


Chapter 1

Understanding Intercultural Socialization and Identity Development of International Students Through Duoethnography

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at how two international PhD students (re)constructed and (re)negotiated their identities, and intercultural socialization through the sharing their personal stories and experiences. This chapter employed a duoethnography research methodology. Duoethnography is a collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers engage in a dialogue on their disparate histories in a given phenomenon. The use of duoethnography allowed the researchers to revisit their lives as sites of research to determine how their different experiences and backgrounds informed the (re) construction and (re)negotiation of their identities in the face of multiple and competing identities and their subsequent participation in the new culture. Through this process, the researchers acted as the foil for the Other, challenging the Other to reflect in a deeper, more relational and authentic manner as they sought to achieve a balance between participating in a new way of life and maintaining their cultural and personal identities.

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BACKGROUND

International students play major roles in the internationalization agenda of higher education institutions in developed nations. These students strengthen the connections between different countries, create opportunities for communication with people from all over the world and bring cultural richness. In addition, international students bring substantial revenues to host institutions and contribute significantly to their intellectual and cultural capital (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). Their worldview, diverse cultural perspectives and backgrounds add to the discourse on diversity and inclusion (Heyward, 2002). Furthermore, they enrich the social and cultural fabric of a university, strengthen international links, and diminish scholarly and cultural chauvinism (El-Khawas, 2003). However, these contributions and benefits international students bring come at a high cost. International students experience acculturative stress (Berry, 2006), adjustment problems and often have to establish new social networks after leaving their friends and family back home (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). They are thrust into new and complex intercultural contexts.

INTERCULTURAL SOCIALIZATION

Ştefan (2019) defined intercultural as a kinetic, dynamic dimension, which involves reciprocity, interdependence and the identification of some forms of dialogue. It is the recognition of values, ways of life, and symbolic representations that we develop (Ştefan, 2019). Socialization involves the voluntary actions of social integration that appear as a result of a person's relations with the environment and with self, in the presence of the "other" (Ştefan, 2019). The process of intercultural socialization is multi-dimensional as one preserves a certain part of one's cultural specificity, while at the same time being a part of some structures of the dominant or host society (Ştefan, 2019). International students struggle with intercultural socialization and developing new identities as they transition into host institutions. Their former identities may be modified, switched, removed, or even reproduced as they negotiate and make changes (Bartram, 2009; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). They deal with high levels of homesickness, acculturation, and peculiarities of the host culture including food and weather conditions (Yen & Stevens, 2004). They struggle with social-cultural behaviors such as: culture shock, discrimination, new social/cultural customs, loss of identity and mental health issues such as depression due to feelings of alienation (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014).

Using duoethnography, this study explored the experiences of two international PhD students as they (re)constructed and (re)negotiated their identities, and intercultural socialization through the sharing of their personal stories and experiences, while studying in Canada. They examined, compared and reflected on their individual and the host country's cultures and how they adjusted (Sam, 2006). In their intercultural socialization journey, they learned to adapt, adjust and deal with discrimination, new social/cultural customs, loss of identity and mental health issues. And also to understand their values in comparison to the host country, create social supports, and become integrated to the new culture they now live in. They grew to respect and understand their host country's cultural specificity and see culture as multi-dimensional. For them, intercultural socialization meant developing a deep understanding and respect for all cultures, as they learned from one another and grew together (Spring Institute, 2020).

The dialogue in this study includes how the nature of intercultural socialization engagement influenced our identities, how we navigated and established participation and membership in different social

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