Transitional Challenges Faced by Post-secondary International Students

and Approaches for Their Successful Inclusion in Classrooms

Lichan Xu

Thompson Rivers University, British Columbia, Canada

Abstract

As the number of international students in post-secondary education institutions in Canada and the United States continues to increase substantially, much scholarly attention is being paid to the wide variety of transitional challenges that international students face. At the same time frequent controversial conversations are occurring about whether and how instructors' teaching methods should be adapted to support international students' learning. Written from the perspective of an international student, this paper draws upon evidence from research articles to argue that although it is difficult for international students to deal with transitional challenges, nevertheless the transition can be successful if their instructors understand their challenges and develop teaching approaches to help them. I will first describe the transitional challenges faced by international students, these I call culture shock and learning shock, and then I will examine the teaching approaches, their theoretical basis, and how they can help international students to be successful. The approaches I will describe are: culturally relevant teaching practices, a bridging course called Learning about Learning; and the instructional approach of constructive controversy.

Keywords: international students, transitional challenges, teaching strategies, cultural shock, learning shock, culturally relevant teaching, learning about learning, constructive controversy

International students, according to Paige, are defined as "individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship in order to participate in international educational exchange as students" (as cited in Lin & Yi, 1997, p. 474). With massive global shifts in education and population, there is an ever increasing number of international students in Canada and the United States. According to the data provided by the Canadian Bureau of International Education (2012), international student enrollment in Canada grew from 136,000 in 2001 to over 265,000 in 2012- a 94% increase.

There are several reasons that influence students to choose to study abroad. One of them is the global trend to place high value on post-secondary education (Kurucz, 2006). World-wide, a bachelor degree from a Western university has become a highly desired qualification (Kurucz, 2006). Western bachelor degrees give graduates an advantage in competing for high paying jobs in the global job market.

Another factor that may impact the growth of international education is the attractiveness of Western education. As opportunities increase for non-Western students to come into contact with Western literature and ideas, many become attracted by these ideas. These students may travel to Western countries to discover more about the origins of Western ideas and the motivations of Western thinkers.

The increase in the numbers of international students studying in Western countries depends not only on the motivation of international students themselves. It also depends on the motivation of Western tertiary institutions to create places for international students to study. International students make valuable economic and educational contributions. In the opinion of Kurucz (2006), coveting the large fees paid by the international students to the

institution may be the biggest reason that Western colleges and universities open their doors widely for international students. However another important reason is that international students make significant contributions to the promotion of cultural diversity in the classroom and on campus, enriching the academic environment and adding educational value to it (Kurucz, 2006). Admitting international students means exposing the local students to "diverse cultural perspectives and experiences", (Leask, 2009, p. 206) which could prepare both home students and international students with valuable skills and knowledge to work in a global environment.

Although there are various reasons for the incredible growth in the international student population, the accompanying transitional issues for the students involved can be a source of frustration and disappointment and a big challenge for institutions and teachers (Charles & Stewart, 1991). As pointed out by Kurucz (2006), even though international students may have chosen to come to an institution for the very reason of wanting this new experience of living and studying in a Western country, it does not mean the experience is any easier for them. International students may feel lonely, uncomfortable and helpless, and they may be uncertain about many things, as their cultural and personal habits are broken (Kurucz, 2006).

In this paper, I argue that although it is difficult for international students to deal with transitional challenges, nevertheless their transition can be successful if their instructors understand their experience and "internationalize their curriculum" (Leask, 2009). Instructors can do this in a variety of ways including the incorporation of international examples into the content of their courses and developing teaching practices, courses and procedures directly aimed at supporting intercultural transitions (Leask, 2009). In my paper, I will first describe

the transitional challenges faced by international students; and then I will examine specific

examples of teaching practices, courses and procedures that instructors can adopt to help

international students to be successful.

Transitional challenges faced by international students

"Although the experience of studying abroad may fulfill many goals and
expectations for international students and their families, students must nevertheless
contend with a wide array of external or environmental concerns"
(Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004, p.129).

According to Popadiuk and Arthur (2004), the primary issue that international students

must contend with is cultural transition; they face hurdles in adjusting to a new cultural

environment in the host country, and then return to their home countries where they may face

further issues readjusting there. International students face the same problems that confront

anybody living in a foreign culture, such as racial prejudice, language issues, accommodation

difficulties, dietary restrictions, financial pressures, misunderstandings, and loneliness (Lin &

Yi, 1997). In addition to these difficulties, international students also experience academic

issues, such as inability to engage in social interactions with other students (Hammer, as cited

in Furnham, 2004), and dissonance about the academic experience (Popadiuk & Arthur,

2004). Further, international students can be subjected to stereotyping within Western

universities, and they can experience great concern regarding the well-being of families back

home, securing employment after graduation and readjustment to the home country (Lin & Yi,

1997). This paper will specifically focus on two transitional challenges: "culture shock" and

"learning shock", which are related to international students' cultural background and

learning experience respectively.

Culture shock

In order to understand "culture shock" we need to define what we mean by culture. The definition of culture may vary among different individuals and across societies. In the view of Bullivant (1989), there are two ways of looking at culture: as the customs and traditions passed on by ancestors, and as a group's strategy for adaptation and survival in the society (as cited in Egbo, 2009). In addition, Fleras and Elliott (1992) define culture, based on Bullivant's conception, as "a shared system of meaning and symbols that account for patterned behavior between individuals and among groups. This shared reality allows members of the community to make sense of the world they live in and to construct plans for adaptation and survival" (as cited in Egbo, 2009, p. 2). As pointed out by Egbo (2009), our worldviews are influenced by our cultural beliefs and practices; thereby culture plays an important part of who we are.

Culture shock has long been a topic of academic study (Griffiths, Winstanley, & Gabriel, 2005). Oberg (1960), for example, argued that "culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p. 177). For McKinlay, Pattison, and Gross, culture shock refers to "the experience of sojourning international students who must learn to deal with the lack of familiar customs, and become familiar with the host country, often with the expectation of integrating into the new cultural practices" (as cited in Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004, p. 131). Griffiths et al. (2005) theorize culture shock as "experiences of intense disorientation, confusion and anxiety that are experienced when people are immersed into new and unfamiliar cultures with different social conventions, values and norms" (p. 277). And according to Furnham (2004), culture shock

can be seen as a common phenomenon for young people who now travel abroad more frequently.

Arthur states that "international students from source countries that share common language, cultural norms, and demographic characteristics such as race, are less likely to experience serious culture shock associated with cross-cultural transitions" (as cited in Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004, p. 128). Therefore, the adjustment of international students is strongly influenced by the extent of difference between their source and target culture (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) also point out that international students may face a big transition when they study abroad in the countries that are distinctly different from their home country. For instance, students from Eastern countries like China, Japan, and Korea may have more difficulty adjusting to North American culture than Australian students do (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

When an individual enters a strange culture, familiar signs and symbols are broken such as: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people; when to accept and when to refuse invitations; when to take statements seriously and when not (Oberg, 1960). No matter how broadminded or full of good will students may be, or whether they have been abroad many times before their education sojourn, they face challenges. As indicated by Furnham (2004), whether one has travelled a lot or had overseas experience may not determine one's ability to adjust to a new culture.

Oberg (1960) indicates that people who suffer from culture shock first reject the environment which causes the discomfort, then fall into regression; the home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance. They will be somewhat disoriented for at least

the first full year of their time in a host country (Kurucz, 2006). In going through culture

shock and on to a satisfactory adjustment, Oberg (1960) points out that there are four stages

of adaptation as the new culture gradually loses its strangeness and foreign students begin to

be assimilated by the new environment. He states that most individuals are fascinated by the

new during the first few weeks, or honeymoon stage. Then comes the second stage

characterized by "a hostile and aggressive attitude towards the host country" (p. 143). If the

student can overcome this stage, he or she is beginning to adjust to the new cultural

environment. Finally, in the fourth stage they come to think of the new culture as another life

style that they can adopt when living in the host country (Oberg, 1960).

According to Sandhu, there are two primary causes embedded within the process of

culture shock: (a) interpersonal factors such as communication and/ or loss of support

systems, which relate to their environment and surroundings, and (b) intrapersonal factors,

such as a sense of loss and a sense of inferiority related to internal processes (as cited in

Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Furnham, 2004).

Learning shock

As they transition to Western academic institutions, many international students are also

affected by "learning shock" as they adjust to the challenges of learning environments they

have not encountered before. Learning shock, according to Griffiths et al. (2005), refers to

"experiences of acute frustration, confusion and anxiety experienced by some students. These

students find themselves exposed to unfamiliar learning and teaching methods, bombarded by

unexpected and disorienting cues and subjected to ambiguous and conflicting expectations"

(p. 275). Griffiths et al. (2005) claim that although learning shock has similarities with

culture shock, for example both kinds of shock entail a sudden and disorienting immersion in a new environment where familiar habits and reference points are lost, learning shock cannot be viewed simply as a special case of culture shock since it describes the challenges inherent within the learning experience itself. Therefore, learning shock should be emphasized when studying international students' challenges, because it plays an essential role in their study life.

Rosenthal, Russell and Thomson (2006) point to the following factors that contribute to the "learning shock" that international students experience; different styles of learning and teaching, different attitudes to the authority of lecturer and text, different modes of teacher-student interaction and different criteria for assessment. Lin and Yi (1997) mention that international students may have difficulties in adjusting to the various accents of the instructors, their different teaching styles, and understanding class lectures and the test constructions. Rosenthal et al. (2006) also noted that international students who have studied English for years may still struggle with informal language used by instructors in classrooms and they point out that feeling oneself a 'problem' instead of an accomplished and promising student would be a shock indeed.

On the issue of learning styles, in a study conducted by Dykman, it was found that students with a learning style that is 'pragmatic' rather than 'intrinsic' are more likely to suffer depression and lack of adjustment (as cited in Griffiths et al., 2005). For example, students who relied on memory to pass examinations may be confused when dealing with case studies where there is no single correct way to answer questions (Griffiths et al., 2005). Many students, including some with advanced academic qualifications, do not possess the

research skills they need for critical analysis of material. (Griffiths et al. 2005). In addition, students who are used to passively following teachers' instruction may feel disoriented when they are asked to construct their own knowledge or find the answers for themselves.

In Western universities today, attitudes to learning are informed by social constructivist theory (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007). This theoretical position assumes that "all the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). The implication is that students need opportunities to work together to construct knowledge through discussion with each other and with their instructor. Students coming from countries with alternative pedagogical foundations are expected to adjust.

Acknowledging the challenges that international students face is important if we are to support them achieving their goals. As indicated by Kurucz (2006), unlike a more homogeneous group of local students, international students can have an extremely complicated mixture of behaviors that are affected by cultural differences, distinct learning styles, and so on. Sometimes the mix seems to be unwieldy, yet there are effective ways for teachers to internationalize the curriculum.

Teaching in a culturally diverse environment has become imperative in today's globalized society; however, many faculty members are inadequately prepared to effectively "communicate and work with learners from other cultures" (Paige & Goode, 2009, as cited in Gopal, 2011, p. 373). Leask (2009) defines internationalization of the curriculum as "the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning arrangements and support services of a program of study" (p. 209). This includes adapting the content of the curriculum to include

perspectives relevant to students from different countries and cultures, as well as including

culturally relevant pedagogy.

No matter how different the culture and learning backgrounds are, I believe

understanding the students should be the first step towards supporting them. In addition,

teachers need to apply effective teaching methods that aid students' learning. In the

subsequent sections of this article, I analyze the meaningful teaching strategies that may help

in international students' learning.

Culturally relevant teaching practices

"One cannot expect positive results from an educational program which fails to
respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program
constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding"
(Freire, 2000, p. 95).

As indicated from the quote above (Freire, 2000), the worldview of students must be

respected. When considering how best to approach teaching within the context of increased

cultural diversity in today's classrooms in Western universities, lessons can be learned from

prior investigations of multicultural classrooms in different contexts. In the next section of

the paper I will consider literature on teaching in multicultural classrooms in North America

that we may draw upon.

Milner (2011) explains that in the multicultural context of K-G12 classrooms in North

America, one size no longer fits all in teaching. For this reason culturally relevant teaching

(also called culturally relevant pedagogy) has become a major focus for researchers and

educators. Culturally relevant pedagogy is defined by Ladson-Billings as: "an approach that

serves to empower students to the point where they will be able to examine critically

educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating truly democratic and

multicultural society" (as cited in Milner, 2011, p. 68). In the view of Egbo (2009), culturally relevant pedagogy should place emphasis on knowledge related to what students know: "using content that reflects the cultural capital of all students - making the information more closely aligned with their frame of reference" (p. 98) and should give them opportunities to have a voice in authentic ways. Culturally relevant pedagogy enables students to relate their culture to curriculum (Milner, 2011). Ladson-Billings (2009) explains that culturally relevant pedagogy also helps students in overcoming the negative effects brought by the dominant culture, such as ignoring minorities' histories and cultures in most curriculums.

While academic knowledge is essential knowledge, making it culturally relevant can help empower all students (Egbo, 2009). According to Ladson-Billings (2009), "culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 20). Milner (2011), building on the work of Ladson-Billings, indicates that through culturally relevant teaching, teachers help students with developing critical thinking skills in questioning inequity, as well as allowing students to connect what they have learned with their lives.

As pointed out by Auger and Rich (2007), a good teacher should realize that equal treatment of students may not be sufficient. Teachers have to recognize that some students may be taking part in two cultures: the dominant and the ethnic (Auger & Rich, 2007). When there are discontinuities between the two cultures, students may have difficulties in school, especially if the teacher assumes that the mainstream culture is the one that has the greatest value. Milner (2011) also states that teachers must keep students' social context in mind,

because the social context that shapes students' experiences is vital to the process of their

decision-making and the reasons behind the decisions. Culturally responsive instruction puts

emphasis on the significance of diversity, meanwhile acknowledging that non-mainstream

students should have the same access to academic knowledge as the mainstream students

(Auger & Rich, 2007). With culturally relevant teaching, multicultural students not only

know and value their own culture, students also understand the dominant culture they must

navigate, in order to be successful students. Ladson-Billings (2006) describes this as cultural

competence (as cited in Egbo, 2009).

Community-Centered Approach: giving students a voice

   "The aim is graduates who see themselves not only as being connected with their
   local communities but also as members of world communities"
   (Leask, 2013, p. 104).

   The book *Life at the Intersection: Community, Class and Schooling* (James, 2012)

concentrates on the schooling, lives and experiences of young people who are growing up or

have grown up in the Jane & Finch community of Toronto, which has long been portrayed as

one of Canada's most "troubled" neighborhoods. At the end of the book, the author

emphasizes that education may be the only route for people in the community to make a

difference in their lives and satisfy their ambitions. However, not all schools are able to meet

the individual needs of all students. James (2012) suggests a community-centered approach

that concentrates on understanding the students' cultural background and life experience is of

the utmost importance if teachers and schools are to mitigate inequities.

   When discussing a community-referenced approach to education, James (2012)

comments that using appropriate curriculum, pedagogy and resources can help students to

connect their learning to their community and their own lives. "Educators must have knowledge of the community and the culture if they are to effectively facilitate a teaching and learning process in which students are able to see the relevance of their learning to their lives" (James, 2012, p. 124). To be actively participating in the learning process, students are encouraged to perceive education as their project, not something being done to them by someone else, but something they create with their lived contexts (James, 2012). In addition, as Bruner (1966) (one of the major researchers in the area of Constructivism), comments; "instruction should focus primarily on the experiences and contexts that prepare and motivate students for learning and should be structured so it can be easily grasped by the students" (Auger & Rich, 2007, p. 42). Because learners bring many prior experiences with them when they get into any learning situation, teachers' main responsibility is to facilitate students to make connections between their previous learning with the new learning (Auger & Rich, 2007).

The community-referenced approach, as indicated by James (2012), "begins with an understanding that the students' lives- their experiences, needs, interests, expectations and aspirations- are mediated by the communities in which they live" (p. 127). He also points out that "teachers' knowledge of the community and their students is fundamental to building a relationship with them that is an essential component of effective teaching" (James, 2012, p. 128). When instructors' develop understanding of students' experience and combine them with effective teaching practices, students are more engaged with the learning process and feel that their culture is recognized and made relevant. Adapting curriculum content to incorporate local examples can make learning relevant to the lives of the students. Changing

pedagogy to better suit culturally diverse ways of learning and knowing can ensure that all students are included.

Lessons to be learned from this consideration of multicultural classrooms

It is important to recognize that there are similarities and differences between multicultural K-G12 classrooms in North America, and Universities classrooms in Western Countries that are diverse due to the increased number of international students studying abroad. While both types of classrooms include cultural diversity, international students usually come from high-income homes, which is not the case for the majority of multicultural students in K-G12 environments in North America (Giroux, 2005). However, international students in the classroom are subjected to the same kind of discrimination within classroom settings when teachers teach according to the norms of the dominant Eurocentric culture and ignore the different perspectives of international students.

Just as the curriculum needs to be adapted for multicultural students in Canada, curriculum must be internationalized for international students who come to Western post-secondary institutions. Many researchers believe that it is imperative to internationalize the curriculum. Internationalization of curriculum assumes that "curriculum content within the formal curriculum will be informed by research that crosses national as well as cultural boundaries" (Leask, 2009, p. 209). Internationalizing the curriculum will benefit both domestic and international students by informing them of global perspectives. "It will purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspective as global professionals and citizens" (Leask, 2009, p. 209).

Features of culturally relevant pedagogy can be applied to the context of University

classrooms to better accommodate international students and achieve the goal of true sharing and learning from the mix of cultures that are present. In the next section of the paper I will describe some examples.

Cultural Bag: get to know the students

"The Cultural Bag activity is one that I have used for many years and I believe it grew out of my desire to "welcome" students into my class, to get a true sense of how each person identifies and what they see as culturally relevant. It is from a constructivist, phenomenological pedagogical perspective, in that it provides the class and opportunity to see the lens the person views the world through. It also provides an opportunity for the student to begin thinking deeply about how they have constructed their identity, and what is important to them. It is also a celebration of each person in the class"
(Allison Cumming-McCann, personal communication, May 17, 2013).

The Cultural bag activity is an amazing task for students to learn about their own cultural background and the cultural backgrounds of others. It provides opportunities for students to become "experts" about their own culture as a prerequisite to learning about other cultures. This activity asks students to create and videotape themselves to share their own "cultural bag", through the items that students choose to introduce themselves to the class. The items included in the cultural bag should symbolize or represent aspects of the student's culture and multiple identities, roles, interests, values and beliefs that student holds.

"Know the student" should be a mantra of every teacher (Kurucz, 2006). As pointed out by Egbo (2009), teachers must know who their students are and must be able to draw upon their students' prior knowledge if they are to teach them effectively. As well, teachers need to identify the bias that they may bring to the class. By sharing their own cultural bag, teachers can build the essential awareness of the class and of themselves.

With this activity, several objectives could be reached. Firstly, during the process of

creating one's own cultural bag, the students have a chance to think deeply about what items could represent their identity and how the items are important for them. Besides the reflection on their identity, the students are expected to share their cultural background. Secondly, with the sharing of each other's cultural bag, students will learn about the cultural backgrounds of their classmates and from the interaction, students unpack their stereotypes. According to Vygotsky (1978), "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (p. 90). When students realize that other people have different points of view, the interactions are considered as challenges which can prompt them to revise and extend their former thinking. Teachers can obtain benefit from this task as the initial access to understanding the students. Once they have attained basic knowledge of students' background, and cultural context, the instructor can reflect on whether the curricular content is a good match for the diversity of classroom. It is essential in student-centered design to begin lesson planning by considering the larger curricular picture in combination with consideration of the particular learners in the classroom (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis & Trezek, 2008).

Students may not be interested in reading textbooks or search information on the Internet to learn about their peers' cultural backgrounds, but they may be very happy to watch the short movie clips wherein everyone shows their important items selected for the cultural bag activity. This activity serves the important purpose of helping students and teacher get to know each other. As indicated by Egbo (2009), "an important strategy for getting to know the students they teach includes learning from the students themselves, as they have a repertoire

of information about their own lives and communities" (p. 147). Since instructors may have little chance to get to know their students one-on-one, using the cultural bag activity as the welcome celebration not only builds a harmonious classroom environment for students, but also gives students an important opportunity to understand and learn more about different cultures. However, it is possible that the cultural bag activity could be misused and this could be harmful to students. For example, an instructor could have bias of which they are unaware. To use the cultural bag activity well, teachers need to understand their own attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills - the three main elements of Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006).

Learning about Learning: A Bridging Course into the Culture of Advanced Academic Learning in Western Institutions

What do we really mean when we use the word "learn"? Most people usually think learning is something we all do from the moment of birth, so most of us tend to take this very complex process for granted. There are often many assumptions about the meaning of learning and how learning occurs. For the international students who are from countries that use examination-based education systems, many assume that learning is gained when they have memorized the theories and facts, and have a good performance in the examinations. According to Taylor (2008), learning is a transformative process that involves "constructing and appropriating new and revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience in the world" (p. 5). These two alternatives are just two possible perspectives on the process of learning, no matter what background students are from, they all need to understand different points of view on how learning happens.

In the course description of *Learning about Learning*, Rees (personal communication, 2012) points out that each student's learning can be viewed as a unique journey. The course is based on the theoretical perspective that there are many ways of learning and knowing, each developing within its own particular social context, including thinking, language, community and culture. As well as aiming to support students exploring their own learning perspectives, the course offers students a look at contemporary theories of learning; including Western, non-Western, and Aboriginal perspectives. By connecting learning theories with real life, students have more systematic ways of talking about familiar experiences (Wenger, 1998), and reflecting on these experiences can foster critical thinking (Clark & Rossiter, 2008); these processes together can contribute to students' learning.

Learning about Learning is built upon the theoretical foundation of Henry Giroux (2005) who uses the border crossing metaphor to highlight the complexities of learning in demographically diverse settings. This metaphor is useful for examining the transitions that diverse students and instructors must engage in if they are to make the best use of intercultural learning opportunities within diverse post-secondary environments. This is in line with the ideas of James (2012), Ladson-Billings (2009) and Egbo (2009) described earlier, in that learning perspectives from students' home cultures are honored and at the same time students have opportunities to bridge cultural differences and develop "cultural competence" within Western academic institutions. Another way to bridge cultural differences, by helping students to perceive different perspectives, is constructive controversy. In the next section, this strategy will be described.

Constructive controversy

The Western model of education tends to be students-centered. According to this model, students are given more space to voice their opinions and to question, while the teacher plays a role as helper to guide students to find answers. However, as Johnson and Johnson (1979) point out, in classrooms where students' are encouraged to voice opinions, there may be lots of different opinions expressed and arguments can occur, and this may arouse negative emotion among students. Palmer (1990) argues that "conflict can be a paradoxical path to health and harmony for persons and groups" (p. 15). The question is how to make good use of intellectual conflict in the classroom. It is believed that constructive controversy is one of the best ways to foster positive intellectual conflict among students and the instructional procedure is effective for improving the quality of students' learning and problem solving skills; those skills that are essential for students of all ages to become competent citizens when facing complexity of today's society.

In using intellectual conflict to enhance student learning and development, there must be "operational procedures that guide instructors in its use and empirical evidence documenting the effectiveness of the procedures" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 38). In a number of articles and with numerous co-authors, David W. Johnson introduces the procedure of constructive controversy as one effective path to using intellectual conflict for instructional purposes. According to Johnson, Johnson and Smith (2000), constructive controversy is defined as an instructional procedure that "combines cooperative learning with structured intellectual conflict" (p. 30), and it exists "when one student's ideas, information, conclusions, theories, or opinions are incompatible with those of another, and the two seek to reach an

agreement" (p. 30). Therefore, constructive controversy can be considered as a type of

instructional intellectual conflict in classrooms, by which students seek to reach agreement

and acquire new perspectives.

In engaging in constructive controversy and in seeking to reach an agreement, students

can experience a process that "advances from factual leaning to reasoned judgment" (Johnson

& Johnson, 1988, p. 60). The articles that describe the procedure of constructive controversy

include Johnson & Johnson, 1979, Johnson & Johnson, 1988, Johnson et al., 1997, Johnson,

Johnson & Smith, 2000, and Johnson & Johnson, 2009. According to Johnson and others in a

series of papers, including Johnson as an author, the process of controversy can be concluded

in the following five steps. First, when individuals are presented with a problem or issue, they

make an initial conclusion based on categorizing or organizing their present information,

limited experience and specific perspectives (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2000; Johnson &

Johnson, 2009). Second, when asked to present their conclusion to others, they engage in

cognitive rehearsal and "making a persuasive presentation as to the validity of students'

positions" (Johnson et al., 1997, p. 2). Third, opponents present opposing positions. Students

may become uncertain about the correctness of their own ideas when listening to others'

conclusions and a state of conceptual conflict or disequilibrium is aroused (Johnson &

Johnson, 1988; Johnson & Smith, 2000). Fourth, the conceptual conflict leads to epistemic

curiosity. Students are motivated to search for more information, and a more adequate

cognitive perspective in hopes of resolving the uncertainty (Johnson & Johnson, 1979, p. 57).

Finally, students are trying to understand the opponents' conclusion and hopefully "deriving a

new, reconceptualized, reorganized conclusion by accommodating the perspective and

reasoning of others and by adapting their own perspective and reasoning" (Johnson, Johnson

& Smith, 2000, p. 33). As a result, novel solutions and decisions may be developed, and

students, meanwhile, arrive at a conclusion of higher quality. The process is repeated until

"the differences in conclusions among students have been resolved, a synthesis is achieved,

an agreement is reached, and the controversy has ended" (Johnson & Johnson, 1988, p. 60).

With the appropriate structured process and conditions, students can reap the benefits of

constructive controversy. It can arouse "greater mastery and retention of the subject matter

being studied as well as greater ability to generalize the principles learned to a wider variety

of situations" (Johnson & Johnson, 1993, p. 43). With greater mastery and retention, students

are better able to recall more correct information and transfer it to new learning situations.

Constructive controversy also may result in students' increased perspective-taking abilities

(Johnson & Johnson, 1988). Within the process of controversy, students "practice adopting a

perspective, advocating it, enlarging their opinion to include the opponent's position as well"

(Johnson & Johnson, 1988, p. 63). Furthermore, according to Johnson et al. (1997),

controversy results in "higher-quality problem solving and decision making, more frequent

creative insight, more thorough exchange of expertise, greater task involvement, more

positive interpersonal relationships among students, and greater social competence,

self-esteem, and ability to cope with stress and adversity" (p. 2). Students engaged in a

controversy tend to be more motivated to "learn more about the issues" and "have more

active interest in learning others' positions" to "develop an understanding and appreciation of

diverse points of view" (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2000, p. 34). In conclusion, students

who participate in constructive controversy are more likely to become "capable and evolving

problem solvers" in a pluralistic society and an increasingly globalized world (Rees, Pardo & Parker, 2012, p. 490). Such students need to master the process of advocating their own view, of challenging opposing positions, of accepting other's opinions, of making decisions, and finally of committing themselves to implement the decision made.

Conclusion

As people in cross-cultural transition, international students encounter transitional challenges, culturally and academically. I have described these as "culture shock" and "learning shock" in my paper. Both shocks can be ameliorated and turned to be positive with culturally sensitive and helpful teaching practice. In this paper, I have introduced some teaching approaches that may be helpful for international students' learning, including culturally relevant teaching practices, such as an activity called "cultural bag"; a course called Learning about Learning; and the instructional procedure of constructive controversy. Approaches such as these could be adopted generally, in post-secondary institutions where numbers of international students continue to rise. Culturally relevant teaching practices such as the cultural bag activity show high respect for students' cultural background and prior experience, and are really effective for helping teachers to get to know and learn from their students. From my point of view, the Learning about Learning course should be considered as a foundational course of every program in a university. As students are pursuing more and more advanced degrees, it is essential that they have understanding of how they learn and how the learning style they own impacts their study and daily life. I believe that constructive controversy should be considered as an effective instructional procedure that teachers can use to motivate positive outcomes from intellectual conflict in a classroom. Through the whole

process of constructive controversy, students acquire problem-solving skills and seek solution spontaneously, which can help students become accomplished citizens in a pluralistic society.

As summarized by Kurucz (2006), "teaching international students is one way a teacher can achieve a full, rich, and rewarding life, full of fascinating new ideas , interactions, and insights" (p. 209). Therefore, if international students are to continue gaining valuable learning experiences, and if instructors are to have meaningful and helpful careers, instructors should work to constantly think about and improve their teaching practice. The teaching approaches introduced in this paper may help international students to build understanding of other cultures, exploring the real meaning of learning, and adjusting to a new way of teaching and learning. I recommend that post-secondary institutions support these teaching approaches, as well as consider other teaching approaches that may be effective for international and all students' learning, based on their experience and needs.

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