

Co-national support, cultural therapy, and the adjustment of Asian students to an English-speaking university culture

Elza Magalhães Major

University of Nevada, Reno, United States *emajor@unr.edu*

This article discusses the adjustment of ten Asian-born university students to the academic culture of an English-speaking university in the United States. Findings from a case study reveal an instrumental role played by compatriot networks in the students' adjustment process. Spindler's cultural therapy model provides the lens for an anthropological understanding of the role of the co-national networks in the participants' adjustment to the new school culture. Implications of this study are two-fold: they indicate the need for universities to revise their orientation programs for international students, especially Asian students, whose home country school practices differ from the English-speaking school cultures. It is also suggested that cultural mediation upon arrival is a more viable alternative than institutional remediation of academic difficulties experienced by Asian students that come from cross-cultural maladjustment.

Cultural adjustment, Asian students, co-national support, student orientation, international students, enduring self, situated self, endangered self

Despite the fact that English is the lingua franca of the world, it cannot be assumed that non-native English speakers who learn English in their home countries are fully prepared to undertake academic studies in an English-speaking country. The difficulty stems from the fact that using a second language in a school setting also involves socioculturally constructed norms. Besides linguistic proficiency in English, non-English speaking Asian students entering a university in English-speaking countries need to be prepared socioculturally and emotionally to deal with a multitude of non-linguistic factors in order to succeed academically in an unfamiliar educational environment. This article describes a case study involving ten Asian-born university students at a university in the United States.

BACKGROUND

The cross-cultural, linguistic, and academic adjustment of international students pursuing degrees in English-speaking countries has been investigated by linguists, second language educators, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. Studies of second language acquisition have addressed cognition, motivation, attitude, learner strategies, and stages of culture and language shock. The studies postulate that adjusting to a new environment through the use of a second language involves challenges to self-concept, worldviews, values, and attitudes (Ellis, 1995; Gardner, 1985; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Schumann, 1978).

Scholars across various disciplines have debated over the significance of cultural differences between the school cultures and practices in Western countries and those in Asian nations, in an effort to explain why cultural difference makes it more difficult for Asian students to adjust to academic life in Western universities than for international students from other Western nations,

regardless of their native language (Littlewood, 2000; Marsella, DeVos, and Hsu, 1985; Ward and Kennedy, 1993). In question are the teaching practices, concepts of academic success, and expected behaviours and interactions among students and between students and teachers in the classroom. Some scholars have indicated that the educational experience of Asian students in their home countries is usually characterised as teacher-dependent, passive, receptive, unquestioning, and based on rote learning (Atkinson and Ramanathan, 1995; Ferris and Tagg, 1996; Johnson, 1988; Saville-Troike, 1984). The Asian students may have difficulty adjusting to Western dialogical practices in class such as questioning, criticising, refuting, arguing, debating, and persuading. These are sociolinguistic characteristics of the standard English academic discourse that are key factors for academic achievement in English-speaking Western countries (Adamson, 1993; Gee, 1990). Other researchers have presented evidence that university students from Asian backgrounds consistently succeed in higher education (Biggs, 1999) despite the stereotypes of their learning styles. More recently, Hellstén and Prescott (2004) and Reid (2002) have claimed that international students, including Asians, actually value interactive teaching and learning. In any case, the adjustment of Asian students has been of some concern to researchers, university administrators, faculty, counsellors, and advisors in English-speaking countries.

THE STUDY

Research design

Designed as a case study (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994), the data collected consisted of a series of audio-taped individual interviews with ten Asian students enrolled at a university in the West of the United States. Other sources of data were the students' reflective journals, interviews with their instructors and advisers, observations of classrooms and special events, the researcher's field notes and research journal, and relevant student orientation and advising documentation. Data collected through visits, observations, and interviews with key informants (such as faculty and staff in appropriate departments and service units) provided a profile of the university culture and the context of the students' experiences during the study.

The setting

Western State University (a pseudonym) is located in an agricultural area of the north-western United States. In a student population of 17,500, around 1,300 students have been identified as internationals on student visas; and approximately 73 per cent of those students have come from Asian countries. The majority of the undergraduates are state residents of European-American descent. Domestic ethnic minorities (African-American, Native-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American, and Asian-Pacific Islanders) and most of the international students are highly visible because of their small numbers and physical appearance against a backdrop of a significant European American, white majority. International students on student visas must achieve 500 and above on the TOEFL test to be admitted to the university.

Academic departments and service units included in this study were: the International Student Office, the English Department and its ESL program, the Writing Centre, the Intensive English Program, the Advising Centre, the Counselling Centre, and various campus-based international student associations. Services for international students are departmentalised; that is, there is no central coordination of support or academic services. A Multicultural Student Centre serves primarily domestic (American-born) minorities. Within the selected departments, key informants (professors, staff, or advisors) were interviewed privately and observed during special events. Foreign student orientation, peer tutor training workshops, extended freshman seminar sessions, writing tutorial sessions, counselling workshops and study skills sessions were observed and a large amount of documentation, such as program brochures, training manuals, orientation packets,

course syllabi, handouts and tests, counselling information, and other relevant data were collected and analysed.

Under the university's student governing body, several special interest and ethnic associations represent their respective student constituencies. These organisations sponsor or participate in cultural, social, and informational campus events. For the Asian students in this study, the co-national student organisations were the linchpin of an informal network of compatriots who assisted them with academic advice, sociocultural mentoring, interpersonal support, and ethnic identity validation.

Participants

Two types of undergraduate Asian students were interviewed: newly-arrived students and continuing students. The first group provided insight into the dynamics of their adjustment as it unfolded. Continuing students with more than two years of residence at the university added a retrospective point of view on the adjustment process. Participants were recruited through announcements made to the international student population, in ESL classes, and through direct mailings to the Asian student associations on campus. The ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of the ten volunteers who chose to participate closely mirrored the national origins of the four largest groups of Asian students at this university at the time of the study (Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Thai). The study focused on undergraduates only because their classes were usually larger, their courses were more standardised, and advising was more perfunctory. Too many variables in the adjustment process of postgraduate students such as age, family status, length of stay, and departmental support, would have detracted from the focus on the sociocultural context of adjusting to the academic culture. Table 1 identifies each participant's pseudonym, age, gender, country of origin, major, educational status, and length of stay in the United States or in another English-speaking country at the time this study began.

Table 1. Profiles of ten Asian undergraduate students ranked by length of stay since arrival

Name	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Major	Status	Length of stay at onset of study
Yuko	F	23	Japan	Elementary Education	Unclassified	1 month
Emiko	F	21	Japan	English Education	Unclassified	1 month
Masumi	F	20	Japan	International Relations	Unclassified	1 month
Yuan	F	26	Taiwan	Finance	Third year, transfer	1 month
Terawat	M	25	Thailand	Food Engineering	Fourth year, transfer	2 years
Jay	M	24	Taiwan	Business Management	Third year	2.5 years
Su-ling	F	23	Taiwan	Fine Arts	First year	3 years
Naraporn	F	23	Thailand	Communications	Fourth year	3.5 years
Xiao-su	F	22	Taiwan	Hotel Restaurant Management	Second year	3.5 years
Somsri	F	22	Thailand	Business Management	Third year	5 years

FINDINGS

Through data analysis, the adjustment of the Asian students to academic life was categorised in dimensions and stages. The stages were consonant with the stages of culture shock and adjustment that commonly characterise the process of adjustment to a new and unfamiliar culture (Oberg, 1972; Schumann, 1978). The participants in this study described three stages in the adjustment process: (a) a short period of expectations and elation just prior to and immediately subsequent to arrival; (b) a second period of variable length characterised by intense emotional and interpersonal turmoil; and (c) a third stage where comfortable adjustment and achievement of personal and academic goals were achieved. For the purposes of data analysis, the stages were defined as entry, dissonance, and adjustment. In addition, the findings indicated that the students experienced interpersonal and sociocultural challenges, which could not be attributed solely to linguistic problems; that is, in their own views, it was not just a matter of limited English proficiency.

Categories that emerged from data coding suggested three dimensions of adjustment throughout each of the three stages: (A) intrapersonal, (B) sociocultural, and (C) academic. An analytical matrix that depicted the intersection of the three dimensions and the three stages of adjustment is seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Analytical matrix depicting stages and dimensions of adjustment

Stages and Dimensions	STAGE 1 ENTRY	STAGE 2 DISSONANCE	STAGE 3 ADJUSTMENT
A INTRA- PERSONAL	1A Expectations: being outside observer and doing intellectual tourism	2A Culture shock Psychological turmoil Sense of incompetence	3A Cultural therapy and self-efficacy Personal adjustment
B SOCIO- CULTURAL	1B Introduction to co-national network	2B Interpersonal and sociocultural divergence	3B Cultural therapy and sociocultural adjustment
C ACADEMIC	1C Co-national coaching and mentoring	2C Divergence of academic practices	3C Cultural therapy and academic adjustment

Two intersecting analytical models were applied to data analysis: Bandura's concept of self-efficacy and instrumental competence, and Spindler's concept of repairing a perceived lack of instrumental competence through cultural therapy or intervention. The concept of self-efficacy was defined by Bandura (1982, 1995) as an expectation to succeed in specific social contexts. Bandura postulated that self-determined perceptions of being able to do the right things in a school setting could be expressed as instrumental competence. The notions of self-efficacy and instrumental competence emphasised the situational nature of the relationship between self and self-esteem to schooling.

Spindler's anthropological model stresses the culturally-situated performance of students from culturally-dissonant backgrounds (Spindler, 1987, 2000). From this perspective, the students acquire deficits in self-concept when they fail to adjust to the school culture; they may be perceived negatively by teachers and majority students, or perceive themselves as incompetent or deficient. Since school performance and self-concept are interrelated, this means that plunged into an unfamiliar sociocultural school context, students develop a sense of personal incompetence in the absence of an effective cultural frame of reference. In addition, Spindler and Spindler's (1992, 1993) definition of a multi-faceted self (the **enduring self**, the **situated self**, and the **endangered self**) facilitates our understanding of how individuals can overcome cultural divergence by separating the permanent sense of self and ethnic identity from a locally situated self for adjustment purposes. The enduring self is the lifelong concept of self deeply rooted in home country heritage, educational experiences, and sociocultural practices, which all individuals possess. The situated self develops during a process of adjustment to a new environment without harming the enduring self. If, however, the person is constantly threatened by unfamiliar demands placed on the situated self for a prolonged period of time, the latter may be unable to cope or adjust, thus endangering the enduring self. The endangered self may resort to resistance, hostility, or simply shuts itself down, unable to adjust. The student with an endangered self attempting to adjust to a new school culture then either fails to succeed or becomes permanently marginalised. Nevertheless, the endangered self can be repaired by cultural intervention and role modification in a process that Spindler (1992, 1993, 1994) defines as cultural therapy. This process involves conscious learning of ways to make situational adaptations, to verbalise the dual nature of the self in cross-cultural situations, and make efforts to engage the situated self to act in culturally appropriate ways. This consciousness raising process results in instrumental competence and self-efficacy, which, in turn, facilitate academic adjustment. While these two analytical frameworks have been applied to studies of domestic linguistic minorities around the world (Bandura, 1995;

Spindler, 2000), they provide a new approach to understanding and interpreting the adjustment of Asian students to the university culture in another country.

Whether applied explicitly and directly by knowledgeable teachers or counsellors, or implicitly by cross-cultural mediators, cultural therapy, according to Spindler, is the “process of bringing one’s own culture... to a level of awareness that permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social interaction and in the acquisition of skills and knowledge...[that] we call...instrumental competencies.” (1993, p. 28). According to Spindler and Spindler (1993), this empowerment process can be utilised by students as a form of consciousness-raising that allows them to identify the “steps necessary to obtain the instrumental competencies they need” (1993, p.29) in order to succeed academically. The intervention of co-national networks in the adjustment of the Asian students in the study reported herein is explained through this concept of cultural intervention or therapy. The students’ perspectives on their own adjustment, which they have shared through interviews and personal journals, are discussed in the following section. They are based on the dual analytical framework and the analytical matrix of stages and dimensions.,.

DISCUSSION

Stage 1: Expectations

The ten Asian students in this study arrived in the United States as adults with established ethnic identities and culturally defined self-concepts developed in their home countries. Cells 1A., 1B, and 1C in Table 2 depicted the initial experiences of the participants on arrival in the United States in terms of intrapersonal experience, sociolinguistic limitations, and initial tasks dealing with the structure of the academic program at the university. At the time of arrival (entry) the students expected to remain outside observers during their sojourn, attending classes, getting an education, and learning about American culture without really getting personally involved. As outsiders looking in, the Asian students anticipated an experience akin to cultural and educational tourism. Their initial motivation to study in the United States and their expectations upon arrival did not prepare them for what they encountered: they were expected to respond to new situations in an English-speaking university as socioculturally competent students able to participate effectively in the academic classroom discourse. Upon arrival, the institutional orientation to academic and campus life was overwhelming. Even to an observer familiar with the setting, the amount and breadth of information, catalogues, regulations, and guidelines to be pored over quickly in one or two days prior to registration was impressive. In a matter of days, international students were expected to negotiate the demands of attending all-day academic orientation sessions, take placement tests, select courses, see advisers, secure housing, and attend to financial transactions in an unfamiliar sociolinguistic and cultural context. Fortunately, the initial culture and education shock was cushioned by the safety net of the compatriot support system (cell 1B). Co-national coaching and mentoring helped them sort out the priorities of what needed to be accomplished in order to begin academic studies and adjust to university life (cell 1C).

Stage 2: Dissonance

To the Asian students in this study, the anticipated onset of culture shock corresponded to varying levels of emotional turmoil (cell 2A) that came mostly from cultural dissonance between their earlier schooling experiences in their home countries and the new school culture. This dissonance was manifested in all facets of daily life: sociocultural divergence (cell 2B), cognitive divergence (cells 2B and 2C), academic discourse divergence (cell 2C), with serious repercussions to the students’ self-concept, self-efficacy, and interpersonal interactions (cell 2A).

From a psychological perspective, feelings of estrangement and inadequacy, although predictable, resulted in dysfunction and alienation (cell 2A) To varying degrees, every one of the students

experienced culture shock, mental fatigue, loss of self-confidence, and academic deficiency. The students expressed their pain and self-awareness in the following ways:

Now, I am not so glad I came. I cry all the time, I'm homesick, I feel lonely... I can't sleep, headaches. Big problem is myself... I think I can do better... Here I don't have chances to express myself... In Taiwan I communicated very well in my job. I lost confidence... here I'm scared and afraid. (Yuan, Interview 2)

... When I want to say something to the teacher, the body language says "What you say is not important" or "Asian people act very stupid," then I don't talk anymore. (Naraporn, Interview 2)

The feelings described by the participants revealed emotional turmoil during stage 2. At this point, their enduring selves became endangered because the situated self was not well equipped to facilitate the adjustment without harming the enduring self (Spindler, 1987, 2000). In Yuko's words,

... All the time I can't say anything my opinion...so I get so nervous...The problem is I cannot speak well, they cannot understand me... I know everything is not English... I feel a little discrimination, I feel out of place with strict attitude of some classmates. Also behaviour of students... attitude against teacher is very different...This would never happen in Japan, because we have other custom, we have to respect teacher and we can't complain... I worry, feeling helpless and tormented by the change in personality because of the difficulty expressing in different language. (Interview 2)

Stage 3: Adjustment

Some of the participants in the study had been put on academic probation because failing grades at some point of their studies (Xiao-su and Somsri). Although some of the students considered leaving the school (and the country) early in their studies as stated in their journals and interviews, none of them dropped out. It may be argued that self-motivation and cultural therapy were factors that enabled the participants to move into the comfort zone (cells 3A and 3B). Motivation and goal-setting had brought some of them overseas in the first place. During the second semester of the school year, (during Interview 3, students shared their thoughts. To Emiko, an aspiring elementary school teacher, it was professional motivation: *"In Japan, elementary school teachers will have to teach English to elementary school children, so I came to improve my English."* To Naraporn, certain personal characteristics were essential: *"I think people who are insecure, troubled, shy, will have more trouble. I am not afraid to ask questions...I learn watching other people too."* Su-Ling believed goal-setting and self-motivation were keys to success: *"...I think most students don't want to drink beer, just study hard, keep going. The degree is their goal, they spend four or five years, get a degree and go back..."*

An informal network of compatriots was repeatedly mentioned as the main source of mentoring and cross-cultural reference.

Last semester I couldn't understand the professor. I stopped going to classes. My GPA was 1.01... I was on probation... So my [Taiwanese] friends help me choose. I chose some easy and some hard classes. I worked very hard the second semester. My GPA is 3.09 this semester. (Xiao-Su, Interview 3)

By providing reassurance that the individual was not incompetent but was facing a different educational system with different expectations of university students, the co-national mentoring network was instrumental in aiding the transition from cultural divergence (Stage 2) to the adjustment stage (Stage 3). *"... The librarians very helpful but they didn't explain. When I ask they cannot explain what I needed. My [Thai] girlfriend knew how to show me slowly step by step"*

(Terawat). This also validated ethnic identity and the need to succeed for the sake of their families. A key informant, the department advisor in the school of business, gave credit to the role of compatriot assistance:

The Malaysian students come into my office in groups. The mentor shepherds them around campus in groups even for advising.... The Chinese students have a grapevine system to relay information ... sometimes erroneously, I might add... But they do well within the system, so I guess it works for them.

Discussion

Regarding the adjustment of students to situations of cultural discontinuity, Spindler's (1987, 2000) notion of multiple selves (the enduring self, the situated self, and the endangered self) makes sense. These views of self are reflected in the testimonies of the participants. Becoming adjusted, reaching a comfort zone, meant to Naraporn, Yuko, Terawat, and Su-Ling a reaffirmation of their enduring self, the ethnic identity proudly maintained, while the situated self was stabilised after the endangered self negotiated communicative and academic inefficacy. The situated self was able to reach academic and sociocultural competence at a comfortable level of self-confidence, sociocultural adjustment, and academic competence.

The concepts of 'adjusted accommodation' and 'learning to play by the rules' are processes described by anthropologists. Gibson (1987) studied language minorities in various countries who succeeded in their educational objectives despite home and school divergence, personal adversities, and sociocultural obstacles in mainstream schools. The instrumental value of an education in an English-speaking country, ethnic pride, the need to save face, the modelling by co-national mentors, and a gained awareness of sociolinguistic differences provided the tools for the students in this study to make the adjustment possible within each of the three dimensions.

To some of the participants in the study, the adjustment process meant adapting their study skills. Xiao-Su stated that she decided to "*crack down, not skip classes, and study ahead.*" Somsri relied on her college-graduate American host mother for advice. She reported that her

host mom always went to the professor.... she told me to try because it makes a big difference, the teacher gets to know you... so if I'm not finished by the due date I go to the professor and he say, OK, no problem.

Yuko took to heart her teacher's suggestion to consult after class: "*I see the teacher after class to make sure I understand the assignment.*" Su-Ling also reported she asked the teacher when she had problems with the class. Yuan had mixed feelings about talking to her professors. Even though she had been advised by her biology professor to "*talk to the Teaching Assistant to help with the vocabulary and use your dictionary during the exams,*" she acknowledged that she seldom talked to her teachers, preferring instead to "*talk to my [Taiwanese] friends about my classes.*" Jay concurred. "*I get help from my Taiwanese friend who took this class before,*" he said.

For some students, the adjustments had profound effects on them. To Naraporn, it meant regaining national pride:

...Coming here made me more aware of being Thai... I found out that sometimes when we try to improve our pronunciation, the other [Thai] students will say, "You are trying to become American." It doesn't look good. So I decided to keep my heavy [Thai] accent... You have to tell yourself that you can do it like American students. You have to respect yourself. American students are not always better...

Somsri had to deal with reverse adjustment to her own culture after five years of residence in Canada and the United States. She disclosed:

... I changed a lot since I came. I used to be scared of everything, helpless... Now I can handle my life... I am still shy and quiet... When I hang out with Thai people, I don't get the joke. They are not funny anymore. It is more difficult to relate to them. I don't enjoy their topics. I see things differently.... I also argue with my parents a lot. I even said to my mom when she was here visiting 'back off, leave me alone'. My father was mad, but my mom said, let her go. She understands...

Emiko attributed some of the difficulties in communicating to lack of interest of the native-born Americans in international students. She said:

... I used to think that American students were cold, unfriendly. But now I think they just are not interested in other cultures and other people. When I go back to Japan I will remember, it's not enough to be kind to international students. I will have genuine interest and sharing.

Yuko also realised some of the difficulties she had experienced were not her fault.

The people's behaviour was hard. I thought it was prejudice. Why did I feel like that? I couldn't communicate.... Now I can communicate. The differences don't bother me. I have been Japanese for 23 years. Now I never think of becoming an American. I think the problem to communicate was the Americans. I have friends from Mexico and it's nice. The other day I was talking in English with a Korean friend, well I don't speak Korean and she doesn't speak Japanese, and we heard some people near us talking about why we were trying to speak to each other in English if our English was so bad, they thought we were from the same country.

In the case of the Asian students in this study, self-reflectivity mediated by co-national support, provided the medium for the situated self to adjust. Through cultural intervention, or as Spindler (1987, 2000) called it, cultural therapy, the students were able to adjust to the new sociocultural context of the university by redefining their dual selves – the enduring and the situated self. In this way, they found a more favourable view of the self, maintained the enduring self-intact, adjusted to the new university culture, and succeeded academically. The catalyst in the adjustment process was the cultural therapy provided by the compatriot network that prevented the endangered self from damaging the enduring self permanently. Once the perceived interpersonal and academic inefficacies were defined as cultural discontinuity, the Asian students in this study were able to continue working towards their goal: to earn an academic degree from an American university.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study add to the body of evidence, which indicates the need for culturally-specific support for non-native English speaking students and Asian students, in particular, attending higher education institutions in English-speaking countries. While linguistic preparation for academic studies in a second language is undeniably essential, adjusting to the university culture is far more demanding than just displaying linguistic proficiency. This understanding is essential for university administrators, admissions officers, international recruiters, advisers, and university staff and faculty in English-speaking countries. It is also of concern to English teachers and school administrators in Asia working with Asian students who plan to pursue academic degrees in English-speaking countries. The findings from this study are grouped into two categories: (a) student perspectives on their adjustment; and (b) suggestions for institutional intervention and support.

Student perspectives

The Asian-born university students in this study did not seek help from any of the institutional support services for various reasons. Some of the participants were not aware of the existence of support services, or dismissed them as not as helpful as the co-national mentors. According to the ESL instructor interviewed, international students perceived themselves as visitors, “*not consumers of higher education as an export commodity who are entitled to appropriate support services. After all, they pay tuition and contribute to the local economy.*” By choice or by circumstance, the students who participated in this study remained segregated from the mainstream campus culture. Their quiet demeanour and smiles of embarrassment were often misunderstood in and out of the classroom. Their silent yet intense suffering remained unknown to, or ignored by, their advisors, professors, and classmates. To quote another institutional informant (departmental advisor) who reflected on the choice of support, “*Perhaps Asian emphasis on a sense of accomplishment and self-respect prevents them from seeking help from the university community.*”

Self-reliance as a cultural construct

Upon arrival, understanding the university registration procedures for selecting, adding or dropping courses, and understanding the role of advisers, was challenging. The students needed individual support to meet these challenges. As mentioned above, the newcomer orientation sessions were crammed with verbal, visual, and printed information for immediate and future reference. This practice was a manifestation of the American self-help and self-reliance lifestyle, which has permeated the academic culture as well. In addition to cultural expectations of self-reliance, the overwhelming amount of information presented during foreign student orientation was bewildering to the students, despite the good intentions of the presenters and advisers. Assistance and guidance in navigating the institutional requirements during the first semester and thereafter came from the informal network of compatriots.

Co-national support and cultural therapy

Compatriot support was the key element in the adjustment of each of the ten participants. Co-national mentoring did not label the student as linguistically or academically deficient; it focused instead on differences between the educational systems of two countries. Through individual mentoring and academic coaching, the co-national network was not repairing or remediating an incompetent person but providing cross-cultural therapy. Assuming that the Asian students had a choice between institutional support (advising, tutorials, counselling, remedial courses) and sociocultural mentoring through the co-national support, it was easy to see how the focus on cultural divergence rather than academic remediation would favour the compatriot network.

Suggestions for institutional intervention and support

Remediation or sociocultural adjustment?

At many institutions of higher education in the United States, remedial courses and tutorials are offered (or required) for students on academic probation due to low grades. This practice places the burden of remediation of academic deficiency on the students. In the case of Asian students in this study, if they had been provided adequate sociolinguistic orientation to the university culture before or soon after their arrival in more effective ways, they might not have reached the point of being placed on academic probation or forced to enrol in remedial courses when their grades dropped dramatically. By stressing cultural mediation as a characteristic of support services specifically designed to facilitate the academic and sociocultural adjustment of Asian students to a

new educational environment, a pro-active cross-cultural approach to student orientation would more closely resemble the cultural mediation provided by the compatriots in this study.

Extended orientation to the academic culture

One type of academic support which can be provided to international students is an extended orientation program. Offered at many universities in the United States for English-speaking first year students, the extended orientation program, sometimes called the First Year Experience, or Freshman Seminar, aims explicitly at improving critical thinking skills and academic reading and writing, targeting particularly first generation college students from Non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB). More importantly, some of these programs also provide interpersonal support and academic modelling by peer facilitators, who lead small group discussions tailored to the students' academic adjustment needs and concerns. Promoted as a bridge between high school and higher education, First Year Experience programs have become quite common at universities in the United States. At the site of this study, an elective seminar is linked to one of the required freshman courses. It provides a supportive environment for academic acculturation of first year students facing an unfamiliar discourse and culture. Peer tutors lead small groups of five to ten students in weekly face-to-face and web-based seminars. This approach to student support linking lower division courses with peer-facilitated seminars has been implemented at Western State as a means to eliminate and prevent the need for subsequent remedial services for students who fail in their first year (From an interview with the director of the Freshman Seminar Program).

A program similar to the extended freshman orientation seminar could be developed for newly arrived international students. A semester-long orientation to the academic culture incorporating the three dimensions of adjustment discussed in this study is recommended. By inviting co-national mentors to participate as peer advisers, such an orientation program has the potential to diminish the risk of academic failure during the sociocultural and academic adjustment process.

Cross-cultural awareness among faculty

The globalisation of higher education is a reality in many countries. To many universities, the presence of international students brings financial and cultural advantages. This can be viewed as an opportunity for the university faculty to understand better cross-cultural differences. In-house professional development workshops on the topic, integration of instructional technology into course designs, and diversification of teaching strategies are some ways to assist university faculty in integrating cross-cultural diversity into classroom practices. This idea is gaining popularity in many universities in the United States, where centres for excellence in teaching exist to assist faculty to improve teaching and learning. Promoting cross-cultural and mutual adjustment between faculty and international students would foster inclusiveness and improve interactions between native and non-native English-speaking students in the university classroom.

Furthermore, when the stigma of remediation of academic deficiency is removed from support services available to international students, self-perceptions of maladjustment, inefficacy, and academic deficiency can be transformed into a journey towards personal growth and the acquisition of additional ways of reasoning, communicating, and interacting without loss of ethnic identity or the sense of self-efficacy. Cultural therapy would greatly facilitate the achievement of educational goals of international, particularly Asian students, in English-speaking universities. This pedagogical approach would also benefit the worldview of the native-born college students, if a true internationalisation program of reciprocal sociocultural and academic exchange were implemented in institutions of higher education in English speaking countries.

It would be naive to expect institutional changes to occur simply because there is a need for change. That is not to say nothing can be accomplished. Educators, student leaders, and recruiters

of international students in English-speaking countries can be effective advocates for the implementation of effective sociocultural orientation to the university culture for Asian students seeking university degrees in those countries.

EXPANDING THE INQUIRY

More interdisciplinary studies of sojourner adjustment to school contexts are suggested. Ethnographic cross-cultural studies of the adjustment of students from different sociolinguistic backgrounds pursuing academic studies in English-speaking institutions would expand the understanding of the role sociocultural differences play in the development of instrumental competence and academic achievement of international students studying abroad. Studies of the tenuous nature of self-concept and self-efficacy of international students in unfamiliar settings, as proposed by Spindler's (1987, 2000) concept of cultural therapy (or mediation) have a place in international education research. Through qualitative studies of the First Year Experience or Freshman Seminars and other extended orientation programs specifically designed for international students, insight may be gained into institutional practices that promote academic adjustment and achievement for all students. Comparative studies of co-national support networks might reveal other aspects of adjustment to academia. Finally, educators and administrators in Asian countries, particularly English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors, involved in the education of Asian students bound for college overseas, should be encouraged to expand their practices in order to prepare students for the multiple dimensions of the university culture Asian students are likely to encounter abroad.

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