Faculty's Response to Globally Divergent Thinking in American College Classrooms: An Autoethnographic Reflection

Michael T. Ndemanu, Ph.D.
Dept. of Teacher Education
University of Southern Indiana

ABSTRACT

The paper is an autoethnographic reflection of my experiences as a graduate student in two Midwestern universities. I argue that although "internationalization at home" remains the only easily affordable route to bringing global knowledge to domestic students' doorsteps, higher education institutions are not effectively exploiting the advantage of large international student population to speed up the internationalization of their curricula in the U.S. The paper offers suggestions for designing a globally responsive pedagogy which is paramount to "internationalization at home."

According to the Association of International Educators (2012), there were about 764.495 foreign students enrolled in the U.S. institutions of higher learning in 2011-2012 academic year. These students and their dependents brought approximately $21.81 billion into the economy. Contrast the international student enrollment in the U.S. to 270,604 U.S. students who studied abroad for credit in 2009-2010 (International Institute of Education, 2011). As the U.S. higher education institutions experience this exponential increase in their international student population, their faculty is not doing enough to harness and leverage the former's perspectives to the benefit of the domestic student population, who, in most cases, may never travel abroad to learn those perspectives (Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Teekens, 2007; Wachter, 2003). There is a lack of cross-cultural competencies in graduates of many college disciplines which is attributed to college faculty's marginal ecumenical expertise (Boyle-Baise, 1996). Zeichner (1996) posits that "most of the academics who must be counted on to improve the preparation of teachers for diversity are as lacking in interracial and intercultural experiences as their students" (p. 138). As higher education's interest for international education grows, it is important for faculty members to become more globally and culturally responsive in their pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). International students bring a wealth of knowledge pertaining to politics, science, technology, and social studies in a way that if well exploited, it could have a multiplier effect on their host country's economy and livelihood (Ryan & Viete, 2009; Ladd & Ruby, 1999). Although they are coming to learn from us, we can also learn from them while they are enrolled in our classes. The overarching research question here is how do academics design and teach courses in a way that benefits both international and domestic students in terms of broadening their horizons and frames of reference?

Drawing from my personal experiences as a graduate student in two Midwestern universities, this paper foregrounds the importance of cross-cultural and global competence through globally responsive pedagogy. It is an autoethnographic reflection of my own experiences as an international graduate student and as an instructor of both international and domestic students in teacher education programs. Higher education, as it is often the case, is supposed to be a place where students acquire literacy skills that help them read the world better than people with no college education. Therefore, it needs to ensure that universities are producing well-rounded graduates who are ready for a globally competitive workforce.

SITUATION

Given that many faculty members remain unfamiliar with the literature pertaining to diversity and world cultures, they tend to evade or shun cross-cultural perspectives surreptitiously or highhandedly. After all, how can one expect them to utilize globally responsive pedagogy in their instructional practice when they are unfamiliar with the concept? In reference to cross-cultural incompetence of teachers, Howard (2006) concludes that they can't teach what they don't know. This paucity of knowledge about the concepts of culturally and globally responsive pedagogy has an adverse ramification on higher education faculty's curricular and instructional designs. It, sometimes, leads to their propensity to emit deficit thinking about their international students' academic abilities; thereby triggering advertent or inadvertent proclivity to assimilate and deculturalize them. When academics spar-

ingly draw from their international students to inform curriculum and instruction, the implicit message they are sending to the rest of the students is that the international students' knowledge is invalid and deficient (Ryan, 2005). U.S students already have enough of negative imagery about cultures that are not part of the American macroculture. Not exposing them to global perspectives only further reinforces their deficit perspectives about unfamiliar world cultures. A faculty's disregard of the international students' perspectives can only be to the detriment of the entire class given that reciprocal learning which is supposed to be endemic in college classrooms is short-circuited and teaching is relegated to one-dimensional way of knowing which is the instructor's.

In the graduate schools, I used to be the only international student from my continent in each of my classes. I was, sometimes, not only expected to speak for my country, but for the entire continent. Sometimes I was an extrovert in one class and an introvert in another irrespective of the class size. It all depended on professors' choices of readings and attitudinal responses to my perspectives on issues being discussed. I had taught French and English in secondary schools in my country of birth for eight years prior to immigrating to the U.S.; and upon arrival, I was volunteering in my children's school and was serving as a substitute teacher from time to time in a predominantly Latino public high school. So, I had a dual frame of reference to draw upon in class discussions pertaining to curriculum and instruction. In classes where I thought my perspective was valued, I was very engaged in class discussions and my peers would miss me whenever I missed a class for a conference. On the contrary, some of my professors who were not culturally and globally responsive would remember me as a person of few words in their own classes. It is worth stating that globally responsive pedagogy is preceded by cultural decapsulation. This explains why professors who are already versed with diversity issues are more likely going to be globally responsive than those who are not.

Making a case for globally responsive curriculum

With the digital revolution that sprang up in the later half of the 20th century, the world is fast becoming a global village. There is need for a revolution of human mentalities about cross-cultural knowledge in order to harness the socioeconomic benefits of a global village. Although there has been a spike in the study-abroad programs in Western universities, the scourge of cultural absolutism is impeding our ability to learn from other cultures. A ten-day "tourist" study-abroad (with no intense pre- and post-internship workshop) is marginal to gain any meaningful experience as to be able to reverse the negative information that students have been bamboozled into believing since they started watching TV images about those countries. On the contrary, students go to confirm the stereotypes that they had heretofore internalized about those places rather than to confront and correct them (Locke, 1997; Kagan, 1997).

Higher education needs to require cross-cultural competencies for all its future graduates as it is increasingly the case in many universities across the nation. Specific courses that meet the cross-cultural competency requirements need not be required only for Education Majors but for all students passing through higher education. Such courses need to be prefaced with the fundamental argument about transcultural awareness the necessity to be culturally relativistic when learning about other people. As an instructor of multicultural education, a good number of my prospective teachers has often frowned at the notion that successful teachers of culturally and linguistically different students make conscious efforts to educate themselves about their students cultures and home languages. They often wonder why they should learn about their English language learners" cultures when their families chose to immigrate to the United States. Some academics may have a similar, though unspoken, reason for being apathetic about globally responsive pedagogy. As Birnbaum et al. (2012) posited, when academics undermine international students' prior experiences, it can elicit a feeling of disconnection and disengagement in the students.

THE CHALLENGE

When I first enrolled in a graduate program in a university in Oklahoma, I had barely lived in the United States for two months. I was still very unfamiliar with American macro- and microcultures. I came to learn about my height in U.S customary units in a very degrading and humiliating way. In a test and measurement course, one of my professors, whom I would name Dr. Smith, wanted to show the class how to find the mean and mode in statistics. He decided to choose students at random to share their heights with the class so that he could find the mean of the students' heights. I happened to be the first student to be asked my height and I confidently uttered loudly "1 meter 77 centimeters." Dr. Smith spontaneously and disdainfully retorted "in feet?" I shamefully muttered "I don't know." In a completely dejected mood, he moved on to the other students who all provided him with the kinds of responses he wanted to hear: "I am 5 feet 6 [inches]," said one. "I am 5 feet 9," said the other. As he took down the peers' heights, I could decipher utter disbelief in him, from his facial expression, to have a graduate student who did not know his height.

Dr. Smith seemed oblivious with his patronizing attitude to the existence of the International System of Units or

metric system which, according to CIA Factbook, is used by almost every country in the world as their official system of weights and measures except the United States, Liberia, and Myanmar. If this were an IQ test question, I would have flung it. An aggregate of similar culturally biased questions would have earned me a place in a special needs class or lower track in some elementary and secondary schools. But would that be a fair assessment of my knowledge of my height? Granted that he did not know the conversion from metric system to customary units, he did not equally care to find out from the rest of the class. Or can we say to play it safe, he simply had to move on so as to avoid venturing into an unchartered territory fraught with unfamiliar knowledge? Assuming that this was the case, he failed to consider the extent to which his student's self-esteem would be adversely affected by his idiosyncratic reaction to what he does not know.

Little would Dr. Smith know that he subconsciously gave me a major assignment, which was to begin learning about the US customary units that same night at the end of his class. That humiliation led me to an independent study of US customary units; and I am proud to tout my bicultural skills in both systems of measurement today. Given that his response to my response was condescending and imperialistic, to say the least, I would assume that that incident was not a teachable moment to him as it was to me. He missed an opportunity to educate himself about the metric system as well as expand on his students' horizons and frames of reference. He ought to have found out whether any other student was knowledgeable about both systems of measurements. In the absence of a credible answer from the students, he could have given it as an assignment which would entail students to convert their heights into the metric system and share it with their classmates in the next class meeting.

STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL AND GLOBAL RESPONSIVENESS IN COLLEGE TEACHING

Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as the application of a given cultural knowledge of diverse students as well as their prior experiences to inform teaching. I will define globally responsive pedagogy as an approach to teaching that involves leveraging worldwide funds of knowledge to design instructional and curricular materials in a given curriculum. One important way to prepare students for an interconnected world is to help them understand how the world works and why it works that way by infusing a plethora of perspectives into the curriculum.

Understanding world Englishes

Given that the degree of English language proficiency of college students, especially graduate students, determines their academic success in the U.S. and most other English-speaking universities around the world (Litowitz, 1993), academics would need to be proficient in the World Englishes to facilitate cross-cultural communication. They would also need to be proficient in World Englishes in order not to grade international students down on their papers on the basis of lexical and grammatical differences emanating from British English, which may be significantly dissimilar to American English. It is worth noting that owing to the legacy of colonialism, British English remains the most authoritative Standard English used in many English-speaking countries outside the United States. Thus, it is very likely that, a good number of international students studying in the U.S. are more versed with British English than American English, even when they are coming from non-English-speaking countries. For academics to circumvent confusion and optimize communication, it is important for them to familiarize themselves with other world Englishes, especially the British English, which is still more widely used around the world than the American English. Here are some examples of lexical differences between the two standards:

American English	British English
Labor	Labour
Learned (past tense)	Learnt (past tense)
Pants	Trousers
Gas	Petrol
Sidewalk	Pavement
Windscreen	Windshield
Truck	Lorry
Elevator	Lift

The list is not exhaustive; it is a mere snapshot of a long list of lexical differences between British English and American English.

In addition to the examples in the foregoing table, there are many socially, culturally, and geographically driven idioms that would not initially make sense to international students until they are explained. For example, in a statement like, "Ali has pushed his media literacy grant proposal to the back burner," there is a cultural assumption that the interlocutor, in addition to understanding the denotative meaning of the word "burner," is familiar with a four-burner stove which is mundane in U.S. households. Researching on the geographic and sociolinguistic backgrounds of international students is an important prelude

to designing instructions that respond to their diverse cultural and linguistic needs. For example, a student from Saudi Arabia who has never seen *snow* before may not be familiar with snow-related words like: *snowball, snowdrift*, *snowflake*, and *avalanche*. As Cardona et al. (2013) suggest unfamiliar and informal language usage such as slangs and idioms by American English speakers can contribute to abysmal miscommunication. To be a successful teacher of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, faculty will need to make a conscious effort to learn about the background knowledge that their international students bring into the classroom for the benefit of all learners (Banks, 2002).

Funds of knowledge: Gathering cultural knowledge

Funds of knowledge is an ethnographic research method which involves a teacher gathering culturally and historically embedded bodies of knowledge and skills about students and their families to inform instruction. Moll et al., (1992) first used this technique in 1990s to study household and classroom practices in the Mexican-American working-class communities in Tucson, Arizona. The knowledge gained from the study by teachers helped inform them about the variability of what counts as knowledge and cognitive resources. The bodies of knowledge the teachers learned from observing these Mexican-American families was rich but quite remote from what they had hitherto considered as knowledge in their curricula.

Academics can embark in a similar process of learning about their international students' cultural knowledge and their ways of thinking and knowing through formal and informal meetings (Volet & Ang, 1998). Some of those events may start with international student orientation and continue with year-round events like international potluck, international day, or more personalized visits to their family events when possible. There is a lot of information that can be gathered through engaged conversations with international students and their families. Such information can help professors to become more globally responsive in their instructional practices. More deliberate exposures to international students in formal and informal contexts would likely help ameliorate faculty's global competencies given that such purposeful exposures can lead to better understanding of students' cultural backgrounds and prior knowledge in some subject areas relevant to faculty's specialties (Biggs, 1997). An awareness of students' prior knowledge could serve as a catalyst in mediating the overlap between prior (foreign) knowledge and new knowledge being exposed to in a U.S. classroom.

Designing a curriculum as "window and mirror"

As Style (1996) posited, "basic to a Liberal Arts education is the understanding that there is more than one way to see the world; hence, a balanced program insists that the student enter into the patterning of various disciplines, looking at reality through various "window frames" (p.39). In order to challenge our domestic and international students to think beyond their comfort zones, higher education courses need to be conceptualized from the "window and mirror" frames (Style, 1996). Mirror curriculum provides content that reflects one's life experiences and prior knowledge while window curriculum introduces one to unfamiliar content constructed from the perspective of the "other". Balanced curricular perspectives require introducing students to content materials that enable them to look through the window frames to see the other social realities that have heretofore been unfamiliar to them as well as see their own realities. Although students tend to do well when reading materials and class discussions mirror their past experiences, it is vital for them to see through the window frames in order to understand the realities of other people. To provide window and mirror experiences for both international students and domestic students, faculty needs to infuse global content materials into their locally designed courses. Currently, most U.S. liberal college course contents are representative of U.S. students' mirror frames while that same content serve as a window frame for international students. For more meaningful learning to occur, students are supposed to be exposed to both mirror (self) and window (other) frames. One simple way to go about this approach is to build choice in a course design by assigning common readings and choice readings (Sleeter, 2008). Common reading, in this case, entails general readings assigned to the entire class while choice readings offer the opportunity for students to propose readings from their own backgrounds. The combination of common and choice readings ensures that prior experiences are helping every student to make new knowledge more meaningful and unforgettable.

If Liberal Arts College course contents mostly mirror life experiences of our domestic students, then we are not preparing them for the increasingly globally competitive world economies. International students who start off college in the U.S. just as monocultural as their U.S. counterparts, are more likely to graduate with more bicultural skills, leaving their U.S. peers just as monocultural as they started off some years prior. The reason attributed to the cultural disequilibrium is that the international students are more likely to be exposed to the "window" curriculum which is a "mirror" curriculum to the domestic students. If both groups of students were exposed to window and mirror curricula, they would all graduate with a reasonable degree of multicultural and global skills. Inasmuch as students can be attracted to course contents that reflect their background experiences, they equally enjoy readings that talk about specific issues pertaining to societies that are foreign to them. As Christine Sleeter (2008) puts it, "Young people are often curious about those who differ from themselves (p.151)." Although they may, sometimes, not conclude that points of views of others are just as important as their own, continuous exposure to myriads of points of views can lay the groundwork for a more tolerant and respectful national and world citizenry. Helping international students adapt to the culture of U.S. education by way of accommodating their needs (Ladd & Ruby, 1999) is a laudable goal in itself but ensuring that there is a mutual exchange of knowledge between domestic students and international students should be the target for all academics. Thus, it is academically vital to involve domestic and international students in selecting some of the reading materials for a course (Sleeter, 2008).

A major benefit to a potential course content that is infused with window and mirror perspectives is that more international students could become more actively involved in class discussions. Language barrier is not generally the only obstacle to international students' voicelessness. Lack of mirror frames in the curriculum can also cause anxiety and can lead to apathy as well as lack of confidence to express oneself. It is very hard for these students to contribute in an academic discourse on a topic that is unfamiliar and unrelated to their past discourse as it was the case with me. Discourse in this context is a "plural set of cultural practices or culturally appropriate ways of thinking, believing, valuing, acting, speaking, reading, writing, and listening"(Li, 2010, p.42). Exposing the international students to a curriculum that also mirrors their experiences could be a springboard for them to venture into the "window" territory given that they develop assertive skills as they begin to draw from their personal (mirror) experiences to understand the "other".

Cognitive development is also fostered during class interactions that are beefed with mirror and window frames. Seeking to make meaning of the world should be a reciprocal process involving every student in a school setting. In this process, locutors and interlocutors seek to appropriate each other's words and ideas. Baktin (1981) refers to this process as "authoring the self". He argues that words are always half someone else's because they often carry embedded perspectives of interlocutors from which they were subconsciously appropriated. Thus, when students of various national backgrounds find themselves in one classroom, they have a lot to gain cognitively and linguistically if educators provide them the interlocking pavers to negotiate value systems and worldviews. Hence, it is critical for faculty to recognize the notion that they and their students may be products of different cultures with different worldviews resulting from different historical, religious, axiological, and epistemological exposures. Such recognition will help shape their judgment on what counts as knowledge and thus, should be included in the course syllabus.

CONCLUSION

Global competence is increasingly indispensable in this 21st century for academics. There are two main ways of achieving this global competence (especially in teacher education programs) which are "internationalization at home" (Teekens, 2007) and study abroad. However, the responsibilities of "internationalization at home" lie squarely in the hands of academics who have to deliberately conceptualize a globally responsive curriculum, as well as instruction, in every course that they are called upon to teach. A globally responsive professor will ensure that he or she is "using the presence of international students to see intercultural learning, by providing alternative perspectives and illustrative examples from other countries and cultures" (Harrison & Peacock, 2010 p.2). Ensuring intercultural learning, in this case, should neither only focus on the countries represented in the class nor should it be tokenized and superficialized by limiting a global curricular content to four F's which include: food, fashion, festivals, and folklore (Banks, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 2002). Whether U.S. students choose to gain global competence through study-abroad option or not, their local college courses should be able to instill the global competence in them effectively.

If globally responsive pedagogy is not yet a common practice in many college classrooms across the country, it is as a result of lack of expertise in global issues on the part of the professors, as well as the absence of a purposeful inclusive planning that is suitable for onward pedagogic application in their respective syllabi. Every student can tell when their perspective is being marginalized either by their instructor or their peers. Ryan & Viete (2009) reported international students in an Australian university complained about domestic students tuning out when an international was speaking, "Sometimes...the Australians [in class] have not the patience to hear us, to stay and listen, to put some attention, while we must do this for them" (p.309). Another student who had experience teaching in her country of birth prior to embarking on her graduate studies in the U.S., had the feeling that no one cared about her perspective in class discussions.

As a matter of fact, universities and their faculty have to understand that a majority of students will not travel abroad to acquire international experience for many reasons ranging from lack of funds, lack of interest, to family

commitments. However, universities can invest more on faculty's research that is focused on international studies so that they can, in turn, bring that knowledge to every student through a globally responsive curriculum. There is no gainsaying that travel broadens the mind. Thus, research-oriented travels are likely to boost faculty's knowledge and skills about world issues as well as transform them into culturally and globally responsive pedagogues. Designing a curriculum that responds profoundly to global issues and international students' needs does help institutions of higher learning accomplish "internationalization at home" for their domestic students.

REFERENCES

Banks, J. (2002). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Baktin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Biggs, J. (1997). Teaching across and within cultures: the issue of international students. In R. Murray-Harvey & H.S. Silins (Eds.), Learning and teaching in higher education: Advancing international perspectives. *Proceedings of the Higher Education Research and Development Society Conference* (pp. 1-22). Adelaide: Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA).

Birnbaum, M., Cardona, B., Milian, M., Gonzalez, M. (2012). Strangers in a strange land: How non-traditional international adult students see a United States university. *Journal of International Education and Leadership, 2*(2), 1-16.

Boyle-Baise, M. (1996). Multicultural social studies: ideology and practice. *Social Studies, 87*(2), 81-88.

Cardona, B., Milian, M., Birnbaum, M., & Blount, I. (2013). In-class and out-of-class experiences of international graduate students in the United States. *Higher Education of Social Science, 4*(1), 1-9.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Harrison, N. & Peacock, N. (2010). Cultural distance, mindfulness and passive xenophobia: Using integrated threat theory to explore home higher education students perspectives on internationalization at home. *British Educational Research Journal, 36* (6), 877-902.

Howard, G. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: white teachers, multiracial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Institute of International Education, (2011). Open doors 2011: Study abroad by U.S. students rose in 2009/10 with more students going to less traditional destinations. Retrieved October 28, 2012, from http://www.iie.org/en/Who-We-Are/News-and-Events/Press-Center/Press-Releases/2011/2011-11-14-Open-Doors-Study-Abroad

Kagan, D. M. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Research in education*, 62, 129-169.

Ladd, P.D. & Ruby, R. (1999). Learning style and adjustment issues of international students. *Journal of Education for Business*, *74*(6), 363-367.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1990). Culturally relevant Pedagogy. *The College Board Review, 155*, 20-25.

Li, Guofang (2010). The impact of social dynamics on immigrant children's language and literacy practices: Learning from Asian families. In L.M. Dantas & P.C. Manyak (Eds.). *Home- school connections in a multicultural society: Learning from and with culturally and linguistically diverse families* (39—58). New York: Routledge.

Litowitz, B. (1993). Deconstruction in the zone of proximal development. In G. Foreman, N. Minick, & A. A. Stone (Eds.) *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development* (184-96). New York: Oxford University Press.

Locke, S. (1997). *Teaching Teachers in a Pluralistic Society: Mixing up a new tossed salad*. (Doctoral dissertation). Indiana University library.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, *31*(2), 132—141.

NAFSA (2013). The Economic Benefits of International Students to the U.S. Economy reports. United States 2011-212 Fact Sheet, retrieved June 27, 2013, from http://www.nafsa.org/Explore_International_Education/Impact/Data_And_Statistics/The_International_Student_Economic_Value_Tool/.

Ryan, J. & Viete, R. (2009). Respectful interactions: Learning with international students in the English-speaking academy. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *13*(3), 303-314.

Sleeter, E. C. (2008). Involving students in selecting reading materials. In M. Pollock (Ed.) *Everyday anti-racism: Getting real about race in school* (150-153). New York: The New Press.

Sleeter, C. & Grant, C. (2002). *Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class, and gender*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Style, E. (1996). Curriculum as window and mirror. The S.E.E.D. Project on inclusive curriculum. Retrieved June 26, 2013, from http: www.wcwonline.org/seed/curriculum.html.

Teekens, H. (2007). Internationalization at home: An introduction. In H. Teekens (Ed.) *Internationalization at home: Ideas and Ideals*. (pp. 3–11). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: European Association for International Education.

Volet, E.E. & Ang, G. (1998). Culturally mixed groups on international campuses: An opportunity for intercultural learning. *Higher Education Research and Development, 17*(1), 5-24.

Wächter, B. (2003). An introduction: Internationalisation at home in context. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *7*(1), 5–11.

Zeichner, K. M. (1996). Educating teachers for cultural diversity. In K. Zeichner, S. Melnick, & M. L. Gomez (Eds.), *Currents of reform in preservice teacher education* (pp. 133-175). New York: Teachers College Press.