in an International Doctoral Research Seminar. Key themes that the participants explored included the role of culture, the impact of power dynamics, and navigating institutional systems. The outcomes of this research encouraged personal agency and responsibility in international educational contexts, consciousness raising and providing voice through collaboration, and promoting connectivity between "self" and "other." The result of this experience is unique and significant as it contributes to the advancement and growth of research practices of emerging scholars, particularly in international research collaborations. As educational institutions continue to move toward competing on an international stage, an important aspect of achieving this goal is to prepare graduate students to engage on a global level (Knight, 2014). Initiatives such as the International Doctoral Research Seminar provide opportunities for this development through experiential learning in diverse global research settings.

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