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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

To have an open mind is more important than learning; and we can have an open mind, not by cramming it full of information, but by being aware of our own thoughts and feelings, by carefully observing ourselves and the influences about us, by listening to others, by watching the rich and the poor, the powerful and the lowly. Wisdom does not come through fear and oppression, but through the observation and understanding of everyday incidents in human relationship.

(Jiddu Krishnamurti)

INTRODUCTION

There is a general assumption that learning is a well-defined, standard experience across cultures. International students who come to USA universities often do well academically and it is assumed that they learn the same things in the same manner as resident students, aside from cultural notions of styles. International students enter into a university culture that never asks them to question how they are learning and the nature of the most important things they are learning. Faculty and administrators probably believe that international students face adjustment problems and academic success is achieved after overcoming and adapting to different cultural and language issues. While these certainly are issues to reckon with, the most challenging things they learn and the most important skill sets they acquire do not necessarily come out of the classroom, or a book, or out of a lecturer's mouth—it may be in the cross-cultural experience itself. This research of Asian graduate students examines what international students believe about learning—in their past and present life—and asked them to look at these beliefs in order to understand a more fundamental view of learning from a cross-cultural perspective.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Stigler and Hiebert (1999) in *The Learning Gap* contend that teaching is a cultural activity in that it is represented and embedded within the minds of participants by mental pictures and generalized knowledge about the events that occur in a school. The school context is known and implicitly learned over a long period of time—not deliberately, but through experience—and is consistent with the beliefs, values, and assumptions of that culture. These authors believe educational improvement can be achieved through methods gathered from comparative education research study. Comparative studies generally look at two or more different societies or cultures and, in this research, this also happens to be the same definition used for cross-cultural experiences. This comparative research study takes a look at cross-cultural perspectives of learning and begins with clarifying the meaning of learning as voiced by international students using their own words, metaphors and images.

On a world scale, the movement of people, ideas, and technologies are moving across geo-political borders at steadily increasing rates. Schools, too, are reflecting this movement with larger multicultural student compositions and a confluence of cultural knowledge and personal abilities. This combination of factors has given rise to the call from international educators for a different perspective on learning because, in the globalized world, learning does not require enculturation within a specific educational tradition or formal school system as much as it does skills and abilities that allow the appropriation of cultural knowledge found in everyday interactions across diverse contexts. The Amman Affirmation issued by UNESCO has asked educators to promote new forms of life-learning that reach more students to address changing these global conditions. This set of global conditions would indicate that there is advantage in trying to understand how learning is being re-shaped across educational landscapes. Could it be possible that student learning strategies and their conception of learning have become transcultural metaphors reflecting the purpose people are finding in a world that has changed dramatically over the last two decades?

It was not too surprising that the participants shared many similar perspectives on learning. Their answers were surprising, however, because they challenge many of the academic perspectives on formal learning and what sort of learning outcomes might be likely in global environments. The respondents indicated that learning has more to do with life and interpersonal skills than it has to do with the measuring of academic achievements. Most importantly, the mere crossing of cultural borders may

be a much larger learning event than most educators have ever acknowledged.

Questions underlying this research were stimulated by Young Yun Kim's (2001) research on cross-cultural communication whereby cross-cultural experiences challenge ones identity, yet induces learning through facilitation by acculturation, the comfort that is derived from blurring culture and learning. Successful experiences in and out of learning environments are related by both introspection and dialog. So, while learning is an individual experience, it also requires others for it to bring meaning to the event and its participants. However, when the topic of learning arises, the voice of the learner is often silent—generally, it is the instructor that opines what learning is and how it occurs, usually as a solitary experience as a result of formal techniques applied in or related to a school setting. This study begins with the voice of the learner, an integral participant when discussing learning as an interactive experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning

The study of learning has been generally relegated to the field of cognitive and behavioral sciences, with experts ranging from Vygotsky to Bandura, Pavlov to Skinner. The difficulty with many in the field of cognitive and behavioral psychology is that many are enamored with the belief that knowledge is an outcome of learning and only resides in the brain and its psychological linkages. For example, Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, in defining learning, proposes a contemporary psychological definition: "Learning behavior is a relatively permanent change in mental associations due to experience" (1999: 3). This definition assumes cognition's role as the center of human learning that rationally constructs behavior. St. Clair (2000) reminds us, however, that verbal and visual knowledge creations are not of the same cognitive structures, or behavioral quality, or social contexts. Gaining knowledge through a rational, Western, print-tradition is not the same process as the knowledge gained through an oral tradition that has relied on mental and physical spatial relationships. It is the social, cultural, and introspective aspects of learning that have largely been omitted from learning definitions, partly because they are usually not present in formal educational settings.

Many non-Western societies' indigenous cultures are paradoxically steeped in non-literate learning patterns filtered through oral traditions that rely on visual logic; whereas most Western societies' cultures are informed by a preponderance of rhetorical learning patterns that are generated through the tradition of the printed word. Robert St. Clair (2000) has determined that Western societies have concentrated on print literacy as opposed to visual literacy. Visual literacy is suffused with visual metaphor or "how visual space is organized as a means of sharing cultural and social knowledge" (p. 85). St. Clair believes "Western cultures are so involved in written language that they have not seriously studied how humans structure information visually" (p. 90). He has noted how many indigenous societies who have rich oral traditions have developed a series of visual metaphors that embody large caches of knowledge, such as the Medicine Wheel of the Plains Tribes; the Navajo's Four Sacred Mountains; Maori war boats associated with place; Thai six directions; Taoist landscapes; Vedic traditional dance forms; and Buddhist Mandalas, etc. In his analogy, visual metaphors are equivalent to knowledge "just as scientific paradigms provide a perspective on theoretical knowledge" (p. 86). Oral-tradition cultures generally process information differently, are more affectively directed, look for holistic meanings, are fond of interdependent work, and are more predisposed to learning through movement, the creative, and the symbolic; whereas their print-tradition culture counterparts favor learning alone, analysis of detail, are logical and sequential in approach to problem-solving, are attracted to the sciences, and rely on language for metaphoric development.

Many critical researchers who have been looking at global diversity and their manner of learning share St. Claire's concerns of the western-dominated view of learning. Changes in global education have brought the topic of learning to question and it has been addressed at the international stage. The UNESCO-sponsored *Learning Development Institute* and the *Meaning of Learning Project* spawned a workshop at the International Conference of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) in 2000. The theme of the workshop was the examination of the conceptual and procedural meaning of learning, particularly its social construction. The authors called attention to the fact that learning has not been sufficiently defined to include untraditional forms of schooling and relevant life experiences because educators have given learning a narrow intellectual field in which its' most notable function is to formally classify and sort societies through the measurement of individuals' capacity to store relatively meaningless bits of information in a reward and punishment-laden, production-line type of environment.

During that conference, Jan and Yusra Visser (2000) firmly stated that "there is an urgent need to fundamentally change the entire learning landscape" (p. 4), particularly at a time when global conflict and environmental collapse threaten human sustainability. But what and how this change of the learning landscape will be translated into curriculum change or how and when non-Western countries might be able to forge new approaches to learning in a globalized world is uncertain. These questions may not be answered anytime soon because international commercial interests determine much of the educational policy-making strategies and the skills needed for the market. The workshop questioned whether schools are capable of creating the conditions to bring about learning societies with opportunity for all or are more proficient at being part of a global industry driven by economics and business interests with only a small proportion of society finding meaningful activity.

Another participant with the Project, David Jonassen (2000), pointed out, "many of the assumptions of behavioral and cognitive theories of learning have been challenged by a combination of more socially and constructively oriented theories" (p. 2). He also points out that mind, perception, actions, and behavior are all a unified whole integrated to create and act synergistically with context. We cannot know "something in a completely abstract, decontextualized way" (p. 3). In seeking a clarity in the meaning of learning, he identifies three of the most salient features of contemporary theories of learning, namely: Learning is about consciously creating meaningful activity and not acquiring knowledge; interpersonal interaction, culture, and the social milieu are integral components of the creation of meaning; and knowledge exists in dialogs, social interactions, relationships, tools and artifacts—their production and use—and all the previous notions, models, trials, and versions of the meaning-making process. Ironically, knowledge and meaning-making are extensive circuits within society that acknowledge the contributions of all, yet the social structures within society acknowledge and give opportunity to so few. The same social and meaning making functions that Jonassen believe are hallmarks of learning also limit the extent and quality of learning one may experience, through conditioning and/or misunderstanding the meaning and nature of one's experience and environment.

More critically, David Berg and Jeannette Vogelaar (1998) believe that the expansion of formal education can no longer solely address a society's learning needs, and that teacher education is not prepared to address continuous education objectives nor how to teach teachers or learners how to acquire the capacity to learn. Access and quality are initial starting points, but the creation of learning environments in which people

learn how to make and shape flexible environments that give meaning to their lives through relationship with others are the long term goals of education. The Amman Affirmation, UNESCO document of 1996a (as cited in Berg & Vogelaar), learning has been promoted to emphasize acculturation and intercultural relations in order to advance the human condition at all levels of activity. The Affirmation says:

> Given the trend toward more open societies and global economies, we must emphasize the forms of learning and critical thinking that enable individuals to understand changing environments, create new knowledge and shape their own destinies. We must respond to new challenges by promoting learning in all aspects of life, through all institutions of society; in effect, creating environments in which living is learning (1998: 2).

Cross-Cultural Learning

Research on cross-cultural learning is generally related to language acquisition, cross-cultural interaction, and adaptive skills; but there is a growing, yet still insubstantial amount of research that focuses on the cross-cultural meaning of learning. Cross-cultural learning has begun to attract the interest of US researchers in many fields of study because of the steady increase of international students in US universities. A survey conducted by Davis and the Institute of International Education (as cited in Britton et al., 2003) stated that enrollment of international students increased by nearly 6.4% from 2000 to 2001. Sandra Britton et al. (2003) reiterated the beliefs of a number of authors that the rise in enrollment of international students bring diverse perspectives to US classrooms and little research has been done to examine pedagogical techniques that suit international students perceived learning needs. In their study, they focus on how international students perceive teachers, the value of visual presentations, their preferences related to group work, their difficulties with communication, the impact of formality differences in classrooms, and the nature of class interactions. Prem Ramburuth however, states that studies "based on perceptions of the learning behavior of cross-cultural students… fail to demonstrate accurate understanding of how these students conduct their learning…" (2001: 4).

Bharat Mehra (2004) has noted the lack of studies of international graduate students at US universities with most of the existing research anecdotal and largely concentrating on the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition at the host university and the relevance of application in the home country. Mehra believes that studying international students can bring

needed cultural perspectives to university programs that lack of a broad global, cultural approach to understanding the learning needs of students. His study conceives a seven-phase process international students' encounter at their host universities. His participants expressed a need to connect to past cultural, academic, and work experiences in order to formulate their learning strategies in creating a vision of adapting to an altered cultural present and future. Mehta noted that a means to a holistic approach to utilize the best potential of students and faculty is to become aware of these phases and how they can foster more effective learning and cultural understanding.

> Part of those strengths and realities of international students are their past cultural and educational experiences in other countries. Improvements in effectiveness of student learning, are thus, directly tied to a provision of opportunities to tap into their abilities and strengths that include nurturing past cultural connections from their countries of origin/resident countries and work-related/academic settings (2004: 180).

Given that learning may be "a universal human activity" (Yamazaki 2005: 3), there have been numerous studies associating culture and learning styles. Yoshitaka Yamazaki has analyzed learning preferences and abilities in order to determine how people learn in specific cultures. He has reaffirmed previous research associating culture and emotion, principles of uncertainty-avoidance, organization types, and the relative interdependence or dependence on others as contributing factors in learning within different cultures. He has also affirmed the claim that Westerners generally tend to be analytical and abstract oriented, while non-Westerners generally tend to be holistic and experiential-oriented. While he was unable to get a consistent relationship between learning preferences and cross-cultural traits, he was encouraged by the idea that culture is a factor to contend with when examining a society's learning styles.

In another significant study of cross-cultural learning by Yoshitaka Yamazaki (2004), he describes sticking points that inhibit understanding cross-cultural learning. In his thorough examination of cross-cultural research over the past 30 years, he finds that most research of cross-culture learning pertains to lists of skills acquired as opposed to a theoretical framework to understand how skills are best attained. He sees additional problems in the fact that the research has not tried to benefit from interdisciplinary, diverse social science perspectives and has emphasized types of skills acquired, but has omitted how these skills were acquired or taught. He stated, "learning styles may vary from one culture to another and… converge within and vary between cultures" (p. 25–26). Yamazaki

concludes that much of the learning process is adaptation and this is facilitated by interpersonal skills, which he sees as the most important skills for effective learning to occur. Communication is an aspect of every one of the nine competencies in his model and is crucial in order for cross-cultural learning to occur. He advocates future research identifying the relationship between learning patterns and cultures.

The need to learn cross-culturally requires the ability to acculturate and to function in a world that is negotiated in the social context. Acculturation allows one the comfort by blurring the difference between one's idea of culture and learning. The work of Young Yun Kim approaches learning from an intercultural communications perspective that links the individual and the surrounding environment in an open system. In reflecting on passages to other societies, Kim says: "the process of crossing cultures challenges the very basis of who we are as cultural beings. It offers opportunities for new learning and growth" (Kim 2001: 9). Additionally, the development of communication competence is defined as the "internalized cultural patterns become the world, with strong emotional and protective overtones" (p. 49).

While continuous and meaningful learning lays its foundation with communication, the most essential element of communication is listening, implying an 'other'. Claudia Schachinger and Mark Taylor (2000) believe that understanding 'the other', is at the core of intercultural learning and starts with dialog and then moves on to reflective practices that acknowledge difference as a necessary chafing that shapes personal identity. In this sense, 'the other' becomes an integral accessory to personal development and innovative activity. Given the global conditions of market competition for scarce educational resources at cut-rate prices, innovation and human understanding are also at a premium. However, education has turned to following global corporate systems and learning has been designed to feed these systems that emphasize commerce and materialistic conceptualization of the human environment. Education does not accommodate the contemplative approach of knowing self or the refinement of interaction between self and other and the result appears to be a loss of humanity at the expense of commercial interests and the exploitation of self-ignorance. Peter Senge (1990), among other entrepreneurs and innovators, has called for a revival in learning that leads to a more enlightened and productive society. Senge defines learning as a dynamic process, as opposed to a static end goal:

> Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do. Through learning, we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life (1990: 14).

METHODOLOGY

Rationale of Study

The major research questions for this study are: How do international students from Asia studying in the USA define learning? What is significant about their cross-cultural learning experience? What visual representations/ metaphors would participants associate with learning? Qualitative research methods were used, specifically, a focus group interview and individual, personal interviews. It was believed that quantitative data would not be sufficient in capturing the personal reflections and significance of the participants' insights; consequently, a qualitative approach was considered to be more effective in understanding the symbolic and cross-cultural significance of learning as opposed to measuring degrees of learning instances, preferences, or data related to preconceived notions of the relationship between schools and learning.

Subramony et al. (2002) define focus group interviews as "In-depth, group-based research and evaluation methodology… to help understand how or why people hold certain beliefs about a topic of interest" (p. 1). The interactive nature of a focus group format was chosen to facilitate initial discussion on the topic of learning in order to stimulate personal reflection through dialog with colleagues in preparation for the follow-up personal interviews. The personal interviews were designed to allow respondents to draw or describe personal visual representation/metaphors for learning and then to clarify their meanings. This process was planned to elicit personal experiences, meanings, possible cross-cultural significations, and any follow-ups to any topics from the focus group dialog. Since learning is a personal experience, it was important to have the individual voice within group and private contexts in order to understand expressed beliefs.

The questions of the focus group interview were intentionally left simple in order for the participants to explore ideas both as a group and as an individual. The group session was opened with the question, "What is learning?" An aim of this activity was to get colleagues to engage in a discussion with the topics confined to learning and cross-cultural aspects

related to their experiences of learning; however, participants were given free range to suggest 'out of the box' ideas and directions for the dialog. Opportunity for participants to express themselves and share within a group of peers was intuitively deemed a more useful approach to explore this question. The private interviews were used to dispel any group behaviors such as intimidation, reticence, or groupthink. The group session proved to be a beneficial strategy that stimulated much personal reflection and participants built upon those discussions and delved deeper into their own ideas.

The nationalities of the participants were deliberately spread among the larger Asian international populations at the university, namely: South Korean, East Indian, Chinese, Thai, and Japanese. The participants represented a diverse sample of Asian nations where education was playing a significant role on the global stage, and most importantly, at the university where this research was conducted. There was no intention of essentializing or viewing in a reductionist manner the societies represented by the participants, but there was a question as to whether anything generalizable about culture as education would arise.

Setting

The study was conducted at a large, major university in the Midwest of the United States of America. The town's population is about 70,000 with a student population of approximately 39,000. The international student population is about 3500 with roughly 72% of them are Asian.

Participants

The study used five participants representing five Asian countries—Thailand (female), China (female), Japan (female), Korea (male) and India (male). Ages were not requested, but it is guessed that they varied from 25 to 45 years old. Each participant has been in this university for at least two prior years and was a PhD student. The participants were representative of a typical, convenience samples and were selected by educational and national identity criteria.

Procedures

The research consisted of a focused group interview and follow-up, personal interviews. None of the participants were given any detail of the research except the topic question "What is learning?" All participants were

personally known by the researcher and were recruited in person after receiving approval for the study by the Human Subjects Committee. The focused group meeting took place three days after recruitment. The focused group session lasted two and a half hours and had to be stopped even though the participants were very engaged in the discussion to the end. The follow-up individual interviews were conducted at the university, in a public park, and at the researcher's home and some went on longer than others, varying from 30 to 90 minutes. The personal interview of the fifth participant from Japan was held in her home and lasted one and half hour with the follow-up at the university lasting a half hour. The focused group dialog and all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

The focused group interview was conducted in a comfortable multimedia room at the university that was conducive for discussion. The participants were seated so that there was one male and one female opposite to and next to each other. At the start of the session, the participants were instructed to engage in open, self-directed dialog as much as possible and that I would only stimulate, clarify, or refocus the discussion. Everyone knew each other, so there were no feelings of social discomfort, and the mix of gender and personalities made the experience amiable and engaging. Everyone was respectful and no one dominated the discussion and no one interrupted anyone else. The initial question was introduced, that is, "Tell us what you know of learning?" and soon everyone was discussing these things, which came out as if they had been welling up inside for a lengthy period of time. Aside from asking for clarification points or redirecting the discussion back to the theme, I remained a modestly quiet facilitator. At the end of the session, the participants gave a very favorable response to this style of facilitation. In addition, all participants expressed the idea that this type of session and topic would be of great help for all international students and would be great as an on-going project.

During the individual interviews, the participants gave, aside from more reflective answers concerning their experiences, a visual representation/metaphors for learning, a description of their metaphors and, if any, learning's representative action. The interviews were then transcribed, and then critically analyzed with special attention paid to looking at relationships between issues. This preliminary analysis yielded a number of emergent themes that were coded and elaborated in tables divided into quotes that highlighted and characterized the themes made by the participants. The coded data from each participant was correlated and synthesized in a narrative form. After writing the analysis, I performed a member check verifying the accuracy and context of the information in the research with all participants.

FINDINGS

The participants led the discussions admirably and gave the impression that they were 'hungry' to talk about this topic. Although this research was not an activity to essentialize societies or reduce cultures to the thoughts of a handful of participants; it was a questioning as to whether there were any similarities in the definition of learning from people who had had cross-cultural learning experiences. It is important to keep in mind that the participants have extracted a view of learning by way of cross-cultural experiences that have required them to iteratively reflect and adapt to social and educational norms. I believe they speak with authority on the process of learning as their ideas are neither solely theoretical nor are they bereft of academic underpinnings – they are personal and they are informed. So, although the study is acknowledged to be from a small sample group and not representative of each country, it is thought that it is still valid information with which to begin to conjecture about comparative and global educational issues and what might be useful in establishing learning environments.

The participants delineated attributes of learning with descriptions, which were then broken down into four common themes. Table 1 shows how the findings of this study were categorized into the themes: Definitions of learning, school and its relationship to learning, cultural differences and learning, and independence and learning. Within these four theme areas were 18 sub-themes as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Attributes of Learning

Definitions of Learning	School's Relationship to Learning	Culture and Differences and Learning	Independence and Learning
• As experience	• Social functions of school	• Existential dilemmas	• First time away and maturation
• As emotion/ intuitive feeling	• As meeting places	• Reshaping memory	• Crossing back
• As a spiritual dimension	• As propaganda	• Identifying culture	• Acculturation into cross-cultural contexts
• As morality	• Learning to see	• Cultural metamorphosis	• Transferring knowledge cross-culturally
• Ages and stages			• Independence and freedom from family obligations

Learning Representations/Metaphors

The responses in the visual representations and explanations acquired in personal interviews provide a sense of personal participation, a voice that is neither silent nor definitive:

1. *Indian participant*

Visual: An airplane

Action: Exchanging money/travel, getting on a plane, going to new places, using new currencies, inspecting new ways and means, learning new idioms and language of commerce

Interpretation:

The metaphor of flying, crossing borders, and interacting in new environments is wholly consistent with the participant's expressed belief in learning as something done outside the classroom. The participant was explicit about the importance of cross-cultural experience as learning. In further explaining his metaphors, what emerged was a philosophical and intellectual view of learning (flying, crossing borders and exchanging currencies) that reflects the importance of experience (interactions), the spanning of time and tradition, and the change in consciousness. He saw education as a runway enabling flight, but not all that significant per se. I identify the obvious primary learning themes of cross-cultural experience and interaction and independence away from home.

2. *Chinese Participant*

Nationality/Identity metaphor: You are wrapped in a blanket of culture

Life metaphors: Spiraling staircase – seems I am repeating, but I am climbing

Learning abroad metaphor: A map, a plane, a bus, a train (learning through being somewhere, learning through exploration and talking to people there)

Learning metaphor: A key that opens the treasure house of both knowledge and wisdom. It also opens anything at anytime depending on what you want

Interpretation:

The participant explained that she visualizes learning as the key to open a house of treasures of knowledge. Learning and knowledge are held as valued items that accommodate accumulation and exploration, access to currency, and passage to journeys. When trekking in far away lands, culture, which is associated with familiarity and support, is a comforting blanket that provides warmth. The participant seems to be caught in circles, but comes to realizations that she is winding on a staircase with an unknown landing. The climb on the stairway abroad requires a map of learning, a schemata provided through conversation with others climbing. I identify the primary learning themes of cross-cultural experiences, culture as transportable learning, and the never-ending process of learning.

3. *Korean Participant*

Visual: Learning is a lens, i.e., glasses, microscope, cameras

Action: Learning occurs only if one sees oneself acting educated, that is, being a good person

Interpretation:

The participant explained that understanding the worldly self is divided by an indiscernible boundary, one that learning can transmute. However, in order to negotiate in a moral world and perceive with clarity, the sharp lens of academic knowledge must be applied to experience. The experience of differences encountered in life must be captured with a lens and understood with the aid of continuous talk between the examiners. Most importantly, the viewer must be moral if he is to learn and be perceived. Being a good person is donning an educated persona with the ability to scrutinize and censure knowledge that does not benefit society. The participant identified primary learning themes of cross-cultural dialog, introspection, and moral development.

4. *Thai Participant*

Visual: Thailand learning = Arrow (one) going step by step (through concentric circles) to center point

USA learning = spiraling arrows (four) winding in toward the center point

Interpretation:

True to her calling as a designer/artist, the participant gave visual metaphors and drew them out for me. Moving to the center (of self) was easy in Thailand because cultural norms were clear and inflexible, providing a concentric path in a family-loaded arena. Moving to the center of self in the USA proves to be indirect, unspecified, and spiraling without the aid of the tight concentric binds of family. The movement towards the center is roundabout in search of moral certitude and self-discovery. Learning self and expressing it through design are one and the same—the design of her life unfolds in the art she creates and the art reflects the goal of independent discovery. I identify the primary learning themes of cross-cultural interaction and independence away from home.

5. *Japanese Participant*

Visual A: Paintbrush – pencil – keyboard and mouse

Visual B: Chinese characters = Japanese + spirit + Western + way = understanding + listening

Interpretation:

The participant gave two metaphors—both visual. One was a traditional Japanese symbol for learning—the calligraphy paintbrush—and then she added the modern versions of this—pencils and computer mouse and keyboard. The other was the Chinese characters for understanding and listening, represented by the characters that signified Japanese spirit and the other character signifying Western way. As she explained, the two symbols in combination represent her academic curiosity—the expression of life lessons—and her awareness of her spiritual roots that leads to wisdom. She thought that understanding comes through listening—listening to the voices of tradition and listening to people with whom she interacts. I note the primary learning themes of cross-cultural interaction and spirituality.

Focus Group Findings

Defining learning

Experience: Self and the Spiritual Aspect

The participants' most common theme in defining learning is related to *experience*. The experience participants spoke of is the sort teachers in the USA call experiential, though not vocational—a challenge that requires self-awareness, reflection, and doing in a social context. The participants' sense of experience is associated with various personal and cultural signifiers associated with experience of being human. The Korean participant puts it clearly that "Learning is the understanding of the world, my feelings, and my self… it's difficult to differentiate from life." What makes his comments so aptly fitting is the context reported by the participant himself; Korean society has traditionally emphasized moral character, implying a reflective and self-conscious demeanor.

Similarly, the Thai participant said, "Learning is finding myself, finding what I want to be, and finding self-expression—it all comes from experience." This participant is a design and art major, so visual literacy and exploring the imagery that arise from the interaction between her and the environment as interpreted by her cultural conditioning. But another cultural factor reported by the Thai participant is the continuous social engagement and loquacity that is prevalent in Thai society. She never had to study aspects of herself, but found self-exploration the key to her maturation and learning. "… You change; you grow up, after you explore more with yourself."

The Indian participant spoke quite firmly in defining learning "I actually firmly believe that you only learn through experience, you only learn through doing." During the interview, the Indian participant made a point that learning is not to be confused with knowledge, but is more related to doing and reflecting—changes in brain and consciousness. The Japanese participant also defined learning as an aspect of consciousness, "[learning is] the process to develop the choice, choices of life. So in other words, the more I learn, the more I will get the choice."

Both these participants added a spiritual aspect to learning and being, which is not surprising given the cultural influence of Buddhism and Hinduism in India, the influence of Buddhism, Shinto, and other Japanese spiritual practices, and the overall influence of Confucianism, Taoism, and other post-Vedic practices across Asia. The Japanese participant framed it as if the one learning—or learned about—must be accommodated, "Learning is

spiritual… It is as if something/someone is watching within—it's the *I* that knows. To learn is to be prepared for the inner voice of *I* who knows." Similarly, the Korean participant spoke of "an idea that arises from the core and must be integrated into all things" and "teachers having sufficient *chi* for students to interact with that energy."

Morality and Learning

Comparing the ways of learning academically, the Chinese participant observed the ethics involved in learning here and in China;

> I compare the Chinese learning with Western learning. They sometimes argue different, like in China where we learn some people's ideas, it's more… recognizing other people's ideas, like saying "yes!" to other people's ideas. Like when you read a book, you take these ideas, and you're aware of your own ideas, the process of learning is more like accumulation of these ideas. But here in the United States… they acquire knowledge by challenging other people… In this process, they build their own knowledge.

This was an idea that most of the participants agreed with and found Western scholarship somewhat crude and rough. All the participants similarly noted American attitudes toward authority, maturity, and the concept of truth, both how students related to teachers and the way teachers related to each other and to students. This area seemed less an area of disagreement with the Western academic process, but with academician's lower level of wisdom and over-concern with establishing their academic authority, not their students. The Japanese participant was not so impressed with the university culture in the USA, "Education in USA is not as challenging as in Japan—yes, there are many assignments and readings, but it doesn't require me to find something on my own… Japanese professors have special skill—they stimulate, not instruct students."

In speaking about teacher responsibility to the school culture, the Korean participant spoke lucidly about the importance of morality in education, "Morality is a kind of an agreement of our community and how to live together... moral learning comes from the ability to be shamed." From this vantage point, he believed that learning became the emphasis of the environment, not the importance of the system or its separate elements. In his way of thinking, a deep conflict exists in Western epistemology because it is riddled with relativism and lacks a notion of truth. "I think it is a big problem, especially when educators don't want to talk about morality any more in America. Because when they talk about morality, it is in

conflict with their own individuality, I guess. So, they have much more relativistic ideas in learning." Not only does he see it as perhaps an endless conflict but he also perceives the dilemma faced by many scholars in the post-modernist tradition and how meaningful dialog is prevented from occurring by unspoken institutional hierarchies that encourage the academician's authority.

> When we have a relativistic perspective, we cannot converse because your idea is different than my idea – yours is yours, mine is mine—I'm going to live my way and you're going to live your way—we don't need to talk any more. This is why they don't want to talk about morality in learning, so they think that knowledge must be created by individuals.

This sort of dyadic, no-sum-game appears prevalent in American society whereby multiple cultures are put together and allowed co-existence, but often lacks deep dialog across differences. Similarly, the participant sees rigidity in the American education system that is reflected in its cultural institutions. In contrasting the key difference between academic morality in Korea and USA, he noted, "Korean morality is different than USA morality in that it isn't dogmatic like the religious-like dogma in the West Korea allows for more reflection, feelings, and possibilities."

Intuitive Feeling and Emotion as Learning

Emotions may be one of the most vilified terminologies associated with learning. Yet, all the participants mentioned it as an integral aspect of learning. In Western reasoning, emotion is generally eschewed and there are explicit attempts to exclude it and even use it as a derogatory label or means to discredit thoughts or action. Ironically, Asians are not usually stereotyped as emotional. They are often derogatorily deemed inscrutable, sneaky, and stealthy, but rarely emotional. Yet, the participants expressed ideas related to emotion as a natural function that is not in need of reacting to or fearing. According to the Japanese participant, "Learning is feeling or emotion. I would say this is a kind of foundation. We inevitably feel something and experience something in our daily life." The Thai participant echoes the sentiment and personalizes it, "Learning is to know how to take care of your total physical self, psychology, and emotion." The Japanese participant stretches it even further into application, "Feeling is important to learning… but after we experience and feel something, it's not knowledge yet till we reflect on it, 'get it', and use it in dialog."

Ages and Stages

Observations about Americans not showing respect to elders is pertinent to how learning is approached in Asian and American societies—one that traditionally honors sagacity and one that emphasizes competitive achievement. The Chinese participant called attention to the relationship between learning and age, "When we are four years old or eight years old and we first read a book, it's totally new for us. When we don't have anything in mind, we accept it; but after we've read one hundred books, we already have conflicting ideas in mind." Age was also an aspect that is very relevant to the Japanese and Thai participants. The Japanese participant talked of the divisions of her life, all divided by school levels (primary, high school, and university). University (undergraduate) life for the Japanese participant was seen in a social perspective "I can't say I learned from university, but I'm saying I learned when I was this age… I met many, many people when I was university student age." The point illustrated by the Japanese, Chinese, and Thai participants was that there were stages, or age periods when significant amounts of learning took place. This may or may not be a gender perspective since these three participants were female, and it could be that females are more sensitive to stages related to age, but it is clearly a point all three articulated more than once.

School and It's Relationship to Learning

Schools as Meeting Places

Schools were not generally identified with institutions of advancing the learning process; they were, however, referred to as sort of auxiliary knowledge coordinating stations that also provide essential social arenas. "School is a place to organize knowledge, not to create knowledge" was the assessment of the Japanese participant, which was not in conflict with the other participants' assessment. Traditional notions of schooling as the primary source of learning and advanced thinking were not supported by the participants' responses, but schools had varying degrees of function in the learning process. The Thai participant's view of school gave a generalized guidance function to school, "School is a place to guide you and then you decide whether to do or not." The Chinese participant, who perceives a difference between learning and wisdom, acknowledges the function of school as a place to accumulate knowledge, but again reaffirmed the importance of learning outside the classroom, "What I learn at school is very important for me, but… most of my learning experience, like wisdom

part occurred after school." She further reflected on her experience in university and its relation to learning, "When I recall my life in university, I would say what I appreciated the most was the friends I made, the people I talked to, the professors contacted, the conversations – this is the most important experience in college."

Social vs. School Learning

Just as age might be associated with gender epistemologies, the social function of schools may also be a similar gender aspect. All three of the females mentioned socializing in school as a primary means of learning. The Thai participant talked of the best time of her undergraduate student life and the learning community that arose. "It was not because of the class I think about—I get into the university and they have many activities: I make a play, I go to supper with my friends—they were part of my school experience… something outside the class, too." The Japanese participant mentioned social activity in many different phases of her education, expressed vividly in remembering her high school days. "In my high school days, I stop going to school because school is just boring and the main reason that I went to school… is to see people, to meet my friends, to hang around together." Similarly, the Chinese participant closely links social aspects and experience, "I always appreciate talking to people. When I talk to people—for me it is a very different and important process of learning—learning through… experience, but its different kind of experience."

School and Learning to See

"Never let your education interfere with your learning." Though spoken humorously, the role of school and its relation with learning was not under-appreciated by the Indian participant, but the relationship was put into perspective:

> I don't know if you actually learn other people's ideas, or you just become aware of them or just recognize them… the pupil does not learn what's in the master's mind, the master teaches the pupil how to see through his eyes… sometimes you need to learn to see before you see. And that's what the master does; the master gives you the tool of vision, the tool of being aware of certain things that you were not aware of before. But in the end, learning is something you do by using those tools.

The Korean participant shared a similar appreciation for the relationship between school and the process of learning and perceiving:

> Sometimes I cannot see when I see because I have no intention to see something. This is why we have to read the book, I think, because the book gave us the theory, gave us the lens to see in a different way, in a different perspective. So, it encourages us to learn —but that's not sufficient. I think it's necessary to learn others, other's ideas. You know, through conversation, through reading a book, but when we read the book, we always thinking and we always converse with the other and their ideas.

So, while the purpose of school is to provide "lenses" and to expose learners to other perspectives, the essential skills necessary for learning are the abilities to reflect, engage in dialog, and the application of experience/ knowledge.

School as a Propaganda

The harshest criticism of school came from the Indian participant who says with tongue-in-cheek, "Schools provide jobs for teachers and administrators." Spoken humorously; it highlighted the overblown self-importance schools take on in effort to exercise social control through various forms of social reproduction. Four participants noted this aspect of school. The Japanese participant sees school as a place that designates one's place in society by getting certification as a specialist. Through her experience, she believes that learning, in general, provides some choices. She detailed the story of her father, a brilliant man by her accounts, denied opportunities of fulfilling his dream due to a lack of education:

> At the same time, school prevent me from experiencing feeling freely and in my father's case he had to learn how to fix boiler and these kinds of things. He had to learn from experiences but it's not his choice… He had his dream and what he wanted to do, but he had to give up that because in order to make his dream comes true, he needed degree but he couldn't get that… still I would say it's not his choice.

The Indian participant believes that schooling is a type of indoctrination and doesn't differ much from propaganda. He isn't one to uphold a relativistic point of view, but he does perceive truth as illusive and schools, in an attempt to formulate the shape of truth, "… try to capture, store, and retrieve knowledge as objects." He talked about how knowledge as objects are things that can be used to achieve ends and predicted outcomes. He has, perhaps more than the other participants, seen the harmful and repulsive outcomes of social sorting in India and to people of color in westernized nations. So, the manipulation of knowledge and how it

controls society and individuals is seen by the participant to begin in school, "There is not much difference between school and indoctrination." In a similar type of thinking, the Chinese participant provided an old adage from ancient China: "make people ignorant through educating them." Roughly translated, it means that you give people only partial truth—the truth you want them to have—in order to control them.

Cultural Difference and Learning

Existential Learning

Cultural difference was talked about often. There were comparisons and even existential questions as to whether their experience in the USA is any different than what other students are getting in their homeland. The Indian participant formulated a question that best summarizes this wonderment, "If Harvard were in Bombay, would it be the same? Surely what you become as a person after two years in Cambridge is different than what you would become after two years in Bombay." The Thai participant also asked "How about the person who studies in graduate school in Thailand—do they get something different than me—do they get something different from graduate school?" I sense that there are many parts to this issue—acknowledging feelings of being different, of being changed by circumstance not in their control, perhaps even a feeling of a random and roaming kismet in which they meet their fate at any point. There is some sort of inference of conscious creation that has been made individually within a very broad global context. All the participants expressed variations on the experience of having the perception of the multitude within the individual and the individual amongst a multitude of possibilities.

Reshaping Memory

Being somewhat disoriented about the location of learning, the influences brought from the homeland, and what you expect to take back when you finish your studies here in the USA would seem like ripe topics to discuss—and, indeed, they were. In addressing her orientation here in the USA, the Chinese participant said, "The further you live away from your country, the more aspects you love about your own country." She has seen aspects to China she had never noticed before and appreciates the many things she took for granted before, but also feels more of an observer here in the USA. Difference and distance combine to make a powerful realization as evidenced by the Korean participants 'confession', "Actually, I love my

country after I came here because I never thought about my country—why it is Korean, why do we have to love Korea. You know, I used to teach my students that they should serve your country—it is part of you, Korea. But, I never realized that before I came here."

"Learning is not about differences in cultures, but the way you are shaped by the culture through your age." The Thai participant was expressing her experience with cultural differences and what was learned. It was not about the culture as a discreet fact, but traversing across cultural landscapes and being shaped by the influences that respond to where one is in relation to their phase of development. The Thai participant identified different shapers in social terms, "In Thailand, you learn more community identity and rely on friends more… Thailand is filled by family structures all the time. In the USA, you learn how to care for yourself— body health, mind, and emotion." She also saw an academic shaper, "Thai society and classrooms are homogenous—American classes are multi-cultural and have many perspectives. Nobody looks at me as a foreigner and doesn't treat me differently."

Identifying Culture

In a surprising cultural lesson, the Chinese participant told of a recent experience whereby she had a disagreement over who was more Chinese with her American-born Chinese roommate. It was a disagreement with charges and counter-charges based on conceptions of nationality. The important lesson the participant learned was that it is important to differentiate between politics, nationality, and culture. So, in order for learning to occur, the cultural context must be made known along with its historical perspective. For example, Asia is, by far, a much older region than colonized America and the conflict between the Old World and the New World can be a learning impediment for both worlds. As the Indian participant explains:

> The population and consciousness (of Asia) is one that hasn't gone through an Age of Enlightenment. This is why in Asia you still find so much conflict between tradition vs. modernity… In Asia the modernity clearly is not indigenous—it came from outside influences. That's why we have this big disjunct between tradition vs. modern, eastern vs. western… The USA didn't have much of a coherent or unified moral or cultural base to go by. It's like when Abe Lincoln said that the best thing about not having a history is you're free to write your own. So that's exactly what happened here. Asian nations were more mired in historical traditions and weighed

> down by those traditions and were unable to advance as fast as this country, which basically didn't have anything to weigh it down.

All too often we hear people refer to the "American culture" as if it were one, complete culture in of itself. The Thai participant astutely observed, "There doesn't appear to be an American culture—American culture in New York City is not the same as Chicago, or in Seattle." However, the projection of multinational commercial interests, e.g., McDonald's, Coke, Levi's, Disneyland, Compaq, Microsoft, etc. were identified by all the participants as cultural icons of America. The Indian participant made the distinction between icons and commercial interests. "McDonald's in America is just about food. But McDonald's when it goes outside, it becomes an ambassador of American culture." None of the participants believed they experienced "culture shock" because all of them associated this phenomenon with being familiar with cultural icons. None of the participants could speak knowledgably about cultures in American society beyond cultural icons. Many of the comments made by participants throughout this study, however, reflect a familiarity with the disoriented emotions and thoughts associated with culture shock, which has very little to do with cultural icons.

"America represents movement, mobility, and impermanence" in a Thai cultural perspective—the occurrence of any of these would indicate big opportunity. "In Thailand, there are only two choices to move or make chances of opportunity—BKK or Chiang Mai." This has been the dilemma for the Thai participant—the symbolic and real possibility for opportunity to further explore and learn, make it hard for her to return home. For the Japanese participant, the USA may be just a stop-off to move on to another destination working in an under-developed nation. She sees refreshing cultural attributes that identify the USA, and among them were how she was treated as an international student, "Americans are individualistic, but they help one another and even international students like me. I think American society is more collectivist than Japanese society."

Independence and Learning

Far Away from Home for the First Time

"For many international students, coming to USA is the first time they have been independent, the first time away from home." All the participants, in one form or another, reiterated this assessment made by the Indian participant. Most American students do not have the sort of experience in

which they must live and study in another country, speaking and studying in a language not their own. However, many of the American students have had the experience of moving away from their family when they attend university. "All the kids over here when they go to college they move, too, out from their home. But in Thailand, I never move out of my home—I always stay with my mom." In Thailand, family has surrounded the participant all her life and "there wasn't a chance to be independent." She struggled with this at first and then began to appreciate her experience. "In USA, you learn to be alone, to be an individual without your family. In the USA, there are more opportunities to explore and learn self."

Crossing Back Homeward

Again, the Indian participant nicely defined the significance of the cross-cultural experience, "Learning and coming to the USA is about growing up and entering a new stage of life." As for the possibility of returning, the participant avers that going back to India is no more possible than going back to youth:

> The family there, they have not changed and (when) you come back they still expect you to be the same—and expect you to fit right back into the family and stay with them. I have been too free and too independent for too long for me to be able to go back and fit into the system anymore.

As expressed by three of the participants, returning is also meeting the resistance of the smothering family and constant visitation of family and friends. "In the USA, nobody cares what you do or even about you, but in India, your business is everybody's." This can be overwhelming as the Indian participant further explains, "Because of all the social and family pressure, I admit I'm not going back. I don't want this anymore. I've kind of grown out. I'm used to peace and quiet now." The conflict is fueled by the family's misconceptions and expectations, as told by the Indian participant, "Oh yeah, like you go to America and now you think too much of yourself, yeah. You don't need us anymore. You're too good for us, yeah." It's so difficult and they'll never understand, they'll never know. But lest someone thinks that being in the USA is a safe haven, there is another side to being free of the family. As told by the India participant:

> In India you don't have to do anything for yourself because somebody is there to wash your clothes, somebody is there to cut your vegetables, somebody is there to clean and sweep your floor. Actually life is so much

> easier there, and they (Indian people) think that we (people in the USA) have it really easy here, but we have to do everything for ourselves.

For the Korean participant, the challenges of arriving and adjusting to the USA have been the same, but there has been a different orientation.

> Going abroad, coming to USA is a privilege—I'm here in America, one in almost forty-five thousand Koreans students total and less than 2000 doctoral students. I'm one of them.

The reasons for coming to the USA are multiple, but one in which all participants heartily agreed with, "We need to go to others to see differences… After one or two years, I realized that there were so many differences that I cannot articulate. There are differences—different ways of life, different ways of thinking and expressed differently by everyday behavior." The Chinese participant reaffirmed this by explaining, "When I made the decision to study abroad, I would say the most important factor was I just want to be there and living there so I can get a cultural experience."

Cross-cultural Intentionality: The Potential for Cultural Metamorphosis

Seeing differences, however, is usually not enough to sustain a lengthy stay and intentionality and potential metamorphosis become key factors. The Thai participant saw the intention to explore self and self-expression as opportunities of change. The Japanese participant searches for choice and the Chinese participant appreciates cross-culture experiences for what they have to contribute to wisdom, that which is acquired in a special transaction that is not formalized. The Korean participant has defined his intentionality to be much more of a mission, "I'm going back to Korea because I feel that I have a role in Korea and I want to share my experience and my ideas to other teachers and students that can contribute in some way to look at other ways."

In observing global differences and the changes that occur worldwide, one cannot help but feel that a powerful dynamic is at work, and it is not always a dynamic initiated or fostered by forces of equity. A motive to return to one's own cultural context is fueled by seeing how different perspectives and forces have impacted a country and how they might be re-fashioned. The Korean participant observed:

> Some aspects of changing is good and the other aspect of changing is so negative, especially like change based from capitalistic ideology. I just want to share my concerns about the negative aspects of this ideology. Most of Korean students think learning is a tool of going to college and getting a good job—money is the best and nothing is important but money.

The Korean participant went on to explain that instigating and managing change requires the mobilization of others and controlling of ones own self-resources. There are many obstacles to overcome:

> Korea has very bad habits like fear of others, the others' perspective, the others ways of looking at me… I've met several vice principals in eleven years but most Korean vice principals and principals are very authoritative. They don't want to listen to teachers' ideas and opinions and it can be a big challenge to change our structure. And I want to do that when I go back to Korea. I cannot do that here… I've become more tolerant. I was very resistant and aggressive in Korea. I can break down their ideology piece by piece, not aggressively, but peacefully. I want to try this.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The participants agreed on many aspects in defining learning, which does not seem too surprising. What is surprising is that the definitions, if converted to practice, may be too controversial for educational institutions to consider, especially given the propensity for standards and evaluations. The definitions given by the respondents indicate that learning has a lot to do with things that are not necessarily easily measured: Experience, cultural and cross-cultural learning, emotions, intuitive feelings, spiritual significance, morality, social skills, and stages of learning. There are some alternative education approaches, i.e., Waldorf, Montessori, and some spiritual schools in Asia, that successfully incorporate some of these ideas into their approach, but these are far from universally accepted educational methods, particularly at higher educational levels. Since these types of approaches do not build upon western scientific method, they are also considered dubious practices and mere masks for other cognitive and behavioral concepts.

The American school system arose from the industrial model of education that requires conformation to performance-based models, and has not evolved to be based on an expanded vision of learning within cultural contexts. Schooling to serve commerce, industry, and social stratification

influence and dominate the purposes of schooling and the definitive range of learning. Globalization has led to the creation of an international educational standard based on these Western models, but these models do not seem to mesh with what students have learned culturally and they also do not address some of the human learning skills necessary to live peacefully in a globally competitive world where variation of outlook, perspective, and manners are largely dismissed as trivial encumbrances untangled at a personal level. The importance of technology is now more central to educational goals and most educators consider the sciences as the hallmarks of learning and intelligence, sadly even more central than the wisdom of being human.

It is quite significant that all of the participants emphasized experience as a defining aspect of learning and all participants downplayed the significance of school as a place to learn, even though these notions would likely be addressed dismissively by the educators in the elaborate global network of school systems. It was noted that learning was a solitary outcome, but gained in a social place with the currencies of dialog and social interaction serving as essential vehicles for learning to occur. Learning was a means for the participants to understand life and find their expression across culturally defined identities. Jonassen reinforces this idea by saying "Learning is a process of meaning making, not of knowledge reception" (2000: 3). Making sense of interactions between people is obviously important because, as Jonassen elaborates, "Very little, if any, meaningful activity is accomplished individually… Learning is a complex cognitive and social process that necessarily interacts with the world around it" (p. 8). Kim also provides an explanation as to why learning and social interactions become so crucial for those crossing cultures:

> It can be said that all of us are born into this world knowing little of what we need to know to function acceptably in human society. Nor are we born prepared to engage in the various activities out of which our sense of reality and self is constructed. Instead we *learn* to relate to our social environment and its culture… (2001: 46).

The need to learn can mean to acculturate and to function in a world that is negotiated in the social context. Just as the Chinese participant gave the metaphor of "culture as a blanket," acculturation allows one the comfort by blurring the difference between one's idea of culture and learning. Peterson, Jensen, and Rivers in 1965 (as cited by Kim 2001) noted how the distinction between culture and communication is also blurred:

> Communication is the carrier of the social process. It is the means man has for organizing, stabilizing, and modifying his social life… the social process depends upon the accumulation and transmission of knowledge. Knowledge in time depends upon communication (p. 65).

All the participants emphasized the importance of dialog as a means to make sense of learning. Continuous and meaningful learning lays it foundation with communication. Kim defines communication as "the central pillar of all human learning" (2001: 47). It is no coincidence that the participants' definitions and themes relating to learning resemble intercultural communication theory as explained by Kim. The participants identified various cultural patterns that were incorporated into their psyche (enculturation process). During this enculturation process, they also begin to reflect on their understanding of a cultural sense of self, utilizing subtle emotional reception and personal reflection. The participant's search for continuous dialog, the importance of emotional potency, reflection, and self-expression is the mirror process of acculturation.

Emotions have often been disdained as the antithesis of reason in the Western world, but all of the participants mentioned emotion as a major factor in learning. It is no wonder researchers like Salovey and Mayer (1990) broadened Gardner's list of intelligences to include emotional intelligence, which is composed of five related capacities and skills: capacity for self-awareness, managing emotions, motivational power, empathy, and an ability to respond maturely to others—all mentioned by the participants as key aspects of learning. Kim defines cross-cultural communication competence as the creation of an inner cultural schema that maps the world and deflects and protects through emotional stabilizers. The participants also unanimously expressed the idea that emotion takes a leading role in integrating new learning situations after giving it affective shape, perhaps metaphorically fleshing it out, and integrating it into the schema through reflection and reconfirming it in social interactions.

It was also significant that all participants agreed that Western education was crude and rough, implying it to be aggressive, uncaring, and ungraceful. Though there are aspects to Western education they appreciate, none were impressed with its quality or substance and all of them believed that their cross-cultural experience was more of a learning experience. This was an area of discussion that led to talk of culture and spirituality. Although none of the participants claimed to be overtly religious, they all mentioned the spiritual aspect of learning and knowing oneself. It was duly noted that western education does not encourage much reflective activity or

the significance of knowing oneself, relation to others, emotional experience of life, or spirituality not defined by religion.

Although the participants mentioned the importance of books and academic studies, it was noted that communication was the driving forces behind the need to be informed academically. Cross-cultural differences were the backdrops-stages, as you will—for learning engagements to be dynamic. These stages provided a repertoire for the participants to engage in acting, seeing, doing, experiencing. These stages sometimes were provided scripts by a director/playwright (teacher/master/guru) and provided the lens or ways to act, how to relate to other actors, and understand how the scenes are to unfold. Schools were the means to organize the knowledge needed to perform in the play, but they were not the place for actors to practice their craft. It was schools where the actors modeled their characters with moral attentiveness and honed their craft to prepare for auditions and opening nights on the world stage. Will it matter that the play is in Mumbai or in Cambridge? Once the stage lights are up, the actors will know their character differently, but will be familiar with the role.

CONCLUSION

This research supports the idea that the cross-cultural experience was a profound learning experience that has transcended the schooling experience for the participants. The participants indicated that their definition of learning is not the same as transferring knowledge or attending school, but is more aligned with experiencing life more fully, particularly the experience gained from bounding cultural borders and interacting with people from diverse points of view and in varied contexts that sometimes place them in less secure and unfamiliar positions. They questioned formal schooling and indicated that schooling has not been adequate in acknowledging or building upon cross-cultural skills.

The implication of these findings extends worldwide and calls for educators, comparative educators, intercultural specialists, and policy-makers to re-examine the meaning of learning and global educational goals. With school goals driven by global commercial interests, mostly technological, it must be asked whether students are being served by the current educational goals that do not seem to address foundational life-learning skills. In a world acknowledged by the majority of people to be one that is greatly affected by global forces, there are strong indications that the majority of students are not prepared by formal schooling for this global interaction. Given the large, global challenges facing all peoples, it is

imperative that students and educators be much more fluent in cross-cultural experiences, not just intellectually or superficially, but in a substantial manner.

Questions remain, however, of how knowledge from this research will be useful to formal education and needs to be addressed globally and at individual national levels:

- Are schools fit to adequately address the life-learning and cross-cultural skills necessary in the globalized world?
- How might cross-cultural experiences be incorporated into formal school settings in order to create global, learned students and teachers?
- How do teachers acquire cross-cultural competence without a cross-cultural living experience?
- People are always making meaning in life—how must youth be prepared for creating/interpreting meaning across a variety of personal and cultural contexts?
- How can youth be prepared with interpersonal skills to interact in dialog and also to transform it into personal significance?
- How might emotion, contemplation, and personal insight be instilled into students in formal education settings?
- How might formal school settings encourage life experiences and design learning situations for students to incorporate their experiences?

There was one recommendation made directly by the participants—every university should have discussions to address cross-cultural learning issues. Faculty and administrators should take these discussions seriously to foster a broader, more holistic approach to learning and teaching. It is vitally important to begin to view education as an inter-related global phenomena and not an isolated, local cultural event that occurs only in formal settings. It is time to widen the view of the academic panorama by examining whether the things we really need to know are not predictable, but are subtle, summative, and contextual. Perhaps we need to engage in more cross-cultural exchanges and live where we are least comfortable to learn what is most important to know.

To conclude with my metaphor of 'life as a stage,' there is a need to conceive plays that examine more fully the meaning of learning with scenes that are related to our character development. In order to fulfill our character's potential, we need to find intuitive directors with the talent to

help actors act both dynamically and subtly in front of an audience when the light shines ruthlessly on weaknesses and flaws. These directors are able to induce an understanding of the multidimensional ways in which our characters act and how to anticipate the unfolding of the scenes without losing spontaneity. It is time to allow schools to be stages to prepare for the on-going auditions and plays that are of significance to the actors. It is time for the stages to be set and the lights ready to go up. Will it matter that the play is in Mumbai or in Cambridge? Let us find out by making the world our learning stage.

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