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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Intercultural Capacities and Responsiveness in Higher Education Contexts: Perspectives and Experiences of International Graduate Students

by

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Abstract

In this qualitative, single case study, I focused on international graduate students enrolled in a higher education institution in Western Canada to explore their perspectives and experiences on intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts. The participants were international graduate students who had been in a Canadian higher education institution for a minimum of one year. Through semi-structured interviews with six international graduate students, document analysis, and a reflective journal, I explored their perspectives and experiences on intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts. I sought to understand international graduate students' experiences, including inclusive integration, alienation, and/or isolation, when transitioning into their new academic environment, given their unique socio-cultural backgrounds and learning needs. I examined the responsiveness of higher education institutions to the needs of international graduate students by drawing on intercultural capacities of both the international graduate students and the higher education institution. As an international graduate student myself, I was a researcher-participant in this study. Together, participants and I interpreted and shared our perspectives and experiences through dialogue. The interaction focused on what intercultural capacities meant to them, their significant learning experiences, their intercultural perspectives as international graduate students, and how the higher education institution supported them in adjusting to their new academic environment.

Keywords: Intercultural capacities, International graduate students, Perspectives and experiences, Responsiveness, Higher education contexts, Case study

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I would also like to sincerely thank my research participants for sharing their perspectives and experiences as international students in Canada. Your stories will be part of the ongoing conversation on intercultural awareness in Canadian higher education institutions. I appreciated your generous sharing of time and effort, and the many contributions you made to this study. I am grateful for the trust you placed in me to have your voices represented through this research.

To my wife and life partner, Esi Amenyeafe Otoo, you have been my rock. Your encouragement and belief in me kept me moving forward. Thank you for your love and patience. You made my dream come true. This PhD is for you as well. To my family and friends who supported me on this endeavour, I will always be grateful for your encouragement. Special thanks to my mother, Rose, and my dad, George, for being my cheerleaders, and to my mother-in-law, Constance, for all the support and the food.

Dedication

To the wind in my sails, my wife dearest, Esi Amenyeafe Otoo, you made the dream possible. The waters were rough, but you were with me through the storm, we made shore, *Akpe kakaka*. I will forever be indebted to you. To my two lovely daughters, Ama Nhyira Korama Otoo and Akua Ayeyi Konadu Otoo, I love you. Let us never stop learning. When we learn, we grow. I couldn't have asked for a better family.

Epigraph

Let's invite one another in. Maybe then we can begin to fear less, to make fewer wrong assumptions, to let go of the biases and stereotypes that unnecessarily divide us. Maybe we can better embrace the ways we are the same. It's not about being perfect. It's not about where you get yourself in the end. There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become.

Michelle Obama, *Becoming*

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Definitions

Below are the definitions of terms used in this study to foster clarification and ease of understanding by defining the key concepts:

Culture, according to Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009), is the set of practices and beliefs that is shared with members of a particular group and that distinguishes one group from others.

Cultural awareness is developing a baseline of understanding cultural elements outside of one's own culture that acknowledges that there are other cultures which come with varied experiences. Part of this culture involves language, norms, traditions, and symbols—both tangible and intangible—all being part and parcel of what can be termed culture. Embracing cultural awareness includes validating all cultures and accepting differences in an unbiased way (American College of Education [ACE], 2018).

Cross-cultural competency. According to Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006), cross-cultural competency involves drawing upon knowledge, skill, and personal attributes in order to work successfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad.

Higher education contexts involve all teaching, learning activities and opportunities in post-secondary institutions.

Indigenous graduate students refers to graduate students of Aboriginal descent, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or being a Registered or Treaty Indian (that is, registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada) and/or a member of a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the *Constitution Act*, *1982*, section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Intercultural involves going beyond and engaging with others from different cultures in a bid to understand and learn with and from different people and different cultures.

Intercultural capacities conveys a deepened and expanded awareness of cultural differences and engaging with and responding to cultural differences with sensitivity, appropriateness, purpose, and thoughtful intention by university community members to comfortably and effectively work to elicit full potential from a diversity of people, ideas, and perspectives (University of Calgary, 2020) on an *ongoing basis* with no endpoint.

International graduate student is a student on a student visa who entered Canada with the sole purpose of studying at a Canadian university at the master's and/or doctoral level.

Responsiveness includes how the higher education institution responds to the needs of international graduate students. The needs of international students encompass all activities, processes, and procedures that include adjustments and integration into the new environment.

Success of international students refers to all factors that make international students feel accepted and welcome in their new environment devoid of alienation.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Overview

In this qualitative case study, I explored international graduate students' perspectives and experiences regarding intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts. International graduate students continue to come to Canada on a yearly basis to further their education. Reasons vary for why students choose Canada. International graduate students come from different sociocultural contexts and find themselves confronted with challenges fitting into their new environment. This study sought to explore intercultural capacities and how responsiveness to cultural differences is interpreted and taken up in higher education institutions. Through the voices of international graduate students, this study sought to inform and build an intercultural capacity framework in higher education institutions to ensure international graduate students' success in Canada and beyond.

I employed several methods for data collection, including semi-structured interviews with international graduate students, analysis of selected higher education institutional documents regarding the recruitment of international graduate students, and a reflective journal that captured my reflections, observation and thoughts that emerged during the study as a researcher-participant.

In this chapter, I detail the overall architecture of my study: background and context, problem statement and purpose of study, research questions, locating myself as a researcher, assumptions I bring to the study, research design, rationale and significance of the study, and definition of terms. I conclude this chapter with a brief summary.

Background and Context

I came to graduate school in Canada as an international student in 2016. I had travelled

from Ghana, a sub-Saharan, African, developing country—a country with a significantly different sociocultural history and reality. Contextualizing my own experience as an international graduate student, I was confronted with adjusting to a new culture and a Canadian academic environment. This stoked my research interest as I soon realized there were missing pieces in understanding and responding to international students' acculturation processes. Further, there were related challenges pertaining to university policies aimed to support and accommodate international students' needs (Shafaei, Abd Razak, & Nejati, 2016).

On a more macro level, the interest in my research topic was also fuelled by the increasing number of international graduate students enrolled in Canadian institutions of higher learning. Related to this are the many challenges and barriers students face when integrating into Canadian academic environments. These include isolation, alienation, marginalization, and low self-esteem (Guo & Chase 2011) and are partly due to differences in cultures in one's new environment.

Culture, according to Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009), is the set of practices and beliefs that is shared with members of a particular group and that distinguishes one group from others. International students coming to Canada for further studies come from many cultural backgrounds. Canadian institutions of higher education have experienced a remarkable increase in the number of international students enrolling. International student numbers puts the total number of international students in Canada at 574, 415 at all levels of study (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2018). This accounts for a 154% increase in international students from 2010 to 2018. This significant growth also accounts for a 16% growth from the year 2017 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2019). Various reasons account for the increase in numbers of international students choosing to study in Canada. These

include: the quality of the Canadian education system, Canada's reputation as a tolerant and non-discriminatory society, and Canada's reputation as a safe country (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2019).

The higher education institution where this study took place has an international strategy called *Eyes High* to attract students from around the globe. The institution identifies seven major priorities. One of the seven priorities identified in these plans as key to the university's future success is internationalisation. The internationalisation strategy seeks to achieve two purposes, among others:

> The first is to identify the specific goals, strategies and tactics that are required to harness, focus and intensify this activity so that our university becomes known as a global intellectual hub. The second is to guide the allocation of resources to potential initiatives related to internationalization of our campuses and our activities. (University of Calgary, 2013, p. 4)

The internationalisation agenda, embedded in the institution's internationalisation strategy, comprises four high-level strategic goals, each with supporting strategies and tactics: increase diversity of [our] campus communities, improve global and cross-cultural competencies within [our] campus communities, enhance opportunities for international collaborations and partnerships in research and education, and leverage [our] unique areas of expertise to engage in international development. The first two goals of increasing diversity within the campus community and improving global and cross-cultural competencies within the campus community underscore the capacity-building opportunities to address the needs of international graduate students. The cross-cultural competencies involve internationalising the curriculum and co-curriculum, enhancing teaching and learning resources to optimize the educational experiences

of international students, reviewing and enhancing support services for international students, and increasing and encouraging opportunities for students and staff to develop language skills (University of Calgary, 2013).

To achieve the goals of the internationalisation strategy, two specific councils oversee the strategic plans, involving a) the Council of Associate Deans (International) or Directors (or faculty designates where an Associate Dean International does not exist), which is chaired by the Vice-Provost International (VPI) to provide integration and oversight over internationalisation efforts at the faculty level within the University, and b) Countries/Regions of Emphasis Councils, which develops and oversees the implementation of country-specific internationalisation strategies (University of Calgary, 2013). My study attempts to understand and explore how well international graduate students are supported and aligned with the higher education institution's commitment to capacity-building and the vital roles international graduate students can play in realizing its goal.

The importance of diversity in any society cannot be downplayed. Canada prides itself as a multicultural society. Despite this, Rosenthal and Levy (2010) found that, although multiculturalism promoted respect for diversity, it did not necessarily engender a willingness to have personal contact between students of different races. Though the focus of this study was on intercultural capacities and the responsiveness of higher education to cultural differences, it was imperative to highlight how cultural diversity is lived and experienced by international graduate students. Student demographics in Canadian higher education institutions span many different cultures. How well these diverse talents, strengths and knowledge could be utilized and responded to in these institutions underscored the purpose of my study.

Various research-informed constructs informed the ideation of intercultural capacities for

the purpose of this study. At the forefront is the work of Azzopardi and McNeill (2016), who called for moving away from cultural competence to cultural consciousness. They affirm that one can never unequivocally achieve competence simply through the acquisition of cultural knowledge and skills. That said, maintaining a continuous, mindful awareness of culture and diversity, including the complex ways in which they construct meaning and experience, promotes effective and ethical practice. Cultural consciousness, therefore, is an ongoing and dynamic developmental process with no endpoint—one that requires active, critical, and purposeful engagement on the part of all entering this relationship of getting to know the other. Additionally, Bishop, O'Sullivan, and Berryman (2010) addressed the need to adopt a relation of interdependence where culture counts and where learning is interactive, dialogic, and spiral. Allowing international graduate students into the conversation on intercultural capacities in higher education contexts will go a long way in allowing their voice to be heard, thus allowing for meaningful policies to be adopted. Lastly, Leask (2015), in addition to calling for the internationalising the curriculum in higher education contexts, calls for the ability to work in culturally diverse teams, to understand and relate to others, and to be able to negotiate and communicate effectively and appropriately in a range of different cultural and national environments. The influences of the above authorities helped me arrive at a working operationalization and conceptualization of intercultural capacities.

As terminology is interpreted in particular ways in different contexts, it is important that I specify what I refer to when using the term *intercultural capacities* in the context of my study. It refers to openness to different perspectives and ways of knowing and doing, cultural awareness, engagement, inclusion among others, and going beyond one's own familiar culture and context to engage with others from different cultures on an ongoing basis. Additionally, when I refer to

responsiveness in higher education, I refer to all activities, programs, and learning to support the experience and success of international students. A significant study that influenced and guided me to come up with a working conceptualization of intercultural capacity was Leask and Carroll (2011), which sought to move beyond wishing and hoping on internationalisation and students' experiences of inclusion and engagement in higher education spaces.

Current trends in intercultural awareness and engagement in the field of higher education in Canada take varied forms. An example is how higher education institutions are focusing increased attention on decolonizing knowledge by embracing Indigenous ontology and epistemology within the academic space. The number of Indigenous graduates in Canadian colleges and universities has increased steadily over the past two decades (Gordon & White, 2014). Approaches to designing and delivering higher education programs for Indigenous peoples have focused on providing safe cultural spaces and supports, accommodating perceived learning styles or cognitive preferences, and imparting instructor- or learner-centred critical and decolonial pedagogies (Martin, Nakata, Nakata, & Day, 2015). This evidences the wave of cultural awareness that is changing the landscape within higher education in Canada. In my research, I explored this notion by studying how this intercultural awareness affects and is perceived by international graduate students.

Advancing cultural awareness includes recognizing diverse ways of knowing and understanding. A widespread notion that has arisen in scholarly literature is the aim to advance cultural competency amongst students, staff, and faculty. This concept is not without its attendant problems, however. My study aims to extend beyond this concept of cultural competency as competencies are not easily defined or measured in that cultures are fluid, not fixed.

Problem Statement and Purpose of Study

Critically examining recent literature, there is paucity or almost nonexistent context in research about intercultural capacities in higher education. Some existing literature on intercultural activities focuses on intercultural effectiveness (Almeida, Fantini, Simões, & Costa, 2016), intercultural competence (Brown & Aktas, 2012; Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen, & Meadows, 2014), intercultural curriculum (Daniel, 2006), intercultural education (Garson, Bourassa, & Odgers, 2016), intercultural pedagogy (Ghazarian & Youhne, 2015), intercultural communication (Gu & Maley, 2008), and intercultural learners (Sample, 2013), among others. Other research focuses on cultural competency in higher education (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Brown, 2004; DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Lo & Stacey, 2008; Shen, 2015). It is my desire that this research will also open new boundaries on how to build intercultural capacities in higher education institutions by drawing on existing work that examines all the forms of intercultural activities in higher education.

The problem statement for qualitative research, according to Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2008), is the discrepancy between what I already know and what I do not know. My research problem is driven by an incomplete knowledge or flawed understanding I seek to solve, not by changing the world but by understanding it better. This research gave a voice to international graduate students in the conversation about intercultural capacities and may provide further insights into how higher education institutions can respond appropriately to international students' needs by working *with* them and not *for* them.

The purpose of this case study was to explore with a group of international graduate students and understand their perceptions of intercultural capacities and higher education responsiveness in a university in Western Canada. This study provides new knowledge about

intercultural capacities from the lens of a group of international graduate students in Canada.

Research Questions

The following aim guided the principal focus of this research: to give a voice to international graduate students to assist in building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. In seeking to understand the phenomenon of intercultural capacities within higher education institutions, the following two overarching questions guided my study:

1. How do international graduate students perceive the concept of intercultural capacities?
2. How do intercultural capacities influence the experience and success of international graduate students in higher education in Canada?

These research questions illuminated aspects of the problem I studied. The research question is to make a significant and innovative contribution to the field of study by saying something new and interesting, thus contributing to the concerns of and current topics in the academic community. It is important to consider whether the research question is gap filling, neglect filling, a new formulation of an existing idea or an entirely new idea, and how the answers to the research will match relevant theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). My study sought to expand on an existing idea by adding to the existing body of knowledge on the integration of international students into a new environment.

Locating Myself as Researcher

I decided to come to graduate school in search of self-discovery after many years in the corporate world as a banker. I came to school as an adult learner who wanted to know. Enrolling in graduate school as an international student from Ghana in a new environment in Canada found me in conflict with the way things were done in higher education institutions in Canada. Moments of isolation, loneliness, and trying to adjust to the new environment got me thinking.

My sociocultural background influences the way I perceive and understand the world. I come to the study with a constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2014) that assumes a relativist ontology, which assumes there are multiple realities, and a subjectivist epistemology, where the knower and respondent co-create understandings in the natural world through a set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Also, the push and pull of the conflicting epistemological cultures and the challenges to my cultural ontology got me asking myself a lot of questions. Lots of ideas presented themselves to me. Kelly (2010) explained that ideas never stand alone. They come woven in a web of auxiliary ideas, consequential notions, supporting concepts, foundational assumptions, side effects, and logical consequences and a cascade of subsequent possibilities. Ideas fly in flocks. To hold one idea in mind means to hold a cloud of them. Out of that cloud, I chose to explore and understand the intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education institutions from the perspectives of international graduate students.

My insider perspective as an international graduate student myself, together with my participants' experiences and perspectives, sought to add to the existing knowledge and conversation on how international graduate students can succeed in higher education institutions in Canada. By attempting to draw out my research participants' subjective views, we co-create knowledge. There is the understanding that as a researcher, I will construct knowledge socially as a result of my personal experiences of life within the natural setting of the higher education institution I seek to investigate (Punch & Oancea, 2014). My experiential knowledge from a different sociocultural context and as a man of colour from Ghana will also offer valuable insights into what I bring to my study.

As a qualitative researcher for the purpose of this study, I aligned with the school of thought that sees the world as individually constructed, and I believe that there are as many

realities as there are individuals. Knowledge of the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it (Scotland, 2012). This is contrary to the view held by scholars from the hard sciences/positivists who believe the world exists and is knowable as it is. A qualitative researcher seeks an understanding of phenomena as it. Different people will see or examine the same phenomenon or item and have varying explanations for what they see. Understanding is the essence of my work as a qualitative researcher.

Locating myself as a researcher will be incomplete without illuminating my role as an adult learner. As an adult learner, the demands of my sociocultural context pushed me to develop in order to navigate and function within the contradictions and ideological differences (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014) of my new environment in Canada. This study connected and drew on my previous experience and knowledge to create new knowledge. As propounded by Kolb (2014), experiential learning is based on constructivist learning theories, which state that knowledge is linked to the context in which it occurs and learning occurs from experience according to the personal meaning individuals give to it. For the international graduate students and myself as a researcher-participant, some form of learning, albeit conscious or unconscious, occurred in our new academic environment, and this informed our collective perspectives and experiences as research participants in this new space.

Adults come to learning situations with accumulated experience; therefore, in any group of adults, there will be a wide range of individual differences regarding background, learning styles, motivation, needs, interests, and goals (Palis & Quiros, 2014). I came into graduate school as an adult, and my experiences and those of my participants were harnessed to make a meaningful contribution to this study. According to Groen and Kawalilak (2014), “sharing our experiences through dialogue provides rich fodder and opportunity for exploration and learning”

(p. 13). My research afforded me the opportunity for new learning on intercultural capacities. As a researcher, I will always be critically aware of the biases and assumptions I bring to the study. I ensured to acknowledge my biases at all times during the study.

Assumptions

Foregrounding my assumptions is a key ingredient in qualitative research. My assumptions were based on certain premises that may either hold up or be shown to be unwarranted during my study. My assumptions and biases coming into my research were as follows:

a) That international students coming to higher education institutions in Canada was to foster intercultural awareness and learning.

b) That intercultural experiences can influence the general wellbeing of and, by extension, the adjustment of international students in Canada.

c) That international higher education institutions give support to international graduate students new to Canada.

d) That international students have negative experiences in settling in their new environment ranging from loneliness, isolation, alienation and discrimination to culture shock.

Research Design

For this study, I employed a qualitative, single case study. I undertook a semi-structured interview of a cross-section of six international graduate students from around the world who were currently enrolled at the university. I used a semi-structured interview as affirmed by Kvale and Brinkman (2009), who see it as the most valuable form of interview because it "seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 27). I also examined program and support service documents pertaining to

internationalisation and intercultural capacity initiatives offered by the higher education institution during the study period to corroborate the findings from my participants. I gathered and analyzed the documents I acquired from the university as a source of more specific details and to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 2014). Lastly, using a reflective journal engendered my reflective stance (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which offered the opportunity to create a record of the experiences, insights, questions and tentative interpretations that I brought to my study.

Logistics and pragmatics also informed my decision to do the research with students from the university.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

As an international student and a researcher, I decided to undertake this study to have a deeper understanding of intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts. Underscoring the diversity and internationalisation of higher education in Canada is the desire to make international graduate students feel welcome and successful during their stay on university campuses across the country. An example is the internationalisation strategy of a university in Western Canada, calling “to improve global and cross-cultural competencies [CCC] within our campuses” (University of Calgary, 2013).

Through this study, and together with my research participants, I attempted to understand intercultural capacities and build an intercultural capacity framework that will assist higher education institutions properly and efficiently address international graduate students’ needs. Higher education institutions can foster intercultural capacity building and responsiveness by creating an enabling environment where cultural competence is replaced with cultural consciousness (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016) as an ongoing and dynamic developmental process

with no endpoint—one that requires active, critical, and purposeful engagement between international graduate students and higher education institutions. The driving rationale for this study, as addressed above, depicts why I found it important to carry on with this research.

The significance of this study is the benefits it seeks. I conducted a significant literature search on intercultural capacities and international students in renowned journals and libraries. A total of 13,760 journal results from the University of Calgary (2019) library did not yield anything directly related to my research topic on intercultural capacities in higher education. My study will make a difference by contributing to theory, adding to research, literature, and potential practical application, improving policies in higher education institutions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015) by building an intercultural capacity framework and giving voice to international graduate students in the conversation about intercultural capacities.

Summary

In this chapter, I detailed the overall roadmap of my research, which includes the background and context, problem statement and purpose of the study, research questions, locating myself as a researcher, assumptions, research design, rationale, and the significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I explored the key and relevant literature streams from scholarly literature that informed and guided this research.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

Overview

I explored a broad range of critical literature regarding my area of study for this research. My research sought to examine and understand *intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts: perspectives and experiences of international graduate students*. I did this by employing a qualitative case study methodology.

This research amplified the voices of international graduate students in the conversation on building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. The students' narratives informed how higher education institutions respond to the needs of international graduate students. Therefore, to situate this study within the broader context of cultural awareness in higher education institutions, I began with a brief background on higher education in Canada. I followed that with literature streams on cultural competencies, international graduate students, cultural identity and knowledge sharing, tensions and challenges, the adult learning perspectives guiding this inquiry, intercultural capacity building, and a theoretical framework, and concluded with a summary.

Higher Education in Canada

International interaction and collaboration through education has the potential to develop cultural insights and exchange that is enriching and enabling for individuals, communities, nations, and the world (Leask, 2015). Canada is one of the developed countries leading the way in attracting international students to pursue higher education. International graduate students as individuals serve as a critical resource for higher education institutions. The presence of international students internationalises classrooms, which enhances the quality of research and diversity on university campuses (Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009). A host of attendant benefits and

challenges comes with attracting international graduate students to Canada.

Benefits and Challenges

Having international students in higher education institutions in Canada offers some cultural benefits. An important cultural benefit of having international graduate students in Canadian higher education institutions is the learning opportunity focused on intercultural interdependence between Canadian and international students (Knight 2004). Different cultures coming into contact with each other fosters skills, experience, and understanding to succeed in and beyond the higher education institutions. An appreciation of cultural differences and understanding by higher education institution constituents are part of the benefits of internationalising higher education (Maringe, 2009). Again, the presence of international students in Canadian higher education institutions offers the benefit of high cultural values, and these values are regarded as key elements of the cultural capital of any university (Lumby & Foskett, 2016). This presents higher education institutions with the opportunity to take advantage of a variety of cultural values, languages, and experiences that can intensify student and staff understanding of various cultures (Urban & Palmer, 2014) from around the world. Apart from the potential benefits that can accrue to higher education institutions, domestic students who do not have the chance to study or live abroad can enrich their learning experience and social interaction (McMurtrie, 2011). This diverse cultural environment has the added potential to improve personal capacities or even help students become more positive citizens (Hinrichs, 2011) when they leave the university. Further, it has the potential to change the lives of international students as it helps to produce graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and culturally sensitive (Jibeen & Khan, 2015).

Despite the above benefits, numerous challenges exist in ensuring international graduate

students' success in higher education institutions. International students encounter challenges in the form of cultural, linguistic, social, and educational differences (Crocket & Hays, 2011). Challenges manifest in varied forms, namely in language, culture, and the academic learning process. These are some of the aspects that set international students apart from Canadian students. These difficulties are exacerbated when international students buy into the dream of studying outside their home countries; however, they encounter a plethora of misadventures related to cultural adjustment, language use, and academic issues (Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012; Kenyon, Frohard-Dourlent, & Roth, 2012). Due to sociocultural differences, international students experience difficulties in social integration (Grayson, 2008) in their new environments and academic spaces.

Integration or Alienation

As international students continue to enrol in Canadian higher education institutions, pertinent questions arise about how well they feel integrated or alienated in their new sociocultural environment. Groen and Kawalilak (2014) posited that welcoming differences in the form of learning from one another speaks to the courage to step beyond the comfortable and familiar to engage *with* and to learn together, *through*, and *from* differences. Intercultural learning between international graduate students, domestic students, and higher education institutions can assist in the integration process to ensure international graduate students' success. Another way to foster the integration of international students, as advocated by Leask (2015), is the internationalisation of the curriculum as a means of increasing home and international student engagement with diversity. This will involve communicating and working across cultures, the ability to think globally and consider issues from a variety of perspectives, awareness of one's own culture, and the capacity to apply international standards and practices.

Individuals' lived experiences of places in the new culture have the potential to enhance the students' sense of mastery and provide the context in which they can build new bonds to places in the host culture (Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, & Pace, 2014).

In spite of the arguments in favour of international graduate student integration, existing research has documented examples of alienation amongst international students for varied reasons. An example that inhibits full integration is communication and language barriers. According to Zhang and Zhou (2010), limited English language proficiency amongst Asian international students impacted many aspects of their lives, including making friends with native English speakers, understanding the course materials, and finding group work partners. There is ample evidence in the educational literature to suggest that the English language is a barrier that amplifies international students' alienation (Gunawardena et al., 2012; Lawrence, 2014; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Such factors tend to alienate international students from immersing themselves fully in their new academic environment. International students undergo even more radical changes as they relocate to a host country and must face the challenge of adapting to a foreign culture (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014). Higher education institutions must continue to assist international graduate students in navigating these challenges.

Approaches Towards Intercultural Efforts

Higher education institutions have a responsibility to ensure that international graduate students enrolled in their institutions have positive experiences by way of social integration in their new learning and living environment (Zhou & Zhang, 2014). International students coming from different countries to Canada bring with them varied experiences and learning opportunities. Higher education institutions can benefit from intercultural learning that international students bring with them embedded in those experiences. Scholars such as Almeida

(2015), Beaven and Borghetti (2015), Carroll (2015), and Strong (2011) all cite the importance of intercultural learning opportunities from and amongst international students in higher education. The opportunity to take advantage of the experiences of and intercultural learning from international graduate students is open for further research.

Current efforts by higher education institutions take varied forms. As already noted, Leask (2015) advocates for the internationalisation of the curriculum by introducing international discourses into higher education teaching programs and courses to imbue domestic and international students with international and intercultural competencies. Another approach was by Knight (2004), who argued for a broad institutional culture that recognizes the full worth of infusing intercultural and international perspectives into areas of higher education.

Lastly, one of the most popular and current cultural approaches adopted by higher education institutions in international student integration is cultural competencies. The goal of the cultural competency approach is to train students, staff, and faculty to become knowledgeable and skilful and demonstrate an attitude of international competence (Ahwireng, 2016). The concept of cultural competencies has been contentious and continues to attract debate in academic circles.

Cultural Competencies

There are many perceptions and interpretations—some conflicting and competing—of cultural competency. Going back 30 years, cultural competency, as defined by the seminal authorities Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989), referred to a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or profession and enable that system, agency, or profession to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Further, cultural competency involved engaging the development of abilities and skills to respect differences and

effectively interact with individuals from different backgrounds. More recent literature describes cultural competency as enabling people to understand, interact, and engage effectively with people from diverse cultures (Rasmussen, 2017). This involves awareness of one's own biases or prejudices and is rooted in respect, validation, and openness towards differences among people (Kohli, Huber & Faul, 2010). The idea of cultural competency as a phenomenon worthy of study was developed during the 1980s and adopted in health, social work, psychology, and education (Overall, 2009). Nurses, for example, recognized that care outcomes could be compromised by culturally based misunderstandings and misinterpretations in communication and that systemic barriers impeded effective cross-cultural care (Abrums, Resnick, & Irving, 2010). Significant contributions of medical education in advancing cultural competency cannot be underemphasized (Campinha-Bacote, 2007; Escallier, Fullerton, & Messina, 2011; Jeffreys, 2010). Higher education educators as professionals need to understand what cultural competencies entail to guide them in engaging with international students.

Though research on cultural competency does exist (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Garson et al., 2016), research focusing on cultural competencies in higher education institutions was conducted with very little input from the perspectives of international graduate students. Existing studies pertaining to international students in higher education tend to focus on specific aspects of the experience, such as the effectiveness of study abroad programs (Forsey, Broomhall & Davis, 2012; Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004), experiences of ethnic groups at foreign universities (Ladd & Ruby, 1999), or, more recently, experiences of local host students with their international peers (Dunne, 2009; Jon, 2013). These studies lack an empirical focus on the holistic experiences of international graduate students regarding cultural competencies and how higher education institutions can respond to student needs.

Scholarly studies conducted in nursing practice, education research, and administration (Shen, 2015) identified several models in an attempt to measure cultural competency. The metrics they referred to aligned with a positivistic tradition or worldview when referring to measuring and evaluating cultural competencies. Additionally, the fixed and evaluative language associated with cultural competency implies an achievable level of finite skills and abilities and/or expertise to researchers and practitioners. There has been an emergence of research geared towards evaluating the efficacy of cultural competence training courses in the field of education (Brown, 2004; DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008). Utilizing a vast array of quantitative measurement models, researchers have generally concluded that cultural awareness can be achieved over time by participating in training courses and classes. The problem with these findings, however, is that there is little consistency in definitions of cultural competency or in the efficacy measurement tools. Each study measures different "competency" aspects like cultural knowledge, cultural skills, awareness of personal assumptions, and willingness to learn about cultural differences in different ways (Smith & Soule, 2016). I believe that cultural competency is not that simplistic. My fervent aspiration is that this research will spark conversations on moving beyond the concept of cultural competencies that connotes a finite endpoint in knowing the culture of the other in higher education institutions.

Scholars have stressed the need for research to move beyond simple, pre-and post-test evaluations and to employ qualitative methodologies to learn more about the developmental process of becoming more culturally competent (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2000; Whitley, 2007). Prior studies focusing on cultural competencies have relied on pragmatic and fixed actions to develop cultural competencies on quantitative metrics. By employing a qualitative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), my research was guided by an interpretive paradigm, aimed at understanding

cultural awareness beyond cultural competencies from the perspectives of international graduate students and exploring approaches to deepening and advancing intercultural capacities. These approaches may be achieved through a "culturally responsive pedagogy of relations," as defined by Bishop, O'Sullivan, and Berryman (2010), which refers to

> an education in which power is shared between self-determining individuals within non-dominating relations of interdependence; where culture counts; where learning is interactive, dialogic and spiral; and where participants are connected and committed to one another through the establishment of a common vision of what constitutes excellence in educational outcomes. (p. 20)

This pedagogy of relations should seek to be ongoing, cyclical, and continuous, with no endpoint in mind. By inviting international graduate students in Canada to share their experiences and perspectives, I sought to deepen understandings of intercultural capacities that involve relational approaches when dealing with others. Relational approaches are elements ranging from learning to understand the self and others, being self critical and reflective, looking out for one's biases, and being culturally humble on a quotidian and ongoing basis.

Pon (2009) argued that cultural competency promotes an obsolete view of culture and is a form of new racism. Cultural competency resembles new racism both by otherizing non-whites and by deploying modernist and absolutist views of culture while not using racialist language. Some other misconceptions of cultural competencies include it being seen as a concept from a dominant culture (Danso, 2018) and the erroneous belief that it can only be studied from a deficit-model approach (Lund & Lee, 2018). Lastly, Gross (2000) agrees with the postmodern view of culture which acknowledges that culture is not as simple as we want to make it; there are too many differences—too many to master to achieve cultural competency. My goal as a

researcher was to go beyond trying to advance cross-cultural competencies between international students and higher education institutions. It was more about deepening cultural awareness in higher education contexts and how it could be harnessed to be part of the ongoing conversation or dialogue on ensuring the success of international students. In this context, cross-cultural involves comparing cultures. Cross-cultural competency carries with it the idea that one can be an expert or competent in the culture of the other. Culture is fluid, and competency connotes something that can be measured.

Nevertheless, this view does not negate the importance of cultural competency in education to further the advancement of people from diverse contexts and cultures living, working, and learning from each other. The ideas and learning from cultural competencies can serve as a scaffold to better explore intercultural capacities within higher education contexts.

Dimensions of Cultural Competencies

Cultural competency, as a concept, has been examined through different lenses within the field of education. I will briefly touch on some different facets of cultural competency and how it is portrayed in education literature.

Intercultural competencies. Intercultural competencies involve going beyond one's culture of familiarity and engaging with others from different cultures. Higher education institutions in Canada continue to attract international students (IRCC, 2018). The development of intercultural competencies has been touted as the most important outcome of the internationalisation of higher education institutions (Deardorff, 2011; Krajewski, 2011). Intercultural competency has been defined as "a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini, 2007, p. 9). Moving beyond this working definition, higher

education institutions have a role to play in ensuring the success of international students in their new environment. The goal of cultural competency learning in higher education is to educate students to engage in perspective-taking and self-critiquing to adapt a general ethnorelative mindset, enhanced by curriculum and interventions; this is a crucial step on the path to being lifetime intercultural learners and developing intercultural competence (Sample, 2013). The learning in this context is for a lifetime and does not end with simply ticking boxes on a cultural competency inventory or assessment.

Multicultural competencies. Much has been written about how educational institutions can better prepare their students for a diverse world (Dunn, Gurung, Naufel, & Wilson, 2013; Gurung & Prieto, 2009; Kite & Littleford, 2014). The concept of multiculturalism denotes a number of different cultures. According to Mio, Barker-Hackett, and Tumambing (2012), multicultural competency referred to developing an awareness of one's own cultural values and biases, learning to value others' worldviews, and developing a set of culturally appropriate interpersonal skills. It is important to ask, what happens after acquiring the appropriate interpersonal skills? Does one become competent? Is there a hard stop when one becomes competent? A good starting point is to recognize that engaging with diversity involves skills informed and supported by values and perspectives—skills, values, and perspectives that can be fostered, guided and modelled in/by higher education institutions to support students in developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities to thrive in their new environments (Kite, 2015). For higher institution educators to be effective with students who span diverse cultural contexts, it is crucial that they first recognize and understand their own worldviews; only then will they be able to appreciate the diversity of worldviews held by their students (Bennet, 1993). Higher education institutions can also learn from international students from diverse cultures.

Cross-cultural competencies. According to Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006), cross-cultural competencies involve drawing upon knowledge, skill, and personal attributes in order to work successfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad. Although there are several studies regarding how students can increase their cross-cultural competence or develop global mindsets at international educational institutions (Leung, Ang, & Tan, 2014; Gopal, 2011), fewer studies examine this from the point of view of international graduate students. According to DeVisser and Sands (2014), cross-cultural competencies involve the knowledge and experiences of individuals from different sociocultural backgrounds and how they are able to navigate complex interpersonal situations, express or interpret ideas/concepts across cultures, and make sense of foreign social and cultural behaviour in a given environment. Drawing on some of these elements will inform a better understanding of intercultural capacities in higher education institutions across Canada.

Cultural Competencies and Education

Intercultural competency, multicultural competency, and cross-cultural competency are often used interchangeably in the scholarly literature (Chaney & Martin, 2000). The grand idea behind cultural competency is understanding the culture of the other, being respectful of the other culture, and learning to work together. Higher education institutions across Canada have taken the lead in advancing the cultural competencies agenda (Adler, 2008; Knight & Madden, 2010). Teaching programs with awareness of cultural competencies in universities provide excellent opportunities for institutions to foster awareness and understanding of other cultures (Dimitrov et al., 2014). These institutions are usually focused on promoting and supporting collaborations among advisors across multiple offices in the universities, with intersecting priorities in select areas of scholarship offices, study abroad programs, and centres for civic

engagement (Akli, 2013). According to minutes from public documents of the President's Commission on Human Relations & Equity, Fresno State University, 2013, cultural competency involves the state of having and applying knowledge and skill in four areas: awareness of one's own cultural worldview; recognition of one's attitudes towards cultural differences; realization of different cultural practices and worldviews; and thoughtfulness in cross-cultural interaction.

Despite efforts in higher education institutions to advance the cultural competency agenda, voices of international students are barely heard due to the inability to look beyond major differences between cultural systems (Ryan, 2011) and failing to recognize cultural commonalities which could serve as the foundation of mutual understanding (Ryan, 2016). One way to gain a better understanding of intercultural capacities is to embrace cultural humility.

Cultural Humility

Entering a conversation with humility and an open mind is a good starting point for learning what one does not know. Cultural humility, as described by Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998), is a process that requires "humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique" (p. 118). Cultural humility takes into account the fluidity and subjectivity of culture and challenges both individuals and institutions to address inequalities. It challenges active engagement in a lifelong process versus a discrete endpoint that individuals enter into with clients, organizational structures, and within themselves (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The avoidance of a discrete endpoint in understanding culture through cultural humility as an epistemological virtue can allow higher education institution educators to work together with international students to ensure their success in higher education.

Cultural humility is a process by which individuals are perpetually self-reflective and critical of their understanding of others (Lund & Lee, 2018). Adopting cultural humility as a way

of being enhances learning and growth. There is a constant realization there will always be more to learn and understand through interactions with others. The guiding principle of cultural humility to deepen understanding of other cultures should not/does not have a finite endpoint. It calls for participating in self-reflection and evaluation of personal power, privilege, marginalization, engagement in lifelong cultural learning, recognizing that all identities are salient, and cultivating an environment where cultural humility can occur by encouraging a developmental approach to understanding culture (Abbott, Pelc, & Mercier, 2019). Engaging in a developmental approach should involve creating an overarching institutional awareness of the presence and contribution of all cultures to knowledge production in higher education institutions. Lund and Lee (2018) affirmed this by agreeing that relying on cultural competency initiatives alone can be problematic because they may promote cultural competence from the perspective that educational professionals must reach a point where they demonstrate mastery of a finite body of intercultural knowledge.

Even when cultural humility is apparent in higher education institutions, there still exists a dichotomy between knowledge and praxis when it comes to issues of culture. Knowledge can be gained but might not necessarily be applied in terms of skills, strategies, and pedagogical practices (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016) to help move the intercultural capacity building agenda in higher education institutions forward.

International Graduate Students in Canada

International students are students on a student visa who entered Canada with the sole purpose of studying at a Canadian university (Anderson, 2015). In the context of this study, an international student is a graduate student on a student visa who entered Canada with the sole purpose of studying at a Canadian university at the master’s and/or doctoral level. Canadian

immigration policies actively encourage international graduate students to come to Canadian universities by making migration more accessible than in the recent past (Anderson, 2015). In turn, this has led to a marked increase in the internationalisation activities of higher education institutions.

Internationalisation

Varied interpretations regarding the meaning of internationalisation and how it is practised in educational circles have created much confusion (Bond, 2003). In the scholarly literature, internationalisation encompassed international activities such as academic mobility of students and faculty, international linkages and partnerships, and new international academic programs and research initiatives (Knight 2004). Internationalisation also referred to the delivery of education to other countries through satellite programs (Knight 2004).

An area of internationalisation that gets little attention is internationalisation at home. Knight (2006) distinguished internationalisation at home as one of two streams in internationalisation, which she sees as interdependent rather than independent. She posited that internationalisation abroad consisted of all forms of education across borders, mobility of students, teachers, scholars, programs, courses, curriculum, and projects. Internationalisation at home, on the other hand, referred to activities on campus that helped students who did not travel abroad to develop international understanding and intercultural skills. In considering institutional policies and strategies, internationalisation at home (De Wit, 2011; Knight, 2004) can allow for integrating the international and intercultural dimensions in teaching and learning in higher education institutions in Canada.

Xiao (2018) contends that the internationalisation of higher education has entered a phase of calling for respect for different cultures and multiple knowledge systems. In the view of the

author, universities should increase their commitment in internationalisation to fostering cultural diversity and two-way flow of knowledge. There is an opportunity to learn and to exchange knowledge between Canadian and international students to support developing intercultural capacities between the two groups. Learning from each other does not necessarily need to occur in formal settings. By interacting with each other informally and unconsciously, some form of learning occurs (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006).

Canada's international education strategy is seen as one of the cornerstones of harnessing the knowledge advantage of Canada to drive innovation and prosperity for the future of the country (Canada International Education Strategy, n.d.). Today, internationalisation is at the forefront of most higher education institutions across Canada, with four-fifths of all higher education institutions identifying it as a top strategic priority (AUCC, 2014). Higher education institutions in Canada are engaging with internationalisation to foster global connections and build global competencies among their students, faculty, and administrative units (AUCC, 2014). Integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the mission and vision of a university has become a part of institutional strategic planning processes and practices (Xiao, 2018) in Canada that requires more attention.

Knight (2015), regarded as a seminal authority on internationalisation, defined internationalisation of higher education at the national, sector, and institutional levels as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. Knight's definition was expanded in later years to include how internationalisation may benefit society at large. According to a recent study (De Wit, Hunter, Egron-Polak, & Howard, 2015) published by the European Commission, internationalisation is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or

global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society. Further, internationalisation is a medium by which higher education institutions may harness intercultural capacities to ensure the success of all students in learning from and about different cultures.

Internationalisation has not been without criticism. One of the inherent issues is the colonial baggage associated with it. According to Akena (2012), European colonizers have defined legitimate knowledge as western knowledge, thus delegitimizing other ways of knowing as savage, superstitious, and primitive. This imposes a monolithic worldview that gave power and control to Europeans. Steinman (2009) suggested that western universities and individuals who teach in these contexts should move to establish more flexible and additive relationships with foreign students coming from non-western academic traditions instead of expecting them to unilaterally morph into the conventions and practices of their new academic communities and discourses. In sum, other ways of knowing (epistemologies), like Indigenous knowledge, should be legitimized and encouraged.

Perspectives and Experiences

International students may not be conscious or aware of cultural differences until they are away from their own familiar culture and context. Consequently, a new environment may provoke an unexpected culture shock brought about by several challenges that may include feelings of isolation, alienation, marginalization, and low self-esteem (Ryan & Viete, 2009). Though these may not be positive experiences, some forms of learning may occur. Of significance is that research has indicated that students desire to study in another country to obtain a high-quality education and gain international experience (Skinkle & Embleton, 2014).

As a unique group of students on campus, international students' institutional experiences deserve a closer look since they may have different attitudes, cultures, and learning habits compared with their domestic counterparts (Salvarajah, 2006). The unique experiences and perspectives of international graduate students will add to the existing knowledge of intercultural dimensions in higher education institutions in Canada.

Researching international graduate students' experiences will allow for an intercultural perspective comprising an awareness and appreciation of different ways of knowing and being from people with diverse cultural backgrounds (WorldVIU, 2019). My personal experience as an international student has provided me with the opportunity to learn and see the world differently by learning from fellow students and educators from other cultures.

A better understanding of intercultural learning and teaching is critical if the internationalisation of higher education in Canada is to be a pathway for developing a more ethical, inclusive, and equitable society (Garson, 2016). Apart from the efforts of formal learning, international students' experiences can be informed by the informal learning that happens outside the classroom by embracing learning about others and valuing others as fellow humans, regardless of differences that may seem to divide us as a people (Quinlan & Deardoff, 2016). Such intercultural engagement and connection supports international students in viewing the world from different perspectives.

Support for International Students

When universities enrol international students, they have an "academic and social responsibility in the local and global communities" (Kubota & Abels, 2006, p. 82) to provide support for them. This has not always been the case as, in reality, support to help international students successfully integrate into Canadian academic environments has been lacking (Guo &

Chase, 2011). Some studies also revealed that North American institutions lack experience in serving international students. Further, this extended to serving students from diverse backgrounds such as lower-income students, older students with families, or other cultural or linguistic backgrounds (Bader, 2004). Additionally, little attention has been paid to integration factors (Cameron, 2006) for international students. Xiao (2018) agrees that one of the primary imperatives for international student mobility is to increase intercultural understanding. Canadian universities continue to invest heavily in recruiting international students, yet there are not enough initiatives and programs that support international student settlement and enhance their learning experience.

Current university support services for international students take the form of counselling and non-academic support, orientation, designated support staff or offices of internationalisation, academic advisers/support, and international clubs (AUCC, 2011). While most universities offer ongoing counselling and non-academic support services, only 47% provide specific programs to ensure a successful academic experience for international students (AUCC, 2007). The effectiveness and responsiveness of these support systems in higher education institutions in Canada cannot be underestimated.

According to Guo and Guo (2017) and Leask (2015), another area of support for international students that needs more attention is the internationalisation of the curriculum and enhanced teaching and learning resources to optimize educational experiences. In their studies, international students reported that they felt that few teaching and learning resources related to their experiences. Current literature abounds with recommendations and various types of support for international students: linguistic support (Leask, 2015); writing centre support (Li & Vandermensbrugghe, 2011; Mohamad & Boyd, 2010); academic support (Baik & Greig, 2009);

mental health support (Knaak & Patten, 2016) and social support (Belkhodja, 2018). Despite all this, it appears these supports are not enough to alleviate the concerns of international students to Canada.

Cultural Identity and Knowledge Sharing

All international graduate students new to Canada come with individual experiences shaped by the sociocultural contexts of their country of origin. It is important to clarify that international students are not a group of homogenous individuals; they are all unique. Culture, therefore, cannot be viewed as an organizing principle that creates static borders based on race or ethnicity; culture needs to be understood as dynamic, fluid, and constantly changing (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004).

Cultural Identity in a New Space

International students choose to come to Canada to study to increase their knowledge in their respective fields. I am drawn to a conceptualization of cultural identity described as people's constructions of how they are represented and representations of themselves, which are constituted within patterns of interactions in specific social contexts (Hall, 1996).

My own experience as an international student made me conscious as a minority man of colour in a new country. I had never thought of myself as a man of colour in my home country. As Sussman (2002) argued, heritage cultural identity is often not salient while the person resides in his/her home but becomes more significant once in the foreign cultural environment. The identities of adults are still changing or developing. Being influenced by individual and sociocultural factors, identity is never resolved once and for all but remains open to modifications and alterations throughout adult life (Kroger, 2017). The cultural identity of international students within their new environment is always in a state of flux and allows them

to navigate the waters of this new terrain. Identity thus may be conceived as an ongoing negotiation between the individual and the social context (Hawkins, 2005). The way that students perceive their world governs how they represent themselves in that world, which consciously and non-consciously shapes their identities (Stryker & Burke, 2000). In the scholarly literature, cultural differences were identified as risk factors to international students' security (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir & Forbes-Mewett, 2010). The anxiety that international students face in their navigation of daily life was also recognized as a cultural barrier and may position them disadvantageously at universities in host countries (Kell & Vogl, 2012). However, there was little research on how international graduate students can leverage their unique cultural identities to inform intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts. It is important to point out that strongly embracing a certain cultural identity may also draw upon some barriers in social interactions, such as intolerance in blending their culture with others (Masrek, Noordin, Anwar, & Idris, 2011). Through a contemporary postmodern lens, culture and diversity are viewed as individually and socially constructed phenomena that are ever-evolving (Dean, 2001). From this perspective, diverse groups are not homogeneous in nature, despite sharing some common history, attributes, or practices. Individuals are understood to have intersecting and fluid identities, with wide variation between and within different groups (Azzopardi, & McNeill, 2016). It is important to understand how individual identities inform intercultural capacities in higher education spaces.

International Students and Knowledge Sharing

On a macro level, having international students in Canadian universities provides domestic students access to a variety of perspectives, languages, cultures, and experiences that foreign students bring with them to campuses—perspectives that have potential entrepreneurial,

educational, and intellectual impacts. In a sense, internationalisation brings the world to Canada without Canadian students ever having to leave (Anderson, 2015). There is potential for domestic students to learn and share with students from abroad.

International graduate students carry unique cultural identities that embrace common characteristics such as languages, practices, customs, values, and views (Masrek et al., 2011). All these parameters influence how they see the world. The epistemological and ontological assumptions they hold as individuals inform how they imbibe and share knowledge. There is no standard definition of knowledge sharing in education literature. For this thesis, I am guided by Van den Hooff and De Ridder's (2004) definition of knowledge sharing as a process where individuals mutually exchange their (tacit and explicit) knowledge and jointly create new knowledge. It is important to note that culture and education are inextricably intertwined, and students' perspectives and worldviews influence their experiences in educational environments (Jones, 2004). International students come to graduate school with some form of knowledge, and this is based on the assumption I bring to my study that international students and domestic students learn from each other when they encounter each other. De Wit (2017) countered this argument, challenging that this was a misconception. He argued that students do not normally acquire intercultural and international competencies if they study or serve their internship abroad or take part in an international class because students can choose to seclude themselves. Tapping into the multiplicity of the histories and communities that emerge in the selves of international students, not as a cultural deficit but as adaptive strength, is important in understanding intercultural knowledge sharing in higher education institutions. The multiple identities international students learn to embrace are grounded by experiences in both their home and host countries and are linked simultaneously to more than one origin of culture (Hall, 1996). A form

of symbiotic knowledge sharing and learning ensues when students from different cultures interact and share knowledge.

Global Citizenship

Higher education institutions focused on attracting international students to Canada often identify foundational core values to support and advance their internationalisation agenda. Global citizenship is one of the prominent core values that frequently emerge in the education literature. Other core values include global-mindedness, open-mindedness and empathy, commitment to social justice, appreciation of difference and diversity, cultural and intercultural awareness, reciprocity, mutual capacity building and collaboration for all, among others (Khoo, 2011). Global citizenship, as a concept, has many meanings. For this thesis, global citizenship is an identity rooted in the ability to understand the world through an intercultural lens and being cognizant of what is going on in the world, and the ability to relate to and communicate with a diverse spectrum of individuals from different backgrounds (Hobbs, 2007; Noddings, 2005). Coming from an intercultural perspective, how well the concept of global citizenship acknowledges the contributions of minority cultures is something worthy of note within the larger discourse. Dower (2008) questioned global citizenship as a marker of privileged status and power, denoting noblesse oblige or even a new form of cultural imperialism. He admitted that global citizenship was largely a privileged status of rich Northerners and a product of their wealth, leisure, opportunities, and access. Further, he called on the privileged to use their power, not as an elitist impediment, but rather as a vanguard towards an equal world.

Higher education institutions occupy a position of power and can harness the strengths of international and domestic students towards a level playing field for all. Brigham (2011) posited that, to develop higher education students as global citizens, it is necessary to develop service-

learning experiences grounded in a global citizenship pedagogy. Gacel-Ávila (2005) stated that one of the most basic functions of a higher education institution is fostering a global consciousness among students, to make them understand the relation of interdependence between peoples and societies to develop in all students an understanding of their own and other cultures and pluralism.

Tensions and Challenges

Much has been written about efforts in higher education institutions to embed cultural awareness in their initiatives, policies, and research strategies. Research areas include intercultural learning (Beaven & Borghetti, 2015), intercultural skills and learning (Chuang, 2013), and forms of acculturation (Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2014). While there is a plethora of literature concerned with international students' motivations for mingling in intercultural relationships and settings as well as the benefits of and obstacles to their intercultural engagement, the issue of international students' intercultural responsibility is under-researched (Tran & Vu 2017). Tensions and challenges still exist in this field of study.

Este (2007) locates the notion of culture as being associated with the bodies of newcomers. Newcomers can be applied to international graduate students new to Canada. Clearly, the modernist notions of newcomers and Canadian culture are central aspects of the process of othering. The concepts of the newcomer and Canadian culture reify the newcomer as the "Other." In this way, the newcomer is socially constructed as being different from Canadians and belonging outside of the nation-state. According to this logic, the newcomer and the Canadian culture are mutually exclusive and binary categories (Pon, 2009).

Following from the above, another notable tension in this field is the non-homogenous nature of culture related to othering. There is the danger of essentializing all international

students as coming from the “Other” culture. Jefferess (2020) expressed discomfort about the possibility that the knowledge and lives of “Others” are utilized as objects and treated as the same. There is an inherent danger of higher education institutions treating all international students as one homogenous group. International students come from different countries all over the world with different cultures. It is important for higher education institutions to be cognizant of this issue and attempt not to make broad-brush assumptions regarding international students, as there are significant differences both across and within cultures. Additionally, there is the issue of how practical it will be for higher education institutions to address the concerns of individual international students. International students from Asia, Europe, and Africa come from different sociocultural backgrounds, and it will be quite challenging to meet all their needs.

A significant stream of literature constructed international students as geared towards adapting to the host country and host communities rather than feeling a responsibility towards and having the potential capacity to contribute to the host country or the intercultural processes in the host country. This body of the literature depicted international students as outsiders who are responsible for fitting in with taken for granted practices and norms of the host country or host communities in intercultural processes (Ying & Han 2006; Yoo, Matsumoto, & LeRoux, 2006). Yet, empirical evidence from Tran’s (2011) research suggested that adapting to what is seen as “conventional practices” in the host community does not necessarily mean international students intrinsically value those practices. Tran (2011) termed this as face value adaptation based on the assumption that international students acculturate towards the host country’s dominant culture, and this is not necessarily always the case.

Another challenge is the assumption that international students learn from domestic students. Although learning does take place, this is a slow and non-linear process and takes time.

Bochner, Hutnik, and Furnham (1985) found that international students' friendship patterns were primarily with students and people from their own nationalities, followed by locals including academics, advisors, and students, and thirdly with internationals from other countries. Perhaps the greatest shortcoming visible in much of the literature on cultural competence was its apolitical stance, weak or absent analysis of power relations, promotion of othering, and inadequate approach to addressing oppression at systemic and structural levels (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

In examining current culturally responsive practices in higher education, several challenges were noted. The cultural literacy model, grounded in a modernist paradigm, was the first broadly applied framework (Dyche & Zayas, 1995). It was based on the assumption that culture is knowable, and this approach emphasized learning about the shared history, traits, and practices of particular cultural groups. The cultural literacy model was rooted in anthropology and ethnography and fit with early definitions of culture as a static and monolithic construct, thus neglecting the degree of acculturation and sociocultural realities of multiple intersecting identities. It has been criticized for its impracticality, reductionist approach, attention to the abstract over the experiential, and potential for overgeneralization and stereotyping (Ben-Ari & Strier, 2010; Tsang & Bogo, 1998). The notion that one can truly know another's culture or be an expert in the cultures (and subcultures) of others has been challenged as unrealistic and simplistic (Dean, 2001).

Adult Learning Perspectives

My study was located in the field of scholarship and practice (theoretical and conceptual knowledge) of adult learning. Adult educators and scholars recognize that learning opportunities exist wherever adults work, learn, and live. I am working with the assumption that all

international graduate students coming to graduate school are adults. The movement of goods, people, ideas, and cultural artifacts across borders (Finger, 2005) is part of the cultural globalization agenda. Higher education institutions have become part of this market, selling knowledge to their customers in the guise of international students as a commodity and increasingly reconstructing themselves as enterprises dedicated to marketing their commodities and competing in the knowledge business (Hadfield, 2003). Acknowledging international graduate students' prior knowledge and experiences was central to my research as an adult learner and educator. The accumulation of information and experiences of my participants led me to think about how the parts of what I know, together with my participants and how that might fit together to form some sort explanatory framework (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006) to inform my research. Based on the assumption that my research participants and myself as a researcher as international graduate students are adult learners, Groen and Kawalilak (2014) acknowledged that all adult learners have stories to tell and knowledge to be gained from our experiences and that of others regardless of our work, learning, cultural, or socioeconomic contexts. A western, eurocentric perspective dominates what is considered legitimate knowledge pertaining to adult learning. Seeking to understand international students from different parts of the globe allows one to recognize and value other ways of knowing by engaging students in the interpretation of various knowledges and modes of knowledge production (Semali & Kincheloe, 2002). According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2006), examining other systems is not to replace the western, eurocentric tradition. Rather, educators are called to expand understandings of learning and knowing in consideration of other perspective and worldviews.

Lastly, from an adult learning perspective, higher education institutions, as places of

learning in the literal sense, can also be classified as learning organizations where organizational learning takes place. Watkins and Marsick (1993) agreed that organizations are involved in building organizational capacity for new thinking that is then embedded and shared with others. One can infer from this position that higher education institutions should be involved in building intercultural capacities to support the success of international graduate students.

Since the essence of adult education is to solve real-life issues and promote fundamental social changes (Merriam & Brockett, 2007), research should be about informing institutional decisions in developing a cohesive institutional strategy that commits to actions promoting cultural diversity instead of homogenization (Xiao, 2018) in higher education institutions in Canada.

Intercultural Capacity Building

Fullan and Quinn (2010) defined capacity building as the ability and skills level of all educators to make the instructional changes required to enhance student achievement. In my research, I attempted a conceptualization of intercultural capacity building as the ability to enhance the consciousness, awareness and ongoing skill level of all educators, international students, and domestic students by actively and continuously engaging with others from different cultures to enhance student achievement and success in higher education. Intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions conveys a deepened and expanded awareness of cultural differences and engaging with and responding to cultural differences with sensitivity, appropriateness, purpose and thoughtful intention by university community members to comfortably and effectively work to elicit full potential from a diversity of people, ideas, and perspectives (University of Calgary, 2020) on an *ongoing basis* with no endpoint. Successful participation in twenty-first-century society, as well as university campus life, requires the

development of intercultural capacities (Abdi, 2011; Lee, Poch, Shaw, & Williams 2012; Shultz, 2011). There is a need for critical dialogue about the complexities of culture, recognizing that culture is fundamentally flexible, dynamic, and constantly changing (Signorini, Wiesemes, & Murphy 2009). To foster intercultural capacity building in higher education contexts requires moving beyond the didactic notion of cultural competency. Cultural competency assumes that cultural knowledge translates into competent practice, and the term competence is criticized for implying that a tangible set of skills and behaviours can be achieved and measured (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). According to Dean (2001), one can never unequivocally achieve competence simply by acquiring cultural knowledge and skills. That said, maintaining a continuous, mindful awareness of culture and diversity, including the complex ways in which they construct meaning and experience, promotes effective and ethical practice on an ongoing basis.

Intercultural capacity building and responsiveness in higher education institutions can be fostered by creating an enabling environment where cultural competence is replaced with cultural consciousness (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). This involves an ongoing and dynamic developmental process with no endpoint—one that requires active, critical, and purposeful engagement between international graduate students, domestic students, and higher education institutions.

Some parallels can be drawn with two elements of Zha's (2003) approach to internationalisation to build an enabling environment for intercultural capacities in higher education contexts. The ethos approach to internationalisation emphasizes creating a culture or climate that values and supports intercultural/international perspectives and initiatives. With this approach, the institution's leaders must be committed to building a culture that embraces intercultural perspectives and the internationalisation of practices and classroom pedagogy.

Secondly, the process approach stresses integrating an international and intercultural dimension into teaching, research, and service through a combination of activities, policies, and procedures. Lastly, the individual and collective abilities of international graduate students, domestic students, and higher education institutions can be employed to build shared meaning, capacity and commitment to action (Fullan & Quinn 2015) on intercultural awareness and responsiveness in higher education institutions.

Theoretical Framework

Selecting a theoretical framework not only shapes the questions but also connects the research to a particular field (Agee, 2015). My research focus was on students' perspectives and experiences within the field of educational research in adult learning. I was guided by some elements of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1991), and this informed this qualitative case study. In employing this theoretical framework to undergird my research, I concur with Jackson and Mazzei (2012), who assert that thinking with theory does not follow a method but rather relies on the willingness to borrow and reconfigure concepts, invent approaches and create new assemblages that demonstrate a range of analytic practices of thought, creativity, and intervention. It is central to the research design in the sense that my interest in the framework of transformational learning helped identify the focus of my investigation, sample selection, and interpretation of data analysis (Merriam, 2009). The Transformative Learning Theory posits an understanding of how adults make meaning and learn from their life experiences. My research participants came to graduate school as adults with prior experiences, and this informed their perspectives on intercultural capacities in a new environment.

The overarching guiding questions for this study encompassed how international graduate students perceived intercultural capacities and how those capacities influenced their experiences

and successes in a Canadian higher education context. These questions reflected Mezirow's ideas about a process of learning that leads, through a meaning-making process, to transformations in thought and action in individuals' lives (Agee, 2015). Further, Mezirow employed the term frame of reference to mean structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual's tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions (Taylor, 2008). The frame of reference is akin to an individual's established perspective; hence, a perspective transformation occurs in response to a disorienting dilemma, an occurrence that disturbs an individual's current perspective or view of reality (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). This disorienting dilemma could range from moments of disconnect to the new culture to anxiety, loneliness and self-esteem issues. In a previous study, Taylor (1994) explored a nexus between Transformative Learning Theory and international experiences of a group of 12 participants through his work on intercultural competence, which was based upon adults observing a different culture, working to understand the culture, and integrating pieces of the new culture into a new perspective.

The theoretical framework also informed the process of data collection and data analysis. Theories make sense of difficult social interactions and phenomena, and articulating a theoretical framework helps the sense-making process to be more explicit in the data analysis stage of the study (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Theoretical frameworks act as a lens through which the study is viewed. Maxwell (2005) observed that precisely framed research questions can point you to specific areas of theory that one can use as modules in developing an understanding of what's going on and suggest ways to do the study. Collins and Stockton (2018) further agree that a strong theoretical framework could allow the researcher to reveal existing predispositions about a study and assist in data coding and interpretation. From data collection to data analysis, theoretical frameworks attempt to explain phenomena logically and meaningfully, often

following narrative structures, and in this way, “theories are stories” (Goodson, 2010, p. 11). Out of these stories, meaning is constructed to form new knowledge.

My choice of a theoretical framework to guide my study was not arbitrary but reflected my important personal beliefs and understanding about the nature of knowledge, how it exists in relation to the observer, the possible roles to be adopted, and the tools to be employed in my research (Lysaght, 2011). Grant and Osanloo (2014) opine that all research is theoretical, even if implicitly. Theories are tools for thinking, describing, understanding, predicting, explaining, proving, organizing, connecting ideas and concepts, generalizing, generating research enterprises and suggesting research questions and answers. Using a theoretical framework gave me the latitude as a researcher to explore and venture into new territories in co-creating knowledge with my research participants.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a broad overview of my research topic involving higher education in Canada, cultural competencies, international graduate students in Canada, cultural identity and knowledge sharing, tensions and challenges, adult learning perspectives, intercultural capacity building, and the theoretical framework guiding my study. This chapter explored the current literature to understand the prospects for intercultural capacity building and responsiveness in a higher education context. The next chapter discusses the research design that guided this research.

CHAPTER THREE: Research Design

Overview

In this chapter, I provide details of the research design elements that informed this study. I begin with a rich description of the case, followed by the research purpose and questions. Additional sections in this study include ontological and epistemological assumptions of this research, the rationale for a qualitative research approach, methodology, trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations, my reflexivity as a researcher, limitations and delimitations, and a summary of this chapter.

I employed a qualitative single case study methodology (Merriam, 2009) to explore and understand international graduate students' perspectives on intercultural capacities and higher education responsiveness in a university in western Canada. This research sought to harness the students' experiences and perspectives on intercultural capacities supporting their success in higher education by focusing on promoting and embedding mutually beneficial culturally responsive educational processes and practices.

Intercultural capacity is the ability to enhance the consciousness, awareness and ongoing skill level of all educators, international graduate students, and domestic students by actively and continuously engaging with others from different cultures to make the necessary changes to enhance student achievement and success in higher education on an ongoing basis. I came to Canada as an international student to a graduate program in a school of education at a Western Canadian university. I had travelled from Ghana, a sub-Saharan, African, developing country—a country with a significantly different sociocultural history and reality. Contextualizing my own experience as an international student, I was confronted with issues of trying to adjust to a new cultural and academic environment in Canada. I soon came to realize a gap in understanding and

responding to international students' acculturation processes and related challenges pertaining to university policies aimed at supporting and accommodating international students' needs (Shafaei, Abd Razak, & Nejati, 2016). There is a need to understand what intercultural capacities means from the perspective of international students new to Canada.

Description of the Case

The site of my study was a higher education institution in Calgary, Western Canada. Calgary is located in the province of Alberta and prides itself on being the fourth-most liveable city in the world. Calgary scored 97.5 out of 100, earning top marks in stability, health care, education, and infrastructure ("We are number four, 2018"). The liveability index has the potential to attract international students to pursue further education in Calgary. The higher education institution situated in Western Canada had a total enrolment of 5,825 full-time graduate students as of Fall 2017. Out of this number, international students accounted for 1731, representing 29.7% of the entire graduate student population. The majority of international students come from China, Iran, India, the USA, and Saudi Arabia (University of Calgary, n.d.). My study is set in a temporal, geographical, organizational, and institutional context that allows boundaries to be drawn around my case (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This aligns with Merriam's (2009) conceptualization of a qualitative case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. The bounded system for this inquiry was the phenomenon of intercultural capacities.

Six international graduate students participated in this study to explore and understand the phenomenon of intercultural capacities in higher education contexts. As an international graduate student myself, I was involved in this inquiry as a researcher-participant. Through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and the use of a reflective journal of my perspectives

and experiences, I acknowledged that my own background shaped my interpretation and allowed me to position myself in the research as an individual involved in examining the phenomenon of intercultural capacities. This was done together with other research participants involved in the inquiry to achieve a holistic understanding in the natural setting of the higher education institution (Simons, 2009). Choosing the site to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of "intercultural capabilities" was guided by the geographical location, the availability of the higher education institution, and the willingness of the people to be studied, among other things (Simons, 2009). As a research-participant and an international graduate student in this institution, I sought to understand other international graduate students' perspectives and experiences in their new academic environment and how the higher education institution supports students to ensure their success in their new space. It is important to acknowledge my perceptions and interpretations as part of the research and, as a result, a subjective and interpretive orientation flowed throughout the inquiry (Creswell, 2014).

Gaining access to other international students was relatively straightforward because I had access to other international graduate students. I sat in class and interacted with other international graduate students who had come to pursue graduate studies. On several occasions, even before I formally began this study, I interacted informally with other graduate students who felt somewhat out of place in this new environment. We had exchanged and shared stories of how we felt as "others" on campus. I chose to focus on graduate students rather than undergraduates because I shared the lived experience as an international graduate student with my research participants. The opportunity to undertake this research allowed me to crystallize and deepen my understanding of intercultural conversations I had with other students. Understanding the phenomenon of intercultural capacities as a bounded case was not easy. I

initially knew what I wanted to research for my dissertation in terms of intercultural awareness within the context of higher education. The conceptualization of intercultural capacities involved a lot of mind work, writing, and reflections as moments of coming to know. Merriam (2009) agrees that a case study is the ideal form of inquiry to explore a broad scope of complex issues, particularly when human behaviour and social interactions are central to understanding topics of interest. My study involved five female and one male international graduate student. I was part of this research as researcher-participant as well. To ensure richness of different perspectives and maximum variation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), I interviewed participants from five different countries to inform my study, including myself as a researcher-participant from Ghana. Simons (2009) encourages researchers to write themselves into the text in order to meet the ethical point through which the researcher can reflect, thus allowing one to study the experience of others and not allow our predilections and values to intrude in unhelpful ways. I identify as a middle-aged black person (man) of colour, an international graduate student and a researcher-participant, and I consider myself as an insider for this research. At all times, I was cognizant and acknowledged my own biases as a researcher.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this case study was to explore and understand, with a group of international graduate students, perceptions of intercultural capacities and higher education responsiveness in a university in Western Canada. The study attempted to provide new knowledge on intercultural capacities from the lens of a group of international graduate students in Canada. According to Merriam (2009), cases are selected based on the research purpose and question, and for what they could reveal about the phenomenon or topic of interest. The aim is to provide a rich holistic description that illuminates one’s understanding of a phenomenon.

In seeking to understand the phenomenon of intercultural capacities, the following two overarching questions guided my study:

a) How do international graduate students understand the concept of intercultural capacities?

b) How do intercultural capacities influence the experience and success of international graduate students in higher education in Canada?

Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

Situating myself as a researcher is fundamental to my study. My ontological and epistemological assumptions I bring to my study serve as an intellectual lens through which I look at my research. My interpretivist ontology explains how I interpret reality, and my epistemology explains how I construct knowledge.

My sensibilities and thinking align with a constructivist paradigm or worldview (Merriam, 2009) of a researcher taking on a qualitative approach of understanding intercultural capacities through the perspectives and experiences of international graduate students for this study. My position is also influenced by the works of Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), who claim that reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed. As someone who grew up in a developing country, I also had a fair share of my formal education in that environment. My paradigm or worldview is influenced by the sociocultural background in which I grew up. My paradigm as a constructivist for the purpose of this research makes demands of me as a researcher, including the questions I ask and the interpretations I bring to them. My sociocultural background influences the way I perceive and understand the world. The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology, which assumes there are multiple realities, and a subjectivist epistemology where the knower and respondent co-create understandings in the natural world through a set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). There is the

understanding that the researcher will construct knowledge socially because of his or her subjective experiences of real life within the natural settings investigated (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Co-constructing knowledge was what I undertook with my research participants.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach

As a researcher, I ascribe to Merriam's (1998) portrayal of the qualitative researcher as someone who is "interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed" (p. 6). As a constructivist researcher, I seek to make sense of the participants' realities, which are local, specific, and constructed (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Punch, 2013). It is worth pointing out that this worldview or paradigm goes counter to the assumptions held by the positivist or postpositivist research tradition that meanings are objective and can be known through numeric measurement of a small number or categories of variables in an objective manner. Instead, the constructivist orientations seek multiplicity and complexity of meanings and acknowledge that researchers' biases ineluctably shape their interpretation (Lei, 2018).

My preference for a qualitative research approach identifies and corroborates with the view of Peshkin (1993), who affirms that qualitative research offers researchers the latitude of exploring a) a description of processes, relationships, settings and situations, systems, or people; b) interpretation of data that can explain, develop, elaborate or clarify reality and/or theory; c) verification of assumptions, claims, theories, or generalizations in real-world contexts; and d) evaluation of particular policies, practices, or innovations. My study, among other things, explored the perceptions of a group of students on intercultural capacities in a real-world context of the policies of a higher education institution.

Methodology

Case Study

Case study allows for a pragmatic, flexible research approach capable of providing comprehensive in-depth understanding of a diverse range of issues across a number of disciplines (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). Merriam (1998) points out that a qualitative case study is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting educational phenomena:

> A case study design is employed to gain an in depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)

This exploratory case study research inquiry was adopted to allow for a holistic, in-depth investigation (Merriam, 2009) and understanding of intercultural capacities as phenomena. I sought to understand students' perspectives on intercultural capacities to influence policy and practice in higher education institutions. Most current literature focuses on cultural competencies from the perspectives of higher education institutions (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Garson et al., 2016). There is a paucity in the literature on intercultural capacities from the perspective of international students. Using a qualitative case study approach, I sought to harness the voices of students in the grand conversation of intercultural capacities. In deciding to go with Merriam's approach, my bounded case was selected based on the research purpose and questions, and for what they could reveal about the phenomenon of intercultural capacities (Merriam, 1998).

On points of convergence on what case study research can be employed for, some seminal methodologists on case study research agree that it is a valid form of inquiry to explore a

broad scope of complex issues, particularly when human behaviour and social interactions are central to understanding topics of interest (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). To justify the use of case study as the methodology for my research, it is important to first conceptualize what a case study is. According to Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, and Morales (2007),

> case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 33)

This brings me to how I arrived at bounding my case. The phenomenon I explored was intercultural capacities and it was bound as a case by a group of international graduate students who had at least one year of postgraduate education, by way of an institution (post-secondary), and lastly by geography as an institution located in Western Canada. My case as a phenomenon in a bounded context served as the unit of analysis for my study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This case study research design is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit, as described by Merriam (2009). My study was "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and [relied] heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources" (Merriam, 1988, p. 16). Additionally, this case study research was particularistic because it focused on a specific phenomenon such as a program, event, process, person, institution, or group (Merriam, 1988). The phenomenon under study was intercultural capacities, and it was bound as a case by a group of international graduate students, with a minimum of one year of graduate education, in a particular higher education institution in

Western Canada. Each participant offered their individual perspective on the phenomenon of intercultural capacities, and their collective heuristic beam "illuminate[s] the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). The result of my study was a "rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11) from the perspective of international graduate students.

Participants

Recruitment

Through convenience sampling, I identified and selected participants based on their accessibility to me as a researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The participants were international graduate students who were enrolled at the university and had at least a year of graduate education. I was also a researcher-participant in this inquiry. According to Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012), as a qualitative researcher, I am an instrument of this research inquiry. This researcher characteristic creates unique conversational spaces that inevitably influence what is constructed, selected, and counted as data. My initial aim was to recruit six to eight international graduate students in the higher education institution in Western Canada, including myself as a researcher-participant. I ended up recruiting six international graduate students, plus myself as a seventh participant. I ended up with six participants when I realized that I had reached a point of saturation (Creswell, 2014). I noticed the same recurring patterns and similar threads in participants' narratives. To participate, candidates needed to meet the following criteria: (a) to be an international graduate student from a country outside Canada, (b) to have been in graduate school for a minimum of one year in a masters or doctoral program, and (c) be 21 years of age or older.

Initial primary contact was by email and telephone. The participants who agreed to the study replied via email, and interview dates and locations were set up. A recruitment letter was emailed to each participant in advance of his or her participation. A one-page project description that disclosed the purpose of the study was also included in the email. In addition, a written consent form was provided, signed by each participant in advance of his or her participation on the day of the interview and filed for future reference.

Data Collection Methods

As a researcher, I approached this research with the awareness of my role as a primary data gathering instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in this qualitative study and the self as a key fieldwork tool (Van Maanen, Manning, & Miller, 1989). Guided by reflexivity, I endeavoured to be present at all times and ensured my biases were made explicit during the study.

Interviews

I undertook a semi-structured interview of a cross-section of six international graduate students from around the world who were currently enrolled at the university. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) see the semi-structured interview as the most valuable form of interview because it "seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect of the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 27). The interviews focused on questions inviting participants to respond to open-ended prompts to unearth each participant's understanding of the concept of intercultural capacities. Creswell (2015) recommended using open-ended questions enabling participants to voice their experiences unconstrained by the researcher's perspective.

In creating and producing my questions for the semi-structured interview, I was at all times cognizant of the role theory plays in informing my questions. Theory is inextricably linked to research questions, whether shaping them initially or suggesting new questions as the study

unfolds. In many qualitative studies, an overarching question will point towards one or more of the theoretical constructs that frame the study (Agee, 2015). Drawing on an example of one of the constructs is the disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991) that international graduate students face in their new cultural environment. A typical interview question to further understand this phenomenon was how alienated or welcome they felt as international graduate students in their new environment. As Maxwell (2005) explained, research questions need to account for one's tentative theories about phenomena. Those tentative theories and the questions that result from them may very well change to accommodate data collection or preliminary findings.

Each interview lasted approximately an hour and took place at a mutually agreed location. Five of the interviews took place on the premises of the higher education institution. One interview took place in the participant's private home office. Each interview protocol began with a brief introduction of the research and a review of the consent form. Due to the complex nature of my research topic on intercultural capacities and the varied meanings it evokes, I started with the following preamble:

> I will begin by giving you a brief narrative about the study. There's a lot of discussion and literature around the importance of diversity in higher education especially about being competent with interacting with international students from other backgrounds. This is manifested in different terms, such as cultural competency, cross-cultural competency, intercultural competency, and intercultural learning just to mention a few. In your own words, what does all these things mean to you?

At all times, I was aware of my positionality as a researcher and an instrument of data collection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). I made the participants aware that the interviews were being recorded. My interviews were done with a portable handheld recording device (Olympus

Digital Voice Recorder WS-853) and an additional backup software device (Audacity) on my password-protected laptop. During each interview, I took important notes and made key observations. I made sure to go over my notes after each interview, adding key ideas and thoughts to ensure I got a deep understanding of each participant's story. I transcribed the interviews myself as a way of immersing myself and familiarizing myself with the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). I gave the participants the option of choosing their pseudonym and made sure participant information was protected at all times. After the interviews were done and transcribed, I emailed the participants copies of their respective transcripts to confirm and check for accuracy as a way of validating the interview data as a form of member checking (see Appendix E). According to Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016), member checking is a process in which participants check their interviews for accuracy. I gave the participants one week to review the emailed transcripts. Five of the participants responded and were okay with the transcripts without any change. One participant edited her transcripts and asked for identifiers of names of places and work type removed. I complied with that request and proceeded to work on my findings for the study.

Documents

I examined program and support service documents pertaining to internationalisation and intercultural capacity initiatives offered by the university. Creswell (2015) asserts that documents could be public and private records and can include journals, minutes of meetings, and evaluations. I gathered and analyzed publicly available documents I acquired from the university on internationalisation and international students to employ as a source for more specific details, and to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 2014). Documents were collected before the research to corroborate the finding from my research participants. The

documents used for this study included documents from the university. Key amongst the documents analyzed included the following: Eyes High Strategy Document 2017 to 2022, 2019 Delivering Impact Document, Community Report 2019, 2018-19 Annual Report, 2019 Comprehensive Institutional Plan, 2018-23 Academic Plan, 2018, Canadian Bureau for International Education Western Regional Meeting (Championing Innovation in Internationalization), Ii'taa'poh'to'p – Indigenous Strategy Document, 2013 International Strategy, and 2018-23 Research Plan. Bowen (2009) agrees that in order to seek convergence and corroboration, qualitative researchers usually use at least two resources in the form of different data sources and methods. The purpose is to provide a confluence of evidence that enhances credibility. Corroborating findings across data sets can reduce the impact of potential bias by examining information collected through different methods.

Reflective Journal

Lastly, I used a reflective journal as my third method of data collection. As a researcher-participant in this inquiry, it was important to highlight how writing a research journal was an important qualitative research method to learn about the experience of research and gather invaluable data. The use of a reflective journal is critically important to the documentation of the researcher's personal research journey and helps validate the authenticity of the research data collected using this method (Lamb, 2013). Andrusyszyn and Davie (1997) agree that, as a form of self-reflection, it promotes personal growth. It allowed me as a researcher-participant to understand the intersections of my personal life as an international graduate student and connect my thoughts, values, motivations and behaviours in a format that was accessible and meaningful to this study.

In my reflective journal, I was cognizant of my role as a researcher-participant and the

multiple identities I brought to the research. I endeavoured to clearly describe the intersecting contextual relationships of my race and sociocultural background to increase the credibility of the findings and deepen the understanding of my work (Berger, 2015) in this qualitative case study.

Data Analysis

My data analysis involved three different sets of data from the semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and my personal reflective journal. I began by transcribing the audiotaped interviews, coded the data, and looked for emerging patterns within the data. I employed coding as a form of ascription of a category or label to pieces of data in response to data collected from the study. Two distinct forms of coding were employed. The coding involved the process of breaking down segments of text data into smaller units and then examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing the data into themes (Cohen et al., 2018).

1. Open Coding: I began with open coding, which involved simply attaching a new label to a piece of text that described and categorized that piece of text, and moved on to my second level of coding in the form of axial coding.

2. Axial Coding: With axial coding, the data originally segmented into small units through open coding are recombined in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

In assigning labels to my codes I used some descriptive coding and process coding (Miles et al., 2014), to assist me in the coding of my themes.

Secondly in reviewing my documents:

1. I inductively analyzed the documents by searching for domains that emerged from the data rather than imposing them on data prior to collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

2. From these domains, I looked out for salient topics and recurring patterns, grouping

common themes and patterns into related categories, and comparing all major categories with reference to my previous interview themes to form new perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Lastly, with my reflective journal:

1. I identified conceptual boundaries and determined the fit and relevance of categories (Charmaz, 2011). Using the *in vivo* method, I reviewed line, phrase, sentence, and paragraph segments from my reflective journal to code the data.

2. The codes I identified were grouped into categories, and these category codes were compared with the interview and document analysis so that themes would emerge across all three sets of data. Using this process, I identified similarities, differences, and general patterns (Bowen, 2009).

After I identified major topics from the semi-structured interviews, I brought in my document analysis and reflective journal for comparisons and discrepancies between my data sets. The above data processing strategies allowed for:

a) analysis and coding data to be done thematically (Creswell 2015); and

b) reporting a case description and discussing case-based themes that emerged from the findings as a whole (Creswell, 2015).

My data analysis began the day I started the interviews. It was an ongoing and iterative basis throughout the course of the study, and this process allowed me to formulate a clearer sense of my case and the opportunity to self-critique the adequacy of the data I collected (Miles et al., 2014). Prior to drawing out themes from the findings, I approached my analysis by breaking down the findings into broad topics.

Quality of the Research Process

Trustworthiness

As an international graduate student, I perceived myself as an insider who shared a similar background to the international students I studied. This gave me an advantage in collecting qualitative data over outsiders who do not share similar backgrounds or experiences with the group under study. Nevertheless, my focus was not on analyzing positionality as a binary question of insider versus outsider. In a quest to make my study trustworthy, I was more concerned with the constructivist perspective that recognizes a broader range or continuum of researcher-participant relationships, influenced by the numerous, fluid identities of both researchers and research participants (Flores, 2018).

There is much questioning of the trustworthiness of qualitative research by scholars steeped in the positivist tradition. Guba and Lincoln (1998) countered this worldview by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to affirm the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Credibility

One of the best methods of determining the credibility of qualitative research is employing triangulation by using multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study used interviews, documents, and a reflective journal as methods for its data collection. Patton (2015) agrees that triangulation, in whatever form, increases credibility and quality by countering the concern or accusation that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, or a sole source, or a single investigator's blinders. Employing three methods of data collection contributed to the validity and credibility of the study. Another way of ensuring internal validity or credibility is member checks or respondent

validation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This involved soliciting feedback from my interview participants to rule out the possibility of misrepresenting what they initially said during the interview. Maxwell (2013) affirms that this is the most important way of ruling out the possibility of participant misperception about what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying my own biases.

Transferability

For a qualitative study to be transferable to other settings and contexts, the findings of the study should have a rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973). Rich, thick description is a strategy to enable potential transferability, as it refers to the description of the participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence from the participant interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The best way to ensure the possibility of transferability is to create a thick description of the sending context so that someone in a potential receiving context may assess the similarity between themselves and the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Giving an adequate description of my study context will guide other researchers to be able to make informed decisions on whether the findings can be transferred to their context in other studies.

Dependability

In doing qualitative research, it is particularly challenging to replicate the results. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) agree that though several interpretations of the same data can be made, and all stand directly contradicted by new evidence, if the findings of the study are consistent with the data presented, the study can be considered dependable and reliable. Tracy (2013) postulates that because socially constructed understandings are always in process and necessarily partial, even if the study were repeated, the context and participants would have

necessarily transformed over time through aging, learning or moving on. Notwithstanding, this does not discredit the results of the original or subsequent studies and affirms the dependability of the study.

Confirmability

Unlike in quantitative research, where the goal is to achieve objectivity, qualitative research focuses on the findings being the result of qualitative research rather than an outcome of the biases and subjectivity of the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). I acknowledged my biases throughout the study and ensured transparency that will make it possible for my data collected through interviews, document analysis, and reflective journals to be traced back to the source.

Ethical Considerations

It is imperative to lay bare my axiology as a researcher. Axiology refers to the ethical issues that need to be considered when planning research. It considers the philosophical approach to making decisions of value or the right decisions (Finnis, 1980). It involves defining, evaluating and understanding concepts of right and wrong behaviour relating to the research. This is where the role of ethics comes in for me as a researcher. Abiding by a code of ethics is a hallmark of a good researcher. Creswell (2014) highlights several ethical issues that can come up prior to a study and how to address them. As a researcher, I was always truthful to the participants and myself. I ensured to disclose the purpose of my research to all my participants. In collecting data, I avoided deceiving participants by reiterating the purpose of the study and discussing how the data would be used. Integrity and honesty are cardinal principles I abided by as a researcher in my research undertakings.

I was aware that some ethical implications could come up during the study; thus, I was

cognizant of that possibility and did not take anything for granted. I respected my participants' rights at all times, including cultural, gender and age differences (Simmons, 2009). Due to the nature of this study and the possible sensitivity regarding issues of racial and cultural identity, there was a minor risk that in responding to questions, some emotional concerns could arise for the participants, including topics of colour, marginalization, gender, and discrimination, and I was attentive to their emotions and sensitivities. If any concern had arisen for a participant, the participant could quit the research at any time without penalty and voluntarily withdraw from the study. I informed the participants of counselling services available in the university community for a minimal charge, should the need arise.

Before I proceeded with my study, I sought ethics approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board of the University of Calgary. Ethics boards serve as "institutional gatekeepers" (Simons, 2009, p. 112) of research axiology during a study. A dissertation proposal was submitted to include a general statement to the effect that the research would conform to the ethical principles of the university. On receipt of ethics approval, I sent out a letter of invitation/participation email (see Appendix A) and administered an informed consent document outlining the nature and purpose of the study (see Appendix B). Also included in the information email was a project description of the study to all prospective participants (see Appendix C). Those who agreed to participate were given the consent form to fill out and sign before each interview. The consent form was emailed to participants prior to the interviews. At all times, I ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of my participants by adopting pseudonyms for all participants. All my interviews and transcripts and my personal journal relating to the study were stored with strict confidence in a secure environment in line with protocols agreed with the ethics board.

Reflexivity

Coming into this study as a researcher, my personal journey, motivation, and assumptions allow me to come to terms in knowing the self within the process of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Settling into a new cultural environment found me asking myself a myriad of questions. Moments of solitude, loneliness and countless soliloquies and my personal struggle fitting into Canada led me to explore intercultural capacities and how higher education institutions can make international students feel more welcome in their new environment.

As an international student and a researcher, one way to privilege subjective cultural experiences is for individuals to gain awareness of how our subjectivities influence how we construct and interact with others (Gross, 2000). In this way, the focus would not be so much on mastering cultural knowledge but understanding how knowledge is constructed and contested.

Reflexivity offers us the opportunity as researchers to come to terms not only with our choice of a research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process but with ourselves and with multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research settings (Alcoff & Potter, 2013). The cognitive journey that drew me into my study cannot be taken for granted. The need to foreground my reflexivity and how it shaped my study cannot be ignored. I strove to be always present in the moment during my research. Simons (2009) acknowledges the importance of documenting the researcher's thoughts and feelings for reflection. I took cognizance of personal reflections and acknowledged my biases during the study, and I anticipated the influence of my subjectivity and assumptions on my research.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Identifying the limitations of this qualitative study is of profound importance to the research. As a researcher-participant I found it necessary to address what I deemed were limitations to this study. A potential limitation of this study as a researcher-participant is the potential element of bias towards my findings and interpretations of the study. Also, as an international graduate student and an insider to this study, the possibility of my biases influencing the study is ever-present. I mitigated this limitation by explaining my biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding this research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) throughout the study.

Limitations of a study expose the conditions that may weaken the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). As a researcher, it was important to identify and acknowledge my biases (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Through reflexivity, I ensured to acknowledge my biases at all time during this study. Drawing attention to my limitations does not in any way take away from the findings that emerged during the course of this study but rather added to the study's trustworthiness. This study covered the stories of participants from only one higher education institution in Canada. All participants were doctoral students, and I missed out on the perspectives of master's students in the institution, even though the study sought to explore the narratives of graduate students. Participants comprised five females and two males, myself included as a researcher-participant.

Another limitation of the study was its voluntary nature. Due to this, the participants who came forward may fail to capture a broader diversity of international students at the research site in terms of gender, background, experience, motivation, and circumstances (Hayden, 2015).

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study are the conditions or parameters intentionally imposed to limit the study's scope (Creswell, 2014). This was done with the intention of defining the boundaries of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). My study was delimited to six international graduate students for the semi-structured interviews. I investigated the perspectives of international graduate students in a higher education institution in Western Canada; only these international graduate students in that institution were allowed to participate. Also, participant selection was limited to participants who had been in their graduate program for at least a year. No domestic students participated in this study.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the qualitative research design that informed my study. I began with an overview and a description of the case, research purpose, and questions. I then covered the ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding the research, the rationale for a qualitative research approach, methodology, the broad research design involving recruitments of participants and data collection methods, data analysis, quality of the research process, the ethical considerations guiding the study, my reflexivity as a researcher, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. The next chapter covers the findings of my study.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

Overview

In this chapter, I present the findings of all data collected from the research participants through semi-structured interviews, documents, and my reflective journal. This research inquiry aimed to gain an understanding of intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts by listening to the voices, perspectives, and experiences of international graduate students in a university in Western Canada. To gain this understanding, I interviewed six international graduate students, included myself as a researcher-participant through the use of my reflective journal, and explored documents from the university regarding international students. Of the six students, I interviewed five female doctoral students and one male doctoral student. The individual interviews averaged about 60 minutes per participant. The interviews were conducted over twenty-one days. The overall goal of this research inquiry was to understand intercultural capacities and attempt to build an intercultural capacity framework that will assist higher education institutions to address the needs of international graduate students properly and efficiently. Intercultural capacity building and responsiveness in higher education institutions can be fostered by creating an enabling environment where cultural competence is replaced with cultural consciousness (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016) as an ongoing and dynamic developmental process with no endpoint—one that requires active, critical, and purposeful engagement between international graduate students, domestic students, and higher education institutions.

To achieve the objectives of this study I focused on two main guiding questions: a) How do international graduate students perceive the concept of intercultural capacities?; b) How do intercultural capacities influence the experience and success of international graduate students in higher education in Canada?

The research findings are organized through topics that emerged in relation to the research questions. The participant responses to the questions provided an in-depth understanding of intercultural capacities within the context of a higher education institution and answered the over-arching research questions guiding the study.

This chapter is divided into the following areas: settings of the case; portrait of participants; presentation of findings according to the research questions; and summary.

Settings of the Case

My research took place in a university in Western Canada. The participants in the study were international graduate students enrolled in various programs offered by the university with a total population of over 6000 graduate students. The university opened in April 1966 and has continued to attract students from all over the world. The university covers 526 acres, represents 14 faculties, boasts 185,000 alumni in more than 150 countries, and is hosted in the third most diverse city in Canada. The higher education institution has internationalisation as one of its big priorities. In conjunction with various faculties across the campus, the university prides itself on being a safe space that is committed to building a culture of commitment to internationalisation and cross/intercultural awareness and responsiveness. One of its primary objectives is to develop collaborative and sustainable partnerships founded on reciprocity, thus creating opportunities at home and abroad for students, faculty, and non-faculty to step beyond their own comfort and familiarity to explore and experience diverse ways of knowing, being and doing in the world (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). The university has a reputation as one of the best institutions of higher learning in Canada.

Participant Demographics

All six participants who volunteered to participate in the study were international graduate students of the higher education institution in Western Canada. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was allowed to choose a pseudonym (see Table 1). The participants had been in the institution for two to four years. Participants were doctoral students from various faculties within the institution. Care was taken to protect the identity of each participant. My perspectives, views, and experiences as a researcher-participant were threaded throughout the findings.

Name	**Gender**	**Country**	**Years in Graduate School**	**Postgraduate**
Faith	Female	Costa Rica	4	Doctoral
Margaret	Female	China	2	Doctoral
Pera	Female	Turkey	2	Doctoral
Mary	Female	Participant requested country of origin not be disclosed	2	Doctoral
Micky	Male	Ghana	2	Doctoral
Heaven	Female	Ghana	2	Doctoral

Table 1. Participant demographics

Participant Portraits

Below is a portrait of each of the participants in a form of a brief background vignette about each participant on their journey to pursue a post-graduate degree. The identity of my research participants was kept confidential. Each participant chose their own pseudonym.

Faith. Faith identifies as a Latina middle-aged temporary international female graduate student. She was born and raised in a small rural town in the southern part of Costa Rica. At age 18, she became a single teenage mom with limited opportunities. However, this event in her life granted her funding to study an English Teaching major at a public university. After completion of her undergraduate program, she was hired at the same university. She has been an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher for more than 16 years. She worked with young adults from rural areas. In 2016, she got a scholarship from her workplace to complete her PhD program. She chose a research specialization in Canada that was influenced by her desire to learn and contribute to her campus and community development. She moved to Canada with her 23-year-old daughter, 16-year-old son, and husband for her graduate studies. She considers herself a lifelong learner and acknowledges her strong passion for formal education.

Margaret. Margaret spent her childhood in an inland city in mainland China. After gaining her high school diploma, she migrated to Beijing, the capital city of China, in 2005, to pursue postsecondary education. There, she gained her bachelor's and master's degrees and worked for three years in a multicultural business setting after graduation. She got married and made her home in Beijing. She thought she would settle permanently there. Then, one day in 2014, her husband told her that he would be transferred to work in Calgary. That was the first time she heard about this city. She eventually joined him during Christmas that year after quitting her job. She started her journey as an international student in 2016 when she was admitted to a two-year master's program at a university in Western Canada. She is continuing her academic pursuit as a PhD student and has had more opportunities to involve herself in serving the campus community than she did when she was in the master's program.

Pera. Pera is 30 years old. Her parents are retired now. Her father was a police officer,

and her mother was a registered nurse anesthetist. She was born into a lower-middle-class family and went to public schools all her life. She identifies as female and has been married since 2017. She is from Turkey and has been living in Western Canada for about 24 months now with a study visa. She came to Canada with her husband. Being in Western Canada is her first experience of living in a foreign country. She came to Canada after being accepted for a PhD program at the University. In her home country of Turkey, she used to live in Istanbul. She completed a BSc degree at a university there and worked as a teacher for two years. She also worked for another two years as a research associate at a research center that specialized in educational research with an emphasis on teachers' professional development while she completed her MSc at another Turkish university.

Mary. Mary has been a student at this higher education institution for about five years. She decided to come to do a second master's degree because she wasn't sure that she wanted to commit to doctoral research. She was pleasantly surprised to find that the academic program had opportunities to cater to her ontological and philosophical background, so she did not feel that she was losing her identity as a thinker/person from a different worldview and culture (i.e., as a student). In fact, she found the opportunity to expand learning about what was near and dear to her. She found something a bit insulating about being in a graduate academic program. Even though she had to work to supplement her income, there was something comforting about being in an environment where her contributions were valued both as a student and employee. It was a refreshing break for her from having felt overworked and undervalued at her previous teaching post before she began graduate school in Western Canada. (She said these sentiments were not unique to her, but they were a collective air of discontent among her previous colleagues). It was the need to take a break that brought her to graduate school and made her appreciative of

everything along the way. She found the atmosphere at the university hospitable for the most part. As much as she is looking forward to graduating and getting employment in the city, she is less eager to join the workforce because she expects the bubble of grad school will be gone. Her glimpses of various working contexts in the city have made her realize that there are intercultural challenges beneath the surface that she has not quite prepared for even though she has attended all sorts of workshops. Mary feels she blends in throughout campus because she has been able to fit in as a student, but having spent most of her adult life elsewhere, fitting in in a working context might be a whole other story.

Micky. Micky was born in Ghana but was raised and grew up in Togo, a francophone country that borders Ghana to the east in West Africa. He had his basic school education from nursery to high school in the francophone country. He self-identifies as more francophone than Ghanaian. He completed high school in Togo before moving to Ghana and did his first degree at a university in Ghana. His time in the francophone country gave him a good grasp of the French language. Micky graduated as a French-trained teacher and is a professional teacher. He taught for a few years before moving to Canada to do his master's degree at a university on the east coast of Canada. He is currently pursuing a PhD in French at a university in Western Canada. He comes from a Christian tradition where he has was a youth leader and preaches at church sometimes.

Heaven. Heaven was born in the eastern part of Ghana. She completed her first university degree in Ghana. She later moved to Canada to do her master's degree at a university in Newfoundland and Labrador. Upon completion of her master's degree, she applied to a university in Western Canada to do her PhD and is currently in the second year of her doctoral program. Due to her father's job as a pastor, her family moved around in Ghana for a while. She

has lived in the central, western, and upper east parts of Ghana. Her husband joined her in Canada when she began pursuing her PhD program. She has had the opportunity to travel and has visited South Africa. She keeps busy by listening to music and reading motivational books.

Presentation of Findings

The findings were derived from the semi-structured interviews, my reflective journal, and documents collected from the university. After personally transcribing the interviews to immerse myself and get intimate with the data collected, I sent out the transcripts to the individual participants with an email to make sure what was captured in the interviews was properly reported.

I organized the findings by attempting to answer the two overarching research questions guiding the study. I included direct quotes from data sources to highlight the participant perspectives so as to capture the crux and complexity of the phenomenon of intercultural capacities and higher education institutions' responsiveness. In capturing their perspectives and experiences, I chose to capture as close to verbatim as possible the essence, nuances, and complexities of their narratives informing this study. Elements like pauses, thoughts, and laughter were incorporated in the findings to capture the essence and spirit of the dialogue with the participants. The quotes employed were written as close to verbatim as possible to preserve the participants' voices and ideas. I also looked out for non-verbal communication that paid close attention not only to the content of what was said but also the tone in which it was said. I wanted to convey a rich description of the stories from the participants, so I was generous in sharing as many findings as there were in an attempt to answer the research questions.

The findings that emerged from this study are grouped together as topics that emanated from the participants' responses during the interview, from my reflective journal, and from the

documents reviewed for this research. In arriving at the topics from my findings, I realized there were overlaps between some topics. As a researcher, I had to consider the appropriateness of how each topic fitted into the overall story about the entire findings in relation to my research questions.

The first research question regarding how international graduate students perceived the concept of intercultural capacities resulted in one topic with associated sub-topics. Some of the interview questions asked during the data collection phase that informed the first key research question were as follows:

a) What do you understand by the concept of intercultural capacities?

b) Any suggestions on building intercultural capacities by the university?

c) As international graduate students, how can you contribute personally to building intercultural capacities?

The second research question about how intercultural capacities influence the experience and success of international graduate students in higher education in Canada resulted in five topics with associated sub-topics. Examples of some interview questions that guided the research question in the interview phase are:

a) Any significant learning moments regarding intercultural awareness that came to mind?

b) Share any cultural challenges or barriers you faced as an international graduate student in your new academic environment.

c) Describe any particular supports or experiences you recall that made you feel welcome, fitting in, or alienated.

d) The level and type of supports/ activities that you received from the institution.

e) How has your cultural background and ethnicity aided or hindered you in adjusting to life

at the university?

f) Describe your relationship and learning moments with domestic and international students.

g) Any suggestions you have for the university to support the integration and success of international graduate students.

The following six topics emerged from the data:

1. Building Blocks
2. Support Systems
3. Needs of International Graduate Students
4. Learning Moments
5. Identity and Cultural Tensions
6. Barriers Faced by International Graduate Students

Topic 1: Building Blocks of Intercultural Capacities

The first topic that emerged from the participants' interviews focused on ways of and suggestions on building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. All six participants offered inputs on their perspectives on intercultural capacities. Due to the polysemic nature of the words regarding intercultural and capacities in education literature, I began by preambling my discussion with my participants by giving them a brief background on the discussion and literature about diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions and the associated tensions surrounding higher education institutions' use of cultural competencies as a framework to understand intercultural awareness. I invited the participants to tell me in their own words how all these things meant to them. Below are the findings from the study.

Intercultural communication. Communicating between and amongst individuals from different cultures came to the fore in the interviews. Communication referred to all elements of

verbal and non-verbal communication, and the different interpretations and implied meanings that impact communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. This was evidenced when Faith broached the topic of intercultural communication:

> I'm thinking about the little details in conversation and culture . . . here I learned that [when] my supervisor or any other professor will say, "I strongly suggest," it's not a suggestion [laughter]. It's that you have to do it. But culturally, in my county in my language, if someone says that, it is just a suggestion, so yeah. That's what I'm meaning about the when I say the meaning behind communication.

The importance of communication was not missed by Margaret. She felt that:

> In Canada or maybe in the dominant white culture, everyone is supposed to speak of themselves just immediately, right? When you're asked to talk about yourself, you're supposed to talk. It's a very talkative culture. So you have to be very expressive to be successful. But in China being talkative is not valued. We should show more respect. We get more time to think.

Her contribution drew out a parallel between the communication differences between the cultures of two different countries, namely China and Canada.

According to Pera, communication between individuals of different cultures relies on "interpersonal interactions . . . getting to know other cultures and other ways of living." This is not always an easy, linear, and straightforward process. Mary acknowledged that a lot of effort is required in intercultural communication. She talked about the complexity and challenge of "dealing with people you've not quite understood, and so you're always on your P's and Q's."

Heaven drew out the contrast in communication styles by international graduate students in classroom environments and how meaning was not properly translated. This she attributed to

"cultural differences when it comes to giving examples to support even an argument you're making in class." The importance of intercultural communication in helping to build intercultural capacities in higher education needs to be given more attention.

Despite the concerns and perspectives expressed by the participants, in analyzing documents for this study, in the revised *Eyes High* strategy document from the higher education institution there is a commitment aligned to building intercultural capacities that made mention of communication:

> Collaborating across groups and embracing meaningful two-way communication that is honest and open. It also means overcoming structural, social and cultural barriers to create a safe, inclusive, healthy and respectful environment —one that values diversity and the dignity of every person. (University of Calgary, 2019c)

Cultural awareness. All participants agreed that the higher education institutions were not culturally aware of the needs of international graduate students and more needed to be done. There was the general belief that current efforts from the higher education institutions should move beyond just paying lip service and translated into more intentional actions. The lack thereof of cultural awareness by the higher education institution is amplified when Faith concurred:

> I think they're aware that we're different. That's it. But I don't [long pause] think they are culturally aware. I know they are tolerant and that is good because a tolerant country or society will respect you. . . I think that there are good initiatives that need to be strengthened.

Faith calls for more effort in strengthening the cultural awareness of higher education institutions. Margaret shared similar sentiments with Faith regarding how the university was

culturally unaware of the needs of international graduate students when she affirmed that "I feel in [University], they don't care about international students. Yeah. Yeah. I can't tell where it shows the university is culturally aware of international students' needs."

Other participants suggested ways in which the higher education institutions could be active and purposeful. Pera advised that "they need to listen to us[international students] more often." By listening to the voices of international students, their input can effectively help foster intercultural building capacities. Micky shared similar sentiments when he also affirmed that "they don't really approach us." He was explicitly referring to the university not approaching international students for any input in building cultural awareness. Heaven agreed with the other participants on the absence of the voices and contribution of international graduate students on the lack of cultural awareness when she claimed: "Our voice are not even heard. Nobody's asking us of our needs."

For Mary, for the institution to be culturally aware, they need to "[create] spaces for multiple ethnicities and cultures to feel welcome and feel valued. Despite this assertion, she felt the current situation on cultural awareness was just "superficial."

Role of international graduate students. Building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions cannot be the sole responsibility of only the education institutions. The participants shared various ways and agency in which they could play their part in building intercultural capacities. Faith spoke about looking for spaces to contribute her quota as an international graduate student in her role as a community advisor:

> In my own little small way, [thinking] . . . my contribution there has helped in this way, like how I'm bringing my culture to these conversations. Not to be, first of all, not to wait to be invited, or not to wait for invitation but just try to push a little bit.

Similarly, Margaret showed initiative and agency she took in getting a role as an international graduate student advisor and how it provided an opportunity for intercultural learning:

> So I actually initiated some events for international students and their spouses to share a few photos, their experiences, their life histories in other cultures so that both domestic students and students from other cultures can learn from each other, yeah. Yeah, I think we should provide more opportunities like this, fun and safe space for people to learn about everybody's life.

Pera on the other hand recommended volunteering as a form of how she can contribute to building intercultural capacity as an international graduate student. My dialogue with her appeared to ignite in her the need for her to reach out and contribute her quota when she voluntarily said "maybe I can volunteer for some services on campus. And I also try to do, in my own way, by sharing some cultural things on my social media account." Mary went beyond the role of just volunteering as an international graduate student and opening up and having the agency to have difficult conversations about differences and biases regarding intercultural capacity building. She appeared very animated on her stance on having difficult conversations about issues of biases, prejudices, and diversity in higher education institutions. She spoke passionately about "the courage to be vulnerable and be honest" to engage in conversations of differences. On an encouraging note, Micky challenged international students to step out of our comfort zone and reach out to other students from different sociocultural backgrounds by availing "ourselves to contribute to that cultural diversity. At times when they [domestic students] call us, we pull back. We don't want to respond. It's high time we stopped those things and avail ourselves."

Topic 2: Support System

For an intercultural capacity framework to properly function in a higher education institution, support systems should be in place to support international students. The interview participants discussed various support systems they found to be important to them.

Support from supervisors. Four out of the six participants talked about the level and type of support and/or lack of support thereof they received from their supervisors and how it impacted them as international graduate students.

In referring to her personal experiences Margaret was full of praise of the kind of academic support she received from her instructors in her faculty by remarking that "they're very careful about what they say and at least they treat you nicely. They listen to what you say. In general, they treat you as a student, yeah."

Faith also explained how the academic supports she received allowed her to have a voice within the classroom space:

> In the faculty, in my classes, all my professors were really welcoming because, as I said, I was not only a student there. But they wanted to listen, and they invited us to share our experiences and to see how we could connect the topics to our experiences.

Academic support from academic instructors seemed to be a key support system the participants were eager to share and spoke positively about. Pera goes beyond the support she received from her supervisor and was full of praise for her supervisor in terms their inter-personal rapport they shared. She claimed "the biggest support that I get from the institution is my supervisor. And those are like personal conversations." Even before Mary got admission to the university she had established a good connection with her supervisor through email correspondence. Their relationship was an exemplar of good academic support:

> He gave me something to read and gave me some recommendations . . . made me feel like I was at home, that I chose the right place. And I suppose just knowing that I would have someone who's in my corner, I think even though there are difficulties, that gave me a sense of security.

Despite the glowing praise and support from her supervisor, Mary was quick to add that not all instructors we well equipped to handle cultural issues:

> I don't know if [all] supervisors are being trained to be supervisors. That's the broad conclusion I'm coming to. Therefore, if they're not being trained to be supervisors, do you think they're being trained to deal with cross-cultural issues? No.

Support from other international students. A number of participants found support, solace, and companionship in other international students. Margaret drew her support from other international students. These international graduate students were students from an Asian sociocultural background just like her. She makes mention of support from students of other minority international student groups as well:

> I feel that I have my own support network and most of them are my co-ethnics, like the Chinese and the Asians. [long pause and seemingly deep thought], I think that the skin of color still matters. That when you see people of your skin color and or maybe you feel that they are of Chinese heritage like even though they're from Philippines, they're from Vietnam, I still feel that we belong. I feel you understand me.

The influence and impact of other international students was not lost on Faith. She expressed profound gratitude for the support of other international students and what it meant for:

> My group of international students classmates, they are gold for me. They were my support since day one until now. So I can say yeah, I have a support group here, an

> academic social support here. But they are all international students, so if the idea was to, let's say, be one group with all students, it didn't happen.

In contrast to support and relationship with domestic students, Pera spoke about the fun and bonding times she had with other international students and not domestic students. She says "they have time and then they invest in, invest their time to learn about other people. So they're more warm and welcoming." This was in sharp contrast to the support international students got from domestic students. Heaven received encouragements from her fellow international students during moments when she experienced challenges:

> I think the support I actually got was more was from other international students who also faced the same challenges. And they were encouraging me to . . . the number one support I got was from the international [student]community.

In my reflective journal I also noted that "the support in the form of friendship from other international graduate students is what makes me feel a part of community. I am not too sure if that makes me feel welcome in itself, but it gives me chance to get to talk and relate with others who are away from home." Support from other international graduate students was an important part of the support system.

Institutional support. Institutional supports as described by participants ranged from work opportunities through to financial supports, student support centres and emotional supports. Each participant had a different view on how they believed the higher education institution could do to support international graduate students. In the opinion of some of the participants, the supports they received from the institutions were inadequate.

Even though Margaret received some level of support in terms of services from the international student support centres, she felt they were inadequate:

> I think it's helpful. They have some events and workshops that target international students. And what else? [long pause] I don't really quite feel welcome as an international student, honestly. Yeah, because I feel the service for international students are inadequate and they don't listen to international students to provide the services. They just provide whatever they think is necessary.

Faith addressed the importance of peer mentorship and the international student's office and how it helped her as an international graduate student. She also made mention of the financial support she got as funding from the institution. She found the services useful:

> During orientation day, there was this international students' office presentation. And they were there offering support. Even before that because even before I left my country, I requested a peer mentor. And they gave me one peer mentor like July. So I contacted this person in July, so before I arrived here. Then when I came here again, so the international students' office was really helpful with the peer mentoring program, with meetings, with events they were organizing.

The efforts of the student support groups on campus was of immense support for Pera as well:

> This Grad Student Associations International Student's Branch. So they're also organizing events. Me and my partner, we participated in many things. Like we went to Banff with a bus full of international people. Yeah, it was fun. It was nice. Like those things, those activities are making you feel like you're not alone and you have this community of people.

Margaret also acknowledged how the importance of financial support but not without attendant concerns:

> Financial support, yeah. I used to resort to the food bank on campus. I also applied for a

> bursary. I think finance is a big obstacle for international students. And being able to access these resources help me, but at the same time, I feel it's not empowering me to be financially dependent. I'm actually being, to be financially independent. I'm actually being more financially dependent on these services.

Two of the participants had quite different view on the institutional support offered by the higher education institution. Micky knew the existence of support institutions on campus but never bothered to access any of them. He sounded and appeared nonchalant and dismissive and did not know appear to know the names of support centres:

> I don't think that we have any supports. There are some institutions, I know there are some offices, that talks about those things but I have never been there.

Heaven shared similar views just like Micky who do not believe there is any form of support from the higher education institutions:

> From the institution as a whole, I can't recall any support from them. I don't know whether I don't participate in their activities, and that is the reason why, but I don't find that there's any program even.

Mary disagreed with others on the kind of support that the institution could do to support her as an international graduate student. She believed in agency of self rather than allowing an institution to do that for her, and was of the opinion that workshops offered by the higher education institution do not do enough when she stated emphatically that "I don't think there's anything the university can do. I think that's my work . . . these are things you have to work out in the moment."

Topic 3: Needs of International Graduate Students

An important topic that came to the fore was the implicit and explicit needs of international graduate students. Below are the sub-topics that captured their needs.

Personal and micro needs. The needs of students ranged from personal needs covering with graduate students with families, having a voice, and personal mental health needs. The needs of international graduate students were not homogenous.

As someone coming from a Middle Eastern background, Pera dwelled more on her own personal needs and how that can be handled. She spoke about "our own emotional needs, and there is nothing focusing on that." For her the supports available to her in terms of her emotional needs was from a predominantly Western perspective and did not address her needs:

> As a way to find help, I started participating in some group programs in [emotional support] centre. And their perspective is very Western-oriented.

For Faith her needs centred on her family. She stressed the importance of making sure the needs of her family she brought from Costa Rica with her were met so as to make her time in the university less burdensome:

> I remembered now something that was really hard for me to understand was the health system. I know it's silly but when you come here with your family, you need to, I mean, there are things that are basic needs.

Margaret addressed the need to have international graduate students have more work opportunities to help foster intercultural cohesion and offer learning opportunities:

> I'm thinking that the university should offer more work opportunities for international students so they can gain some strengths in terms of their social position in Canada, yeah, because I feel in most departments, it's the white/domestic students who are the leaders

> and international students are the customers or people who they serve. So if you provide more opportunities for international students to lead in the departments, I think they may help change the culture, the dynamic on campus.

Unlike the other participants, Mary had a contrary view and she turned the lens on herself and looked within to identify the need to dismantle her own intrinsic biases towards other cultures. She argued for having personal "difficult conversations" regarding her own prejudice and bias against people of other cultures. She appeared not to believe in the notion of putting that responsibility on the higher education institution.

The need to have African cuisine on the menus of eating spaces in the university was of prime importance to Micky. He wanted to have African food available to African students on campus:

> We don't have options. Because we don't have continental restaurants on campus. We are compelled to eat what everybody is eating. I think we don't even know the names of those food. But also when you see people buying it, you're so pleased, you just say: "Give me the same thing." Whether you enjoy it or not is your problem [laughing].

Need for recognition. Participants agreed for the need of recognition and acceptance, among others the need for respect of alternative views and avoiding looking at international graduate students from a dominant cultural worldview in terms of knowing. Pera's views dwelt on prejudice based on her looks as someone navigating the politics of geography by way of where she comes from:

> I am coming from a middle eastern country. People's views of me really depends on where I came from—where I come from rather than me as a person. So there are some stigma and then prejudices, stereotypes around people [from other cultures].

The need for acceptance was also echoed by Heaven and she wanted to see international students treated with respect and valued:

> [After a long pause] I would say for now my needs are just for others to accept us for what we are. Yeah. Because well we applied and we qualified to be here so it's not like we were favoured to be here.

The issue of stigmatization as an international student in the view of Margaret made her feel "that being an international student, this term is a stigma here. Yes, is a stigma. It's nothing that I'm proud of." She also found the very notion of being an international student an "alienating" experience that made her feel like an outsider. The lack of recognition was also affirmed by Mary when she addressed some working experiences and conditions on campus "as not a culturally safe or culturally diverse space."

The need for recognizing other ways of knowing has succinctly addressed by Micky when he called for ways of knowing and not always having to imbibe knowledge from a dominant culture by commenting that "we don't have a lot from African writers . . . but when we read the white man who writes something about our culture, it's diluted. It is not authentic as [an] African's."

With regards to knowledge from the dominant culture, one of the participants, Heaven had challenges recognizing and accepting knowledge from the dominant culture. She described this when she gave an example of the debate surrounding gender binaries:

> I kind of find that when you don't tune into the line of accepting this social definition of gender it becomes difficult. But based on your culture, my own culture upbringing and my culture capacities I understand gender to be a two-way dimension, right? So it's difficult for me to kind of agree with them.

My document analysis from the 2019 Community *Report* document called for "promoting a deep sense of belonging and interconnectedness" amongst students, staff and faculties across the university (University of Calgary, 2019). This finding resonated with the needs of the research participants.

Space for dialogue. On contributing to the conversation on intercultural capacity building the participants agreed on creating spaces for dialogue between international students, domestic students and the higher education institutions. Genuine dialogue between domestic and international students will go a long way in building healthy relationships in higher education institutions in Canada. Pera had the opportunity to dialogue with domestic students, but she felt they were not genuinely interested in knowing about her culture and added that "I see how superficial people think. They only hear my culture from me. They don't even bother to look my country on the map. Many of people I know, domestic people, they even don't know where Turkey is."

In a classroom environment, Faith acknowledged it was a safe space for her to have a voice. Her instructors encouraged dialogue. She said "I had a say there. I have a voice. And we were trying to understand what other people from different countries wanted to say about the same topic. So that for me was really significant in my grad program."

In terms of spaces beyond the classroom for dialogue, Margaret advocated and asked the university to provide "more physical spaces for international students and their spouses to network with each other." Mary also called on the university for "spaces where people can confront these prejudices because cross-cultural means we have these deeply embedded biases," whilst Heaven spoke of the need for a space that was more accommodating to international students.

Topic 4: Learning Moments

Key learning moments percolated through out the conversations with the research participants. Drawing from these experiences will help in building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. Not all learning experiences were positive from the participants.

Beyond Superficiality. Some participants agreed that the learning between students from different cultural backgrounds should be authentic. Mary was unequivocal about her stance on the university in promoting intercultural learning and the need to move beyond "superficiality and the political correctness." She felt people should be allowed to be speak their mind in cultural issues freely.

Margaret passionately spoke about harnessing authentic learning opportunities about other cultures by encouraging students to travel abroad. She was of the opinion that anything short of this is "quite superficial, I would say. So I feel we should have more authentic learning opportunities" by allowing "people to experience a different culture through maybe going abroad, and not just the cultural festivals or just the food."

Similar views were shared by Pera on deepening the learning experiences with others from different cultures despite acknowledging the spectre of superficiality:

> Like having friends from different cultures, inviting them to my house or getting an invitation from them for their housewarming party and those kinds of things, so I know it's superficial, but it gave me a chance to get to know their culture better.

Learning about other cultures. Input on learning about other cultures came up as a sub-topic. Some participants gave examples of learning from other cultures. In the case of Mary, her learning experiences about other cultures were captured through mundane quotidian moments when a work colleague fell sick and they were not allowed to contact the individual. She had

suggested they send flowers:

> And I got the impression, "No, we're not even allowed to contact." I don't even know why I got that impression, but all of that was it's like disturbing to my soul. I'm like, "But that's someone that's been there with us. How can we not follow up and check on them?" And for me, that was a big revelation in terms of the cultural differences. I started to see them in little things.

Faith was happy to learn about cultures of other countries she would not have known about had she gone to any other country to study. This she attributed to the multicultural nature of Canada as a country when she noted that "coming to Canada meant to me not only learning about Canadian culture, but about many other cultures because it's so diverse."

For another participant, Margaret coming from China she got to learn about other cultures through her classroom encounters that "talked about equality, diversity, or things like that." There were suggestions from Pera who advocated for learning opportunities by embracing mentoring between international students "so that we learn from each other and also share the same experience of being an outsider or seen as an outsider in this society."

Micky learnt from other cultures through the educational curriculum in the classroom. Not all the instructors exhibited cultural awareness. He was of the opinion that "some of the lecturers also include those things that is in the curriculum to educate us on cultural diversity and how to manage those situations." Learning opportunities from both domestic and international students was a way an individual could learn about the culture of the other. Heaven agreed that we "can learn a lot about maybe the Canadian culture from them" in referring to the domestic students and for the international students as a "very diverse group so there are a lot of things we also have to learn from them, because the culture they're from is quite different than ours." She

did acknowledge that international students are not a homogenous group.

I also had the opportunity to learn from others from different cultures. I wrote in my reflective journal about how "I learnt from indigenous instructors and students alike." I came to realize the similarities and differences in some aspects of the indigenous culture and my own Ghanaian culture in the use of folklore as a way of knowing. It was a significant learning moment. Also, drawing from the university's *Indigenous Strategy* document some lessons can be drawn on how to help in building intercultural capacities across for all students in the university and not just indigenous students. The strategy document was clear on increasing learning opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to further the *intercultural capacity* of the institution, with particular emphasis to address meaningful and respectful inclusion of Indigenous people in teaching, learning, research, and community engagement (University of Calgary, 2019).

Social and interactional experiences. Despite the learning experiences from both domestic and international students, not all the learning experience encountered were positive. Most of the negative experiences were directly related with relationships with domestic students. Five out of the six participants had negative learning experiences to share. Mary admits having a few bad experiences with white female students and work colleagues on campus. Despite being not the best of experiences, she introspectively looked deep into herself to confront her own prejudices towards people of other cultures. She acknowledged her own cultural deficiencies by agreeing to a change in perspective to "humble myself" to learn to interact appropriately with others from different cultures:

> I was creating the barrier. So that's been, I won't say I've learned but that's where I recognize my learning has to occur. And I can't just look at all White women as shallow, empty, dangerous creatures. Yeah, that's me being very vulnerable and that's my ugly

> coming out and I'm putting it there.

In the case of Pera, she had similar negative experience that made her feel alienated, thus ended up finding solace in her Turkish community. She assumed she had a relationship with a domestic student and perceived the domestic student as a friend. She felt slighted when she was not invited to her wedding by observing that "one person from our research group, she's getting married. So she will organize a wedding soon, but she never invited me. And we've been working together since last, I don't know, one and a half years."

Finding himself in the classroom, other domestic students refused to sit by Micky:

> I know any reason, but what I can say is like, whether I am in the classroom and at times we sit around tables. When we are there and you're going they don't want to sit by their side. They will pretend as if you have a call or something, they will leave and you never come back [to sit by him].

Faith had a negative learning experience because she believed she missed out on a communication opportunity when she found herself in a setting with domestic students:

> So I sit, I took my place. I say hi but I didn't look at them in the eye and greeted them. So after that meeting, I could never connect with. . . . North American people, eye contact is really important. And I miss that on a very important day, which was our first meeting. So after that, I guess that my relationship with them was really bad. But I always feel like that was the reason I didn't connect.

Margaret's negative learning experience had more to do with the realization of her being the only minority amongst a group of domestic students when she got a role as a [specialization] representative in a students group. She noticed that the domestic students "did things their own way" and never really valued her input. That was when it dawned on her that "Wow; actually,

except me, the others are white students, white local students."

Travel as epistemology. It was interesting to note how travel and exposure to other cultures influenced worldviews emerged as a sub-topic through this research. Individuals with prior travel experience and exposed to other cultures seemed to have a more accommodating stance towards others. Faith talked about her relationship with one of her classmates who had spent some time outside Canada:

> One classmate from the faculty who is Canadian, who I feel I could reach out for something. Only one . . . and she also lived, I mean out of that country for many years, so she knows what it is not to be home.

Just like Faith, Margaret also had a good rapport some domestic students who had also spent sometime outside the country and she admitted that "I feel that for them, because of their experience teaching and living in a [different] culture, they can better understand what I say and we can better communicate with each other." She felt that "students who lack this experience, teaching and living abroad, they tend to be more arrogant. Those who lack the experience of living in other cultures, and they tend to ignore your culture as an international student."

Mary had a different perspective on travel as a way of knowing. For her leaving the shores of her country allowed her more freedom to explore and know. She was of the opinion that her personal experience of life outside the [part of the world] allowed for intellectual stimulation and allowed her to know and be:

> They call it being in exile, the desire to leave home to be stimulated in a way or think . . . It's actually here has actually allowed me to be more of who I am as a [part of the world] person than I would've been in the [part of the world], if that makes sense. It's allowed me to feel free to be a [person of origin] in the [part of the world].

Also, as part of my data collection through document analysis, the *2018-19 Annual Report* affirmed there was a plan in place by the higher education institution to have "50% of our students have an international experience before they graduate" (University of Calgary, 2019). This goes to underscore the commitment from the university in recognizing the importance of travelling as an epistemological medium for students to immerse themselves in other sociocultural environments outside Canada.

Topic 5: Identity and Cultural Tensions

For the participants, being in a culturally different environment evoked various sentiments around their own identity, prejudices, relationship with domestic students and cultural tensions between their home culture and their host culture. Some form of agentic dispositions from the participants were manifested through the dialogue.

Relationship between domestic and international students. The relationship between international students and domestic students was almost non-existent and showed the intercultural interstices between the two groups of students. Micky's experience of a culture shock was through the distancing domestic students exhibited towards international students:

> To phone, to call someone is like, something very extreme. Very challenging. So when you even ask them to make available their numbers, they will be reluctant, they feel very reluctant to give you email or, they will not tell you anything. So it's very difficult to contact them. So I think that is also one aspect of the culture shock that I had in this country.

On the other hand, Margaret adopted a more optimistic approach. She felt that domestic students should be made more aware of the benefits of having international students so as "to educate them [domestic students] more about their cultural awareness. Not educating international

students about developing [inter]cultural capacities. And yeah, I think the white students should reflect more about the way they do things."

Pera almost draws a hard line of how she is treated by domestic students and her international friends. She emphasizes the closed nature of the Canadian domestic students and affirmed that "all my friends are people I call my friends, are international people. And it's really hard to get Canadian friends because they already settled down. They have their own friends, their own circle."

This behaviour from domestic students was no better from the story Faith shared. She was pessimistic about the relationships between domestic and international students and felt that it was "international students who are coming here and we are the ones who need connections, the ones who need friends, the ones who need to start a new life." She believed there was a non-existent relationship between domestic and international students:

> They don't need to connect to international students because they already have their network . . . they don't need friends, they have their friends, they have their family, they have their knowledge, and their way to do things.

Heaven shared similar sentiments with all the other participants and concurred there was no relationship with domestic student. She shifted in her seat and burst out laughing:

> [laughter]I think the relationship is not . . . my, cohorts I mean, we have fun when we see each other, it's, "Oh, hi." There's no tension, but it's not like there is a relationship, that I'll take your phone number and text or call anyone, yeah. So I think the relationship has not been that good.

Mary, a black person of colour from the [part of the world], unlike the other participants, was cognizant of her own prejudices against white people. She "realized all my prejudices about

white people and colonialism were coming out. . . I have to make sure that I don't give off the vibe that I don't want to talk to you." She acknowledges she had to always make a conscious effort when interacting with domestic students. Mary's position showed how she projected herself towards domestic students, unlike the other participants who felt domestic students avoided them.

Discovering self. Some participants discovered aspects of themselves they hitherto wouldn't have known had they still lived in their home country. Coming into a new academic space was a moment and journey of epiphany. Personally, coming to graduate school in Canada was a journey of self-discovery for me. I became conscious of the colour of my skin. I captured my thoughts and sentiments as black person in my reflective journal:

> From meeting people in the hallways, elevators and corridors of the university, who avert their gaze from you to avoid being greeted. I literally greeted almost everyone I met back home, even if I knew them or not. I quickly learned how to act in this new environment. It is quite different meeting black people on campus just like me. With a slight nod of the head and no verbal communication, it is a way of acknowledging other black people of African descent I come across on the university campus. This is not to be expected of all black people on campus. Some just look away, nevertheless. It is comforting and reassuring to get that nod from another black person on campus. It is a form of silent acknowledgement of the feeling that we are in this together.

Faith had never seen herself as a minority when she lived in her home country, she had to fill out forms in the first weeks on campus. That was the moment of awakening for her she started questioning herself "What am I?" It was the first time in my life that I have to say there was, and I didn't know what to write, Latino, Latina, Latin America, whatever. I don't remember

what I wrote but it was there when I realized, “Okay. I’m a Latina.”

Margaret, just like Faith also never new she was a minority when she was in her home country of China:

> I felt that I’m the minority, a minority but only because I learned of this. Only because I learned the theories in my courses, I learned that oh, I’m an ethnic, I’m pretty sure an ethnic minority of colour in Canada.

Feeling a sense of freedom from her home country, Pera as Muslim coming from Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country, felt a sense of liberation living in this new academic environment and country:

> It was a very big relief when I came here, and nobody cares. They live their lives and they are not really interested in what you wear or what you, I don’t know, eat or what you do, whatever. So everybody has their own lives and they mind their own business.

Being in a new sociocultural environment, Mary said she was “actually feel freer to be myself, which is why I said in [faculty], I’m happy to be a black woman or like I don’t feel I’m a minority. Like, I see it with a kind of badge of honour.”

Topic 6: Barriers

Participants faced numerous barriers and challenges fitting into their new sociocultural environment. All participants shared their stories

Alienation. There were times when the participants felt alienated, lonely, faced anxiety and felt they did not feel a sense of belonging. Heaven felt she was never welcome in the university space and declined to get involved in social programs:

> Well, for the most part, I felt alienated so I just wanted to go through the program and finish and go away. So I think that was one reason why I wasn’t really involved in a lot of

> social programs, whether it's by the university or by the department because I felt alienated. I felt I wasn't welcome in that.

Faith felt she did not fit in and ended alienating herself from domestic students by "alienate myself, I mean, to just group with other international students":

> I guess that there's alienation [laughter]. So yeah, I guess that I never, I mean I fit in in the way that I [hesitation] I feel like I've never had any culture shock or any conflict. But I don't feel like I belong here.

In her working relationship with domestic students, Margaret felt excluded when she concurred that "even though they didn't say outright that we don't care what you say or what you do, but a lot of times, they just ignore you, they just exclude." She found that work environment with domestic students "an alienating space" for her. Pera strongly felt she was discriminated against on several occasions and that affected her sense of belonging. She sounded very passionate about being treated like a lesser human being and noted that "there is this not belonging sense like I am not good enough. Those kinds of thoughts. And they lead me to academic failure because I feel like I don't belong to this community."

Micky affirmed very little interaction with domestic students, and this led to feelings of loneliness:

> They don't have time for those interactions. So that counts the loneliness, you will be left alone. And that loneliness, if you don't know, it can frustrate you. You can get depressed because of loneliness. So you have to go back and look for your own people who are also international students to form new association.

As a researcher-participant in this study, I shared similar views with the other participants regarding feeling out of place "I have not made any proper connection to any domestic student

outside the classroom." These views were captured in my reflective journal.

Language and accents. Speaking English with an accent was racialized and participants felt they were profiled based on the way they spoke. It affected the self-esteem and confidence of some of the participants. Heaven was advised to seek extra help with her English and she felt disconcerted about that. She felt it was discriminatory:

> I think for me, it's more of the mentality that okay, you are not a white person, so English is not your first language. So whatever you write, they don't really see the sense in it, like they read it with a biased eye.

Faith believed she was competent enough in the English language before she came to Canada. Her experience was not pleasant:

> Sometimes I would participate and say something and what I said was not understood the way I wanted to, that was a barrier because then I was afraid that it will happen again or that even worse that my message would be completely different.

For Margaret went straight to the point on how language and communication was a barrier for her "Language is a barrier [pause] and the way the local students do things here and how they communicate." Pera also felt language was a barrier just like the other participants had shared. She observed how people spoke slowly to her and said that "you can be as white as an albino person, but when you start talking, then people automatically thinks that, oh, you're not native. So they start speaking slowly and then try to use baby language." This she found offensive. Micky believed others equated accents with intelligence and paid little attention to him when he spoke with an accent:

> You see, when you speak with . . . you have accents. And your language accents, whatever you are saying is nonsense. They don't pay attention. Meanwhile, all the studies

> that we have, currently, now, have proved that accents has not changed the intelligibility of the message.

Mary juxtaposed her English against Canadian English. For her it was not necessarily a barrier, but a way of suppressing her creativity with language when "you had to shed your cultural style of expressing yourself."

Microaggressions. Microaggressions manifested in subtle forms and hints of discrimination meted out the international graduate students. It was manifested in some interactions with others on the university campus. Heaven had challenges finding a supervisor, she wasn't sure if it was because of her research topic or her skin colour. She was conflicted in her thoughts when she kept asking herself "whether it is because of the cultural background of my research, or it's because of preconceived notions about black people."

Pera experienced microaggression in the form of inappropriate jokes meted out to her by domestic students she deemed her friends who told "inappropriate jokes" about her. Mary admitted in strong language that she had heard others speak about microaggressions "I've heard people speak about the little things, microaggressions that they get for their accent. They speak about that." Personally she did not experience any of that:

> I'm not saying everyone says that because I've heard some really [expletive].So I'm not going to lie. But again, these [expletive] stories are not necessarily cultural. These are just people who are being [expletive] and treating their students badly, domestic students, too.

Micky was concerned and worried about public display of racism on the university campus inscribed on edifices that bordered on "white supremacy" as he put it:

> There is a stone there they insult some communities, and the university authority have to intervene and apologize to our friends. What you have in your mind, that's what you

expose to the general public. Meaning that they have something within themselves, they don't welcome us."

Summary

In this chapter, I presented an overview, the settings of the case, a portrait of the participants including their profiles, and a presentation of the findings from the interviews, my reflective journal, and the document analysis according to the research questions that guided this inquiry. The findings resulted in emergent topics and sub-topics. In the next chapter, I translate these topics into themes and interpret/discuss my themes from the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: Analysis

Overview

This chapter captures an in-depth analysis of my research themes that attempted to answer my research questions that emerged by way of topics from my findings in Chapter four. My analysis captured salient patterns from the perspectives and experiences of international graduate students in understanding intercultural capacities and responsiveness in a Canadian higher education institution. The following six themes emerged:

a) Building Intercultural Capacities

b) Means of Support

c) Exigencies of International Graduate Students

d) Insights on Learning Experiences

e) Identity Formation and Culture

f) Challenges

This chapter captures an in-depth analysis of each theme from the findings of this inquiry.

Emergent Themes

Building Intercultural Capacities

Building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions requires a concerted effort from both international students and higher education institutions. The voices, experiences, knowledge and perspectives of international graduate students should be part of the decision making processes of the institutions. Intercultural communication as a building block in the intercultural capacity building process emerged from the study.

Communication. According to Wello and Azis (2017), intercultural communication focuses on the importance of understanding other's language and cultural background in order to

create appropriate and effective communication. Language in this context does not necessarily imply the mother tongue of the individual, but rather the meaning that communication seeks to portray. Faith spoke about how "sometimes, words are not enough because you need to understand the pragmatics in the conversation." This is further buttressed by Margaret when she claims that communication is "not merely a language issue." She gave a vivid example of an incident involving another Chinese student when she was asked a question in class:

> It took her a long time to think before she can express herself in class when she was asked by the teacher to talk about her own perspectives and opinions . . . it seems that a Chinese student is stupid or something and doesn't have any thoughts.

From the example, Margaret tried to explain how communication differs amongst cultures and how students from China are not very verbal in such classroom environments. Being aware of different communication styles amongst cultures is contingent in helping to build intercultural capacities. Huber (2012) acknowledges that [intercultural] communication is more important than ever because they make it possible for us to address the root causes of some of the most virulent problems of today's societies in the form of misunderstandings across cultural, sociocultural, ethnic and other lines: discrimination, racism, hate speech and so on. This assertion applies to life in higher education institutions as well.

The role of the higher education institutions in building intercultural communication can lead to effective and appropriate communication and behaviours within inter-cultural situations (Deardorff, 2006). This agrees with the literature in chapter two that affirms the importance on communicating and working across cultures (Abrums et al., 2010; Leask, 2015). The need for intercultural communication in higher education institutions is a must because the "twenty-first century world is increasingly global, and relating effectively to others, who are culturally

different has become a daily necessity" (Thomas & Inkson, 2017, p. 159). Developing global mind-sets at international educational institutions (Gopal, 2011; Leung, Ang, & Tan, 2014) can be fostered through creating spaces to foster intercultural communications. All responses from the participants affirmed what was already known in the literature about the importance of intercultural communication. All participants were vocal on why interpersonal communication was important to them. Higher education institutions could intentionally and purposefully foster intercultural communication by facilitating interaction between culturally diverse students to create opportunities for learning, rather than rely on the myth that merely bringing international students to our campuses will provide these opportunities (Knight, 2011).

Being able to communicate with others from different cultures comes with some form of cognitive maturity and the need to see all humans as equals. Micky, one of the participants noted that "they have to create that awareness for everybody to follow because we are all human beings." He was of the opinion that higher education institutions should be involved in creating the cultural awareness on their campuses.

Purposeful awareness of other cultures. Cultural awareness in the higher education institution was a sub-theme with some far reaching significance. Having a sense of cultural awareness was a key element to building intercultural capacities by the research participants. Guided by some elements of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1991), being culturally aware is a kind of social action that acknowledges an individual's responsibility to engage in reflection and introspection as part of the process. According to the participants, they were culturally aware of who they were as international graduate students in a new academic environment, but they all agreed that the university was not culturally aware of their needs as

international students. Heaven remarked on the role university instructors could play in creating cultural awareness and the need for them to be open minded towards student of other cultures:

> One thing is for the teachers [university instructors/professors] to be a bit open minded towards international students. So I know it's difficult because, I mean, we all have our prejudice and our bias but putting people in a box doesn't really help them. It dampens their self image.

She goes further to ask "staff to be trained" to be interculturally aware when dealing with international students. Beyond just this training, Margaret calls for internationalising the curriculum as a way of creating awareness as a way for domestic students as well:

> Incorporate a curriculum learning that every student, not just international students but domestic students, have to reflect. Reflection on their understanding of themselves, their positions, and their relationship with international students.

From my reflective journal, I observed that "I draw on my lived and embodied black experience to understand culture in a different country" as an international graduate student and researcher-participant. In engaging with participants, they had different views on what it meant to be culturally aware. It ranged from moving beyond superficiality of the higher education institutions efforts, to listening to the voices of international students, to being culturally humble. From my literature review in earlier chapters, one of the assumptions I brought to this study was the idea that international graduate students coming to higher education institutions in Canada was to foster intercultural awareness. It appeared that this was not exactly the case. From the view of the research participants the university was not doing enough to help in that regard. A large proportion of the authorities writing on international students (Campbell, 2012; Kimmel & Volet, 2012) agree that international students' own motivations and aspirations are rarely heard.

In the dialogue with participants, the call for listening to the voice of international graduate students came up as evidenced by Pera when said “the only thing is just listen to us, to make it better, make it more in-depth.” Some participants felt their voices and opinions were not considered as international graduate students. Existing literature as evidenced from Page and Chahboun (2019) agree that it seems to be viewed as self-evident that higher education institutions speak for international students, as it is very often stated matter-of-factly in the opening sections of articles and books dealing with international students. After listening to the perspectives of research participants it appears that the voices of international students are silent on cultural affairs in the university. Again, Pera believed that the university being culturally unaware was due to approaching everything from a dominant perspective when she affirmed that “everything is western-oriented, western mindset oriented, so you’ll see that your culture is not supported, your culture is not acknowledged.”

To create an environment of cultural awareness, Lee and Lund (2016) agree that it is not enough to have general knowledge, it is necessary to engage in critically aware practices in the higher education institutions. This brings out more questions than answers. How will this be practically implemented? This is an onerous task of combining knowledge and praxis. One of the aims of this study is to open further dialogue and debate in terms of praxis and knowledge. Tinkler and Tinkler (2016) acknowledge that though people and institutions acquire knowledge, this knowledge might not necessarily be applied in terms of skills, strategies, and pedagogical practices to help move the intercultural capacities agenda forward. The aim is to get higher education stakeholders convert this knowledge into practice.

For higher education institutions to be culturally aware of the needs of all international students they will have to put in place systems that will ensure the success of international

graduate students. In the *2019 Comprehensive Institutional Plan* document that was prepared for the government of Alberta, the institution pledged to organize cultural days to include Germany day, Mexico day and China day. Plans were in place to organize a USA oriented day and a Scottish and Dutch Day (University of Calgary 2019g). As a researcher coming from an African background, I realized no mention or representation is made of a black or an African day and this is a cause for worry. Cultural awareness in higher education institutions can be inclusive of all diverse voices to inform a holistic intercultural capacity framework within Canadian universities. This study attempts to contribute to intercultural capacity building by informing policy and practice on the need to listen to the voices of international students. Kim (2015) corroborated that there is a need for a greater focus on the students themselves in research and this finding from the participants was consistent with the existing body of knowledge. Even though this study focused on international students' involvement, Margaret went further and made a case why both domestic students may also be involved:

> When they talk about intercultural awareness, I think they're addressing us as ethnic minorities to develop intercultural awareness that we have to fight for our own rights. But I feel that actually, the white students or the local students should be educated more about intercultural awareness. Yeah. I feel most of the time, minority students, international students are actually adjusting to the main culture here. And the local, the white students are not so aware of it. And I feel they don't care.

Her assertion questions existing literature on the over reliance on the call for input of international students in building intercultural capacities as sometimes overstretched. Domestic students are usually left out of this conversation. Domestic students can have an input on the conversations involving intercultural capacities. Pera articulated this when she said she "can

open up myself for opportunities to learn from people and being open for people to learn from me." This statement signifies the agency the international student has in help building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. The same can be asked of domestic students to open up themselves to learn from others of different cultures. Attempting to build the concept of intercultural competencies in higher education may be a concerted effort of all parties in a higher education institution.

Contributions of international students. It is important to tie in the agentic role of international students, the awareness concerning cultural humility, and the willingness to learn about other cultures. Micky called for international students to contribute their quota by asserting:

> We should enter, induce conversation, with a clean mind . . . come with a new philosophy and new ideology to contribute to that cultural diversity so that we can create a good atmosphere, a learning atmosphere for all of us.

This assertion by Micky aligns with Mary's stance on adopting a self introspection lens that calls on international students to be "culturally humble" to learn. Her position concurs with the position of the seminal authorities on cultural humility, Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998), who see it as a process of committing to an ongoing relationship with communities, and colleagues that requires humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique. The concept of cultural humility calls for a continuous active engagement in a lifelong process as against a discrete point in getting to know the other culturally. By placing cultural humility as a way of being, knowing, and doing in higher education institutions, according to Saunders, Haskins, and Vasquez (2015) it will encourage engagement in a continuous process of cultural

learning and operating from a “not knowing” position by trying to understand others from diverse cultures.

Means of Support

Participants spoke about the need for support systems in the form of support from supervisors, support from other international students and institutional support. For the participants, having and reinforcing these supports will likely influence and ensure the success of all international graduate students.

Faculty and supervisory support. Among the participants, a majority of them spoke about the positive influence and support they had from their supervisors and instructors. Mary in glowing terms described her supervisor as someone I “think the world of him.” Pera spoke also about times when she was invited to go to her supervisor’s home to partake in dinners and said her supervisor was “ one of the biggest support mechanisms that I have.” Faith also remarked about how her doctoral seminar classes gave her the opportunity to come into other ways of knowing:

> It was an opportunity to have or to share with colleagues from many different specializations. And the topics that we talked there were general topics. And I feel like I needed a class to understand the Canadian way to see education, because I already had my way, but it was really insightful to know.

Despite this position from the participants, some existing literature points to studies highlighting issues such as conflicts and tensions between international students and their advisers (Adrian-Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007; Calder, Richter, Mao, Kovacs Burns, Mogale, & Danko, 2016). To some extent, this refutes what is already known in my interaction with my participants and was not clearly evident with my interaction with my research participants.

Despite the majority of participants view on their relationship, one participant felt not all instructors were well equipped to handle issues of cultural awareness. For the participants who expressed good relationships with their supervisors, I cannot confirm if the supervisors were culturally conscious or were just decent individuals with accommodating personalities who were willing to assist and support another individual.

Bond between international students. International students tend to bond and support each other. The support international students received from other international students was evident from the dialogue with the participants. Participants were unanimous on their relationship with other students from other countries from around the world. They had ties and camaraderie amongst other international students. Pera drove this point home when she made this remark:

> I'm really grateful to have them [international students]. But with domestic ones, I always feel the inferiority implied in many ways. And domestic friend making jokes behind me. It is not a international person. It's a domestic person who thinks that he is superior.

Concerning the bond between other international students, Margaret had a similar story to share: "So we unite with each other but not the whites. They do their own stuff. They have their own circles and they exclude us."

These views expressed by the participants encapsulated the general consensus amongst five out the six participants who felt they did not have a good relationship with domestic students. This resonated with the works of Frantz Fanon in his much-acclaimed book *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he asked a poignant question on the binary of superiority/inferiority and challenges us to simply try to touch the other, feel the other and discover the other (Fanon,

2008). Beneath the layer of not having a connection with domestic studies, inherent in this non-relationship are tensions, biases, and underlying racial tensions. This challenged assumptions that increasing the diversity of the student body would lead to understanding and friendships between international and local students (Leask, 2015). This finding was also consistent with literature on the lack support between domestic and international students (Guo & Guo, 2017) in their interactions.

Institutional support. Under the theme of means of support, higher education support from higher education institutions came to the fore. The participants had myriad of concerns in which they expressed lack of support from the higher education institutions. From reservations about peer mentorship, lack of financial support, to inadequate support from the student support centres. Though various forms of these supports already exist in the institution, the participants were of the opinion that more needed to be done to ensure their success in the institution. For higher education institutions to ensure the support and success of international graduate students it is imperative that they adopt an intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education (de Wit et al., 2015). Transcending the intercultural function and delivery of post-secondary education, support systems should be an integral part in supporting international students. The mechanics of how this can be into practice on an ongoing basis is worthy of further consideration.

The issue of peer mentorship as a form of institutional support came up. It did not appear to have enough impact and traction from the perspectives of some of the research participants. Typically international students were matched with domestic students. This is how Faith participant described that form of support: “It wasn’t that fruitful. I only got advice about how to

find my way around the city and it was valuable, but not really. She never got how I felt as a foreigner."

Bridging the cultural lacuna between two people from different sociocultural backgrounds is much more beyond the ideals that are put on paper. Another assumption is that when two cultures come into contact they learn from each other, some form of learning and interaction may occur, but not necessarily productive. This is consistent with research by Guo and Guo (2017) that shows that the mere presence of international students on campus does not necessarily lead to interactions and intercultural understanding between local and international students.

Financial support was also mentioned as a form of support the participants thought were lacking and felt the university could do more. Research indicates total income from international students increased from $1.25 billion in 2009-10 to $2.75 billion in 2015-16 (Usher, 2018). The participants felt they needed to have more support from the higher education institution considering their financial contribution. Heaven said, "we pay like three times the fees of a domestic students and we don't have any financial support." On the contrary to the view held by Heaven, Faith was relatively happy with the funding she received: "I got really good funding at the beginning. Before leaving my country, they offered me certain amount. And then when I came here, they gave me more. So it was like, 'Yoo-hoo.'"

There seems to be a connection between the value, knowledge and experience international students bring and financial support when international students are seen as "contributors of knowledge and not only as knowledge consumers" (Guo & Guo, 2017, p.864). If international students are seen as ambassadors and crucibles of different cultural knowledge they bring to Canada, perhaps they will be valued more. International students are living curriculums

of culture that will be impossible to put a monetary value on. It is incumbent on higher education institutions to realise the real value of international students on their campuses. It is well known that higher education institutions in Canada do offer some form of scholarship opportunities open to both domestic and international students but doing more in terms of increasing the funding will go a long way to assist international students.

The call for institutional support from the view of one the participants was seen in the call for emotional support. However, literature directly discussing the experiences of international students in relation to their mental health is already limited (Knaak & Patten, 2016) and more so especially of international graduate students. Coming into a new environment in itself comes with issues associated with the set of cultural and psychological changes that follow the contact between two different cultural groups and their members (Berry, & Hou, 2016). These tensions are exacerbated by other factors as posited by Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, and Ramia (2012), who agreed that a that a lack of English proficiency, difficulty understanding new cultural norms, and cultural misunderstandings are primary sources of the challenges that international students encounter in the context of acculturation. According to (Berry, 2005), acculturation occurs when an individual in a different cultural environment may engage in integration, assimilation, segregation/separation, and marginalization/rejection. A number of the participants associated themselves with marginalization and alienation. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) further report that associated challenges in academic learning, racial discrimination, troubles with interpersonal skills, and insufficient access to social supports lead to feelings of alienation and homesickness. Pera in particular aligned with some of these challenges in adjusting to her new academic environment and how it affected her mental health.

International students are not exempt when it comes to seeking mental health support in

higher education institutions. Pera said "their approach to mental health is also very western-oriented" and the staff did not really understand her needs and concerns. The staff at the centre were white people and she believed the solutions offered to her did not assuage her problems. Pera comes from Turkey in Europe, but she identified more as someone with leanings towards the Middle East. Deducing from my dialogue with her, she believed there should be other ways of knowing and being, as a departure from the hegemonic Europeanised way of knowing when it came to mental health support. Andrade (2006) calls for strategies to help international students cope with their mental health issues in higher education institutions, including support from professionals who can best support diverse student needs.

Lastly, the participants felt there was a need for the support centres to able to do more to support international graduate students. The participants wanted to see the student centres "inviting more international people to kind of create a program . . . that recognizes different cultures and different ways of living." The quest to acknowledge other ways of knowing was a common thread that ran throughout the findings of this study. In giving support to international graduate students, there was the consensus that the support centres recognize input from people from other cultures. From my document analysis of the *International Strategy* document of the institution, it seeks to improve global and cross-cultural competencies within the campus communities (University of Calgary 2013b). It is a noble ideal the university seeks to achieve, but the arguments against competencies are growing stronger in education circles in the sense that the concept of cultural competencies has several challenges, as culture is not static—it is fluid, dynamic, and difficult to measure. The notion of "competency" denotes a form of finite expertise pertaining to understanding of culture and responsiveness. Competency implies something that can be measured, and that one can actually achieve a competency, whereas

capacities communicate something more fluid without a finite achievable end goal. Building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions in higher education should transcend cultural competencies and embrace a cultural consciousness that will be an ongoing and continuous commitment across universities in Canada.

Exigencies of International Graduate Students

Asgharzadeh (2008) suggested that we need a vision of international education that pays attention to the educational and social needs of multicultural student populations. To this end, policies and practices of teaching, learning, and educational delivery need to move away from conventional methods based on monoculturalism. International students come from a gamut of different cultures. Immanent in these different cultures are the individual needs of international graduate students, acceptance and understanding, and the creation of a space for dialogue with symmetrical power relations. These sub-themes were emergent in the conversations I had with my research participants.

Individual needs of international students. In moving the conversation forward on personal and micro needs of international graduate students, it was evident in the dialogues with the research participants that the needs of individual international students are most often overlooked. It was important to capture the voices that amplified the micro needs of the participants. Issues of health, work opportunities, emotional needs, having difficult conversations and dismantling prejudice, food, and the need for acceptance as a human being. The personal and micro needs were unique to each international graduate student. Some international students come to graduate school with their family in tow. Four out of the six participants: Faith, Margaret, Pera, and Micky came to Canada with their families. Some came with spouses alone, others with spouses and children. Understanding the health needs can help to increase

understanding of the phenomenon of intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. Pera mentioned her mental health needs which she felt was not adequately addressed by support she received. There is existing literature on the the mental health needs of immigrants to Canada and the occasional mention of international students (Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013; Montgomery & Terrion, 2016), but sparse information on the general health needs of international students, especially those with families. Though the focus of this study is not directly related to the health needs of international students, I believe a fully functioning mind dwells in a healthy body that will allow the individual to express the self fully in one's cultural environment.

Giving the opportunity to international graduate students to work is a great learning opportunity for international graduate student to immerse themselves into the culture of their new environment. This does not necessarily guarantee positive learning experiences between domestic and international students. Margaret had an experience in a working space with a domestic student that was not totally pleasant and resulted in clashes sometimes because of lack of cultural understanding. She opined: "We have different understandings of how we do things. Do I have to always give her notice way in advance or is she just having prejudice against me?"

This working environment brought up issues of communication between people from different cultures. Learning between domestic and international students does not necessarily have to occur within the classroom. Other spaces do offer learning opportunities. Nevertheless, this does not negate the probable learning benefit for both domestic and international students as a whole.

For one participant, Mary, her personal needs went beyond the ephemeral. As a black woman from the [part of the world], without her mentioning the word race specifically, her evocation of anti-racism was more than skin colour (Dei & Simmons, 2010). I as a researcher-

participant, ever present in the moment with my participant, I could literally feel her passion about her needs as I spoke to her. For her it was about having dialogue beyond the sanitized discourse of diversity, race, and prejudice. She was averse to using words like "safe spaces." It almost provoked a cliché-esque meaning for her and did not seem to mean much for her. She appeared to be coming from a positionality of intersections as "person of color, woman from the [part of the world]." Personally for her she believed higher education institutions were not doing enough to have difficult conversations around the issues of diversity and culture. She felt that:

> I think because we're so nitpicky about hate speech and triggers and all of that, that for me if I had a space and I don't mean talking with another [person from her country of origin] or talking with my [family member], because if we talk we will have the same prejudices.

She believed in engaging with others from different cultures to boldly address issues of differences as a way to address the inherent cultural tensions. Existing literature affirms the position of Mary. Racism is difficult for educators to talk about; in fact, many educators tend to completely avoid conversations on the topic (Schwartz, 2014). Refusing to broach the discomforting topic of race, allows for perpetuation of the status quo and implies complicity. As higher education institutions continue to attract international students and as Passaris (2012) noted, educational leaders and institutions across Canada are confronting a perfect demographic storm. The higher education institutions should be ready and able to address diversity issues in socially just ways as there are many culturally responsive strategies that higher education institution leaders can employ (Hamm & Doğurga, 2014).

For Micky, his needs centred on culinary pleasures. He wanted to see food from Africa in the dining centres. In the article "Table Stakes: The Link Between Food Culture and Student

Satisfaction" (2016) it was reported that dissatisfaction with food offerings on-campus does have potential implications for universities. Participants felt that a lack of culturally appropriate foods on campus was an example of administrations ignoring their needs. Better food options for international students can lead to more interesting dining environments in general, and help to nurture a feeling of inclusiveness and respect for multiple cultures on campus. Despite this concern, the practicality of addressing this issue will be very challenging if every international student from around the world will want their culinary needs met.

Acceptance and understanding. The next sub-theme that emerged was the need for acceptance, understanding, and recognition. I will preamble this theme as captured by Heaven when she asked "to accept us for what we are." The need to be recognized as humans regardless of skin colour, country of origin or cultural background was of importance to the participants. Participants felt they were stigmatized as international students, judged by others based on their country of origin, and their views and perspectives were dismissed as other ways of knowing. Margaret felt international students were forced to fit in and for her it was a discomforting experience:

> They have these services like international student service. They provide, they target international students that we get the service, we get the help, and they try to help us fit in. I think that they have the agenda of helping international students fit in to the Canadian culture.

There is the tendency by higher institutions to erase the culture of international students and force them to fit into the Canadian culture. This has the potential to raise issues of the unique cultures of international students being invalidated. This experience reified the alienation the international students already felt as outsiders. Five out of the six participants had particularly

strong views on how they were treated as outsiders. These findings are consistent with existing literature that affirms how international students in higher education institutions are discriminated against and made to feel as outsiders (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; Fries-Britt, Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014; Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014; Malcolm & Mendoza 2014). The need for recognition pointed to the "otherness" of international students. A starting point in recognizing international students in higher education institutions is navigating through politics of otherness, fostering a pedagogy of inclusiveness, and the power of dialogue to dismantle existing asymmetrical power relations amongst students of different cultures.

Dialogue. Dialogue as a need was a sub-theme that was came up in my engagements with my participants. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) posited that education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people (p. 81). International graduate students do not live in isolation. They interact on a daily basis with other students .The position asserts that living together, being dependent on others, and being in *dialogue* with the world is central to moving towards a more equitable and just society. By engaging in dialogue, the foundations of the dominant narrative of the Eurocentric epistemic (Dei & Simmons, 2010) is disturbed and shaken. The dominant narrative can be confronted as Mary put it, when we are able to deal with the "messiness" around difficult and courageous conversations.

In the context of intercultural capacity building, it is important to maintain a commitment to practices, policies and programs that support dialogue and put pressure on the dominant narrative to accept other ways of knowing and being. Creating spaces for dialogue goes beyond physical spaces, it is about that critical discourse and creating a consciousness about the

humanity of all, irrespective of where one comes from. I draw on the seminal work of Bhaba (2004), which talks about the Third Space that represents non-traditional roles, processes, relationships, and spaces in which all individuals irrespective of background can work and have impact. Contextualising the views of the research participants in asking for a space for dialogue, their views covered physical safe spaces and environments as a well as cognitive spaces where their own biases and prejudices can be challenged. As Faith said creating this space will allow other "voices" to be heard. She was full of praise for the opportunity she had in the classroom space to have her voice heard:

> I remember our professors asking about our experiences from different countries, different continents, Asia, Europe [pause] well, not Europe. Asia, Africa. Africa and well, in our case, Latin American countries.

By allowing different voices into the conversation, the status quo of traditional structures, processes, and ways of working in higher education (Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2017) is challenged and fosters the growth of accommodating other worldviews and ways of knowing. Pera talked about the existence of the spaces but was of the view that the relationships and bonds fostered were not authentic enough, but rather were "superficial." Attempting to create genuine bonds and friendships between people of different cultures should emanate from a place of authenticity.

The need for introspection and creating the space to have courageous conversations was an illuminating aspect of this study. Turning the gaze and spotlight on one's own self to acknowledge biases, prejudices and strongly held dogmas about others was key. This was the contribution of Mary to this study. Paradoxically, she appeared to exhibit courage and vulnerability at the same time. She was of the view that "I don't know how you can create these spaces where people don't go out of their minds. But how can I confront my attitudes to white

women if I don't have someone challenge me on it." She was asking for that space to have difficult conversations to confront deeply entrenched prejudices. By creating this space for dialogue, all international students from different cultures can learn from each other. Broaching this topic of having difficult conversations in the form of dialogue is not as easy as it seems. There are attendant challenges, and bringing folks of different cultures does not necessarily guarantee positive learning experiences.

Nevertheless, attempting to engage in difficult conversations is an essential step in building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. By creating the space for dialogue, the benefits of respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility with the transformational potential for individuals and institutions can be realized (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felton 2014).

Insights on Learning Experiences

In my interaction with my research participants, there was no doubt that some form of learning moments emerged for the participants in their new academic environment. Salient and noteworthy experiences were captured in the interaction with my research participants. Moving beyond the superficiality of seminars and workshops on intercultural activities was important to them. A majority of the participants also spoke about the opportunities on how they could learn from others but rather interestingly the participants spoke very little about the informal learning opportunities they could also offer as international graduate students in their new academic environment. Not all learning experiences were positive for the research participants. Lastly, significant learning moments in the form of travel and exposure to other cultures were brought to the fore by the participants.

Beyond seminars and workshops. It will be unfair to say the higher education institutions are not making any efforts at intercultural awareness in higher education institutions.

Through workshops, conferences symposiums, and presentations among others, the higher education institutions offers the platforms for groups, societies and other affiliated international service offices on campus to host a number of intercultural events. The idea is largely to foster the atmosphere where knowledge is shared and disseminated by creating a space and environment to reflect and dialogue with the potential to trigger substantive and positive changes to practices and learning about others. This may bring each other closer to intercultural and inclusive learning in higher education (Garson et al., 2016) beyond the confines of the classroom space. Some of the participants, felt the learning opportunities were not substantial enough and did not address deep cultural issues and also did not have the desired impact they were expecting. In the words of Mary, this will "always be superficial, and it will just be about, let's do this workshop and let's tick this because the deeply felt cultural experiences that people have will never be put on the drawing board."

She felt strongly about how conversations in such spaces did not address the real issues of bias and differences. The goal of higher education is to increase diversity as much as possible through diversity workshops and seminars. Her position was that these workshops hardly achieved their objectives. Moving beyond workshops and seminars by higher education institutions to create a culture and consciousness of intercultural awareness and tolerance will assist in strengthening the intercultural capacity building of higher education institutions. This finding is consistent with the works of some champions of internationalisation who agree that increased campus diversity may lead to increased global mindedness among students, but substantive intercultural learning does not result from being in the proximity of cultural difference (Arkoudis, Watty, Baik, Yu, Borland, Chang, & Pearce, 2013; Bennett, 2012; Knight, 2011; Leask, 2010; Lee et al., 2012). The issue at hand is also exacerbated by the fact that most

of these events are typically patronized by international students with very few domestic students attending. There is more interaction with other international students from different parts of the world than there are interactions with domestic students. Potentially seeing more domestic and international students attending such diversity engagements may offer a much richer learning experience for all students in the higher education institutions.

Intercultural learning. Almost all research participants unanimously acknowledged some form of learning from others did happen for all of them. Most learning experiences from other international students left positive and lasting impressions on them as individuals. From learning about multiculturalism, to learning about social justice and equity, to learning about other cultures in classroom were some of the key exemplars the participants shared with me as a researcher-participant. Faith captured the learning about other cultures:

> I get to know people even from countries that I didn't know they existed. Like I didn't know there was a country called Eritrea and Kazakhstan. So that was something that I didn't expect and that I'm really thankful because it happened here.

As an adult learner, I was particularly interested in the intercultural learning experiences of my research participants within this cultural milieu of a new academic environment and how it impacts intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions. According to Ritz (2010), adults are better prepared than children to evaluate the soundness of their understandings, beliefs, and the dependability of their way of making meaning of new experiences by learning and unlearning in their new environment. Current research studies involving intercultural learning has become quite prevalent within education, with emphasis on either focus on pre-service teachers (Schoorman & Bogotch, 2010) or faculty members (Caruana, 2010). Studies have also been done on international undergraduate student and their learning experiences (Guo & Guo,

2017) in higher education, but not much studies have been done to answer questions in regard to the intercultural learning of students, particularly international *graduate* students and how it can inform policy and practice in intercultural building capacities in higher education institutions. This study sought to fill the gap and add a different perspective in understanding on intercultural learning, awareness, and intercultural knowledge sharing under the broad umbrella intercultural capacity building from the perspectives of international graduate students. The research to date that does examines students' intercultural learning, involve the outcomes of study abroad programs or mobility experiences (Nichols, 2011; Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). Other qualitative studies have examined the classroom experience in terms of the intercultural interactions between students and internationalising the curriculum (Leask, 2015). This supports the view held by Micky, who agreed that some instructors fostered intercultural learning in the classroom. He was also quick to note that this was not true for all instructors. Encouraging learning from others and inculcating it into the academic curriculum will potentially increase intercultural awareness in higher education institutions. According to (Garson et al., 2016; Garson, 2017), there is the need for a more informed, inclusive, and intentional approach to foster diversity and intercultural awareness. This conscious effort of bringing faculty onboard will aid interculturalizing in higher education institutions for the benefit of both domestic and international students. In my own experience as an international graduate student and as a researcher-participant, I agree with Guo and Guo (2017) that the mere presence of international students on campus does not necessarily lead to interactions and intercultural understanding between local and international students.

Bias and discrimination. Not all the learning moments experienced by the international graduate students were positive. Every single participant unanimously pointed out to a particular

negative learning experience ranging from communication issues, lack of minority representation in workspaces on campus, unreciprocated friendship from domestic students, biases, and racism. The participants were candid about some negative learning experiences they encountered. An example is given by Pera who reflected on how she was treated differently not only by other domestic students, but by supporting staff in a university canteen as she recounted an incident where " there is this waste-sorting staff in the [food] hall, and she doesn't treat me the same way she treats the white man."

This sentiment was raised by her and goes to reflect how even non-academic staff treat some international student. This goes to affirm the literature that increased cultural diversity does not necessarily lead to positive interactions between groups (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Bennett, 2012; Knight, 2011; Leask, 2010; Lee et al., 2012) and in some instances may result in increased microaggressions, prejudices, stereotypes, and biases (Garson, 2016). The groups in this context goes beyond faculty and domestic students and is evident in the treatment meted out to international students by non-academic staff in higher education institutions. The behaviour of non-academic essential staff even seems to suggest that stereotypes and biases towards minority students are entrenched in the higher education system. Most literature largely covers how faculty and domestic students discriminate against international students (Guo & Guo, 2017), but a very common overlooked issue is the treatment of non-teaching staff towards international and minority students. This goes to increase understanding on how intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions needs to take account of non-academic support essential staff in the intercultural awareness programs and policies in universities in Canada. Most higher education institutions boast about support services, such as academic writing centres, counselling services, and trained international student advisors, but no attention is paid to intercultural awareness

programs for non-academic essential staff and how they interact with international students. The treatment of non-academic essential staff towards international students was an important revelation that came out of this study. It is the responsibility of higher education institutions to ensure that international students are treated equally to ensure a positive integration into the Canadian academic landscape. One key strategy for educational leaders in diverse communities is to confront their school and community realities head-on (Knight, 2007), thus making the academic institution environment conducive for all.

Travel and know. Another compelling finding from the interviews with the research participants was the importance of travelling, and having exposure to other cultures by domestic students and how this seemingly affected how domestic students interact with international students. Four of the participants spoke about the impactful nature on travel as a way of knowing. Margaret shared her views on the importance of travelling and knowing:

> I feel talking about culture itself cannot solve the problem. We should allow people to experience a different culture through maybe going abroad, and not just the cultural festivals or just the food or anything because we know. When you talk about a culture, you know their food, their dresses, their music, and their festivals, but you don't really experience the culture.

In as much as most of the participants did not have a good relationship with domestic students, there was remarkable difference in the way domestic students who had travelled outside Canada related to them. Faith spoke about "open-mindedness" of her Canadian acquaintances who had lived abroad. This is supported by literature surrounding global citizenship as one of the prominent core values that frequently emerges in the education literature including global-mindedness, open-mindedness and empathy, commitment to social justice, appreciation of

difference and diversity, cultural and intercultural awareness, reciprocity, mutual capacity building and collaboration for all among others (Khoo, 2011). Margaret shared similar sentiments about her Canadian friends who had lived and taught in South Korea and Japan respectively. They were more accommodating and much more open to others from different sociocultural backgrounds. On a personal level, Mary iterated how leaving her country to Canada had given her intellectual freedom to be able to push the boundaries in her quest for knowledge she might not have ordinarily been able to have in her home country. Micky also was revealing about how his sojourn in a country in Francophone West Africa had made him more open and welcoming to people of other backgrounds. These notable findings further buttresses my understanding on the phenomenon intercultural capacities and how the conversations around travel, internationalisation and global citizenship can help inform higher education institution policies on intercultural awareness. More efforts will be required of higher education institutions to drive internationalisation abroad that consists of all forms of education across borders, mobility of students, teachers, scholars, programs, courses, curriculum and projects (Knight, 2006). This will potentially translate into the likelihood that domestic students may be much more receptive to other cultures. This does not call for a reduction in the efforts of internationalisation at home (Knight, 2006) which refers to activities on campus that helps students who do not travel abroad to develop intercultural skills.

Though this study is not directly related to internationalisation, Weber (2011) says that there is a need to understand internationalisation from the perspective of the international students that captures their experiences of internationalisation which should be obtained directly from the students themselves. The concept of internationalisation is an important ingredient in building intercultural capacities as higher education institutions in Canada continue to admit

international students every year. The ideation of promoting internationalisation and intercultural building capacities are inextricably linked in higher education institutions.

Identity Formation and Culture

International graduate students finding themselves in a new academic environment consciously or unconsciously undergo identity transformation. Tensions sometimes erupt between their home culture and the new culture in which they find themselves in. This clash of cultures manifested in the relationships between the international students and the domestic students, and discovery of the self in a new country as moments of epistemological epiphanies.

Tension between international and domestic students. Being in Canada as international students, elements of culture shock, and ways of being and knowing differed from what the international students expected. The relationship between domestic and international students did not appear particularly genuine and authentic. From my reflective journal, I identified my own struggles as a researcher-participant in trying to fit in my new cultural environment in Canada. I noted in my in reflective journal where "there are times when I attempt to engage in conversations with other domestic students. Our conversations focused on the weather, dogs and hockey. It is difficult to sustain such conversations because of different interests and upbringing in different societies." Though difficult and awkward as it may seem, engaging in such dialogues is a key step in trying to understand others from different cultures. Margaret described how domestic students treated international students as " outsiders" and how they perceived themselves as " insiders." Cultural tensions are bound to arise when there is a binary of a we and them mentality. Pera concurred with this positionality when she affirmed that "they don't engage with you" and rather finds solace in her other international friends. As she

puts it, “my international friends, I guess, they have time and then they invest in, invest their time to learn about other people. So they’re more warm and welcoming.”

The chasm of “otherness” between domestic and international students potentially exacerbates the issue of cultural differences and affirms the narrative of international students’ difficulty and anxiety in adjusting to a new culture, language, and academic environment. This stems from emotions of social isolation experienced by way of neglect from domestic students, being homesick, and culture shock, to name a few, that have the ability to affect how well the international student adjusts (Baba & Hosoda, 2014) in their new academic environment. The assumption that domestic and international students intercultural experiences can influence the general wellbeing (Berry, 2008) of international students is challenged very much by the experiences of the research participants in this study. The relationship between the both sets of students as evidenced by the findings do not necessarily guarantee the well being of international graduate students. Despite the findings, continuous efforts could be pursued by the higher education institutions to push this agenda forward both in and outside of the classroom. The Canadian ideal of multiculturalist society should be an intrinsic part of the system in higher education institutions. Beyond mere talk, policies, programs, activities, internationalisation of the curriculum (Leask, 2015) should be at the heart of activities informing higher education institutions. Borrowing from anti-racism work in Canadian education institutions, Dei, Mazzuca, McIssaac, and Campbell (1995) call for the pedagogical need to confront the challenges of diversity and differences in Canadian society and the urgency for an education system that is more inclusive and capable of responding to minority concerns.

To foster a better relationship between international and domestic students, Faith said she doesn’t “think it is going to improve until local [domestic]students meet to connect with

international students." Pera acknowledged how she had made overtures to other domestic students and her efforts were never reciprocated. Faith and Mary spoke about being "culturally humble" and showing a willingness to learn about the other. Whilst Faith called on domestic students to exhibit cultural humility, Mary asked international students to be able to be vulnerable and also themselves to also be culturally humble to learn about domestic students as well. As described by Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998), cultural humility is a process that requires "humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique" (p. 118). Individuals in this context refers to both domestic and international students. Cultural humility is a process by which individuals are perpetually self-reflective and critical of their understanding of others (Lund & Lee, 2018) and this should hold true for everyone in a higher education institution.

New identity. Some participants came to know themselves better through their experiences of living in a new country. Three of the participants, and myself as a researcher-participant shared views on how being in a different cultural environment set as on a journey of self-discovery. Mary by acknowledging her own biases and her willingness to be culturally humble seemingly appeared to be on the road to self discovery in her new sociocultural setting. Being culturally aware of who we have become, and what we know is an important part of building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions.

In my own reflective journal I acknowledge how " I perceived racism to be about colour." As a researcher of colour from a different sociocultural background, far away from home I came to the realization there was more to anti-racism pedagogy in this new academic environment. I have come to understand and know how to navigate my identity regarding anti-racism as more than skin colour. It is about knowledge, representation, culture, and the macro-social politics of

everything and beyond. It is about the fact that I cannot understand race without simultaneously alluding to gender, class, [dis]ability, religion, sexuality, language and vice versa (Dei & Simmons, 2010). Understanding who I am as an international graduate student grants me added agency to contribute my part in building intercultural capacities in higher education in Canada. My research participants, Faith and Margaret articulated how they felt as "minorities" in a different sociocultural environment. Living in their own home countries, they had never had to feel any different from any one around them. All of a sudden, they realized they were different from the majority of people around them and were conscious of their accents and physical looks. The act of re-imagining themselves and negotiating their identity in a different space presented itself with challenges. How can this new forged identity be negotiated in the conversation around intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions?

Being able to see the world in a different way amongst people of other cultures seemingly in itself was a way of broaching difficult conversations about intercultural awareness in a positive way. This resonates with an element of the theoretical framework of Transformative Learning Theory by Mezirow (1991) that guided this study. The perspective transformation in the form of a disorienting dilemma served as a point of entry to a new learning experience on the journey of self-discovery for some participants. Mary's position on her new identity in the academic environment has allowed her to undergo a paradigm shift in her bid to be a better individual and she is "very aware that I have prejudices about white people. So it has been my learning opportunity to learn how to humble myself."

Inviting people of other cultures and domestic Canadian students to engage with international students is a bold step to help build intercultural capacities in higher education institutions and will accelerate the dismantling of stereotypes held by some domestic students.

Weber (2011) notes that international students experienced cultural challenges in forming relationships. The students found their intercultural interactions occurred most often in structured situations such as when a professor facilitated interaction in the classroom, or when they were participating in organized international activities on campuses. Beyond the classroom and formal intercultural activities, international graduate students could possibly avail themselves by leading the way through their own agentic dispositions to allow others to know who there are, by being available to informal learning and knowledge sharing opportunities. Micky captured this feeling succinctly when he said, “when they invite us, we don’t show up.” In short, Micky was asking for opening up the self devoid of “negative attitudes” and show a willingness to share and learn with others from different cultures. Discovering the self, to an extent affords international graduate students the agency, voice and power to engage in dialogue that allows them to be part of the narrative on intercultural capacity building in Canadian higher education institutions.

Challenges

International graduate students face a myriad of challenges as students from different sociocultural backgrounds. Prominent among these challenges included, alienation, language and accent discrimination, and micro-aggressions. The challenges and barriers face by the research participants as international students in higher education institutions has widely been written about (Guo & Guo 2017; Heng, 2017; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Huntt, 2012; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Spanierman & Tafarodi, 2014) in educational literature around world. My research participants agreed with the existing literature on the challenges faced by international students. This is not a new phenomenon and continues to exist in higher education institutions, not only in Canada but also beyond.

Exclusion by others. International students continue to face challenges in their new academic environment. Faith felt she "did not fit," Margaret also felt " excluded," Pera talked about how she also felt " alienated" and how it went as far as to affect her mental health and academic performance:

> We need this sense of belonging, at the bottom line, we're all human beings. But here, we don't get the same treatment as domestic students get all the time. So I guess they need to ensure they're treating everyone equal.

Pera's concerns is for international students to be made to feel a part of the university community. Micky also described how there was "less interaction" between himself and the domestic students and how it led to "loneliness." Heaven said, "she was in a space that she was not welcome." Almost all participants felt alienated and did not feel a part of the broader student body. These experiences shared by the students resonated with some elements of the Transformational Learning Theory framework of Mezirow (1991), which called for taking a critical assessment of the epistemic and sociocultural assumptions they face as students fitting into their new academic space. The participants were faced with trying to adjust their prior belief systems they might have held, before coming to Canada in order to understand the new sociocultural environment. The moments of alienation and feelings of being outsiders appeared as a coping mechanism that lent itself to adapting to the disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991) they faced in the higher education institution as they felt largely excluded.

One way higher education institutions can address this onerous task of international students always feeling like outsiders is by not only internationalising the curriculum (Leask, 2015), but also by introducing curriculum that is transformative in nature for all students in higher education institutions. Transformative learning is the process whereby adult learners

critically examine their beliefs, values, and assumptions in light of acquiring new knowledge and begin a process of personal and social change called reframing in perspective (Mezirow, 2000). Students in higher education institutions are adult learners and have the capacity to develop the ability to question the comprehensibility, truth, and appropriateness of what is being asserted (Mezirow, 2000) about intercultural discourses in the classrooms. One illuminating consequence of the alienation of international students is the continuous finding of solace in other international students from different sociocultural backgrounds. Pera goes as far asking for mentorship opportunities between "mentor-mentee relationships between international people rather than domestic people." This advocacy in itself is not a bad idea, some form of learning will transpire between these international students, but essential intercultural learning opportunities may be missed between domestic and international students in building authentic intercultural capacities in higher education institutions.

Language as new racism. The issue of language and accent discrimination against international graduate students was amplified during the interviews with my research participants. Miles (1989) was very emphatic when he described language as the "new racism," where language, as an aspect of culture, replaces biology as the mechanism through which the discrimination against racialized people occurs. Faith talked about how she "lost confidence" when she was asked go to the language centre for assistance for her spoken and written English by an instructor:

> Even though I've been learning the language for 20 something years, once here I realized that my level of language or English was not as good as I thought. So that was really negative for me . . . So I will say that during my first year I was really active and then I started pushing back.

Heaven had similar experience to Faith when her supervisor "asked her to seek help" with her English. She believed other white Canadians students did not write or speak any better than her. Margaret talked about how conscious she was of her English and it came across as a " barrier" when she was communicating with others. Mary had a slightly different take on how she was encouraged into writing in a particular way that "suppressed creativity." Micky was of the opinion that " accent was equated with intelligence" and he could say the same thing a fellow white student will say, but he will not be duly acknowledged in a classroom environment. Pera complained that "people's views automatically change when they start hearing your accent and voice." No better way to capture the collective sentiments of the research participants and how the "otherness" is amplified simply because of accent and language. Accents provide critical clues to where persons were raised, what their first language might be, their gender, class background, and racialized bodies even in the absence of visual cues (Creese, 2010) and persons should not be discriminated against irrespective of where one comes from.

This finding of language and accent discrimination is solid and consistent with existing literature in higher education institutions in Canada as well as other countries in the world (Ates & Eslami, 2012; Baker, 2016; Cheng, Myles, & Curtis, 2004; Chiang, 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015). This finding further increases understanding of how intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions will have a weak foundation if language and accent bias is not properly addressed. Overt racism by way of skin colour is much more addressed as an issue in current literature in education circles, but the bias associated with language and accents is not an issue that has received enough attention. In examining the discourse between race and accents, Ramjattan (2019) positions foreign accent within the historical interconnection between language and race and describes how ideologies of Whiteness are often used to evaluate foreign-accented

speech, thus reifying the use of accent in racial performances. Every single participant had concerns regarding language discrimination and elements of ideologies of whiteness were manifested in the way they were perceived because of their language and accents. For international students, especially those who identify as non-white, do experience "neo-racism" in which their language, cultural, and/or national backgrounds become the main factor in their marginalization in the North American education institutions (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Lee, 2010) . This is a function of how international students are perceived as "outsiders" as buttressed by Margaret and Pera in their new environment. Raciolinguistic ideologies do not randomly materialize. Rather, they are the products of European colonial histories as corroborated by Ramjattan (2019). Attempting to change the narrative through intercultural capacity building will go a long way in attempting to ensure the success of international graduate students in higher education institutions. Discrimination by way of accent and language is a form of microaggression international graduate students continue to face in higher education institutions.

Insensitivity to cultural differences. The way some domestic students treat some international students lead to microaggressions. They exhibited plain insensitivities to the sensibilities of international students. Microaggressions are continuous invalidating remarks or questions made on the basis of presumed 'differences' in ethnic or racial identity. They are usually not recognized by their perpetrators as awareness and sensitivity on cultural diversity issues is lacking and underlying cultural hierarchies are normalized (Leyerzapf & Abma, 2017). It is evident in the way the research participants spoke about the way they were treated by other domestic students, faculty, and non-staff members of the university community. Being alienated and being judged on account of language and accent were some classical evidence of microaggression that the research participants experienced. Pera complained about her being the

target of inappropriate jokes by domestic students. Micky had particularly had serious reservations on racial slurs written on a shared space in the middle of the university, Mary's concerns were on how international students were maligned because of their accent. These shared stories aligned with some elements of a racial microaggression taxonomy developed by Sue (2010) that covered (a) racial jokes and verbal comments, (b) racial slurs written in shared spaces, and (c) segregated spaces and unequal treatment. Existing literature affirms the existence of microaggressions prevalent in universities across Canada (Hernandez, Carranza, & Almeida, 2010; Houshmand et al., 2014). Canadian scholars have showed ample evidence that racism is commonplace in Canada (Nelson & Nelson, 2004) and still prevalent within Canadian universities specifically (Henry & Tator, 2009). Nevertheless, not much seems to have been done, and the issues continue to prevail. Higher education institutions in Canada will need to do more to address these challenges.

All community members of the institution can contribute to facilitating a positive campus racial climate by taking a proactive stance against racial microaggressions by faculty and teaching staff by undertaking multicultural training to learn how to identify and respond to microaggressions on campus (Houshmand et al., 2014). Most existing literature do not call for cultural awareness training for non-teaching essential staff and this study breaks new grounds by calling for intercultural training awareness for non-teaching essential staff. The intercultural awareness training should be continuous and ongoing process and include all stakeholders in the university. According to the university's *2018-19 Delivering Impact* document the institution prides itself "as an intellectual, social and cultural hub" (University of Calgary, 2019f, p. 15). Considerable intercultural effort seems to be underway to attract international students from diverse backgrounds. There is still room for more intercultural awareness if "symposia that

tackle barriers faced by Indigenous people in education" (p. 10) could be extended to cover the challenges of international students, as well on a continuous and ongoing basis. The behaviour meted to Petra by a non-teaching essential staff is an ample opportunity to broaden the scope of intercultural awareness amongst non-teaching university staff in higher education institutions in Canada.

Synthesis

I showcase a framework depicting the themes in a pictorial format from this study. The radial cycle depicts an ongoing and continuous relationship to the central idea of intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions. Building intercultural capacities in higher education involves addressing elements in each outer circle with no endpoint in mind. The themes in the outer circles emphasizes how information in the centre circle is dependent on information in the outer circles. Frameworks help researchers identify presumed relationships among key factors studied (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). This framework gives a snapshot of the themes from the study.

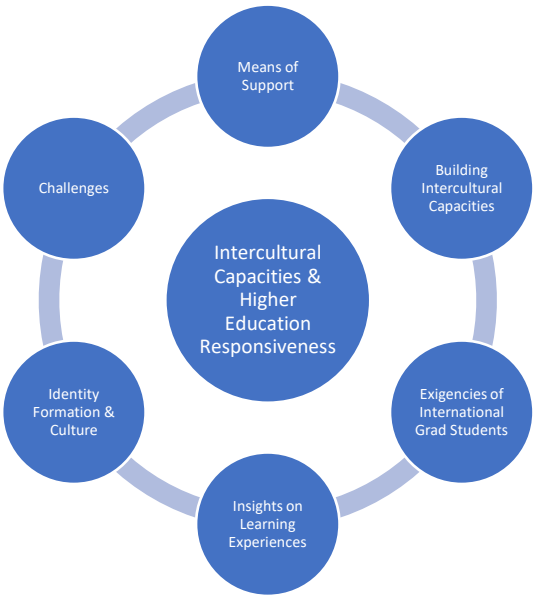

Figure 1. A thematic framework on intercultural capacities and higher education responsiveness

In attempting to build intercultural capacities in higher education institutions in Canada this study identified some key themes. Through trying to understand what intercultural capacities meant to them, the participants identified some key building blocks around the conversations on intercultural capacities, called for a reinforcement of the support systems for international graduate students to addressing their needs. Their experiences and perspectives captured by way of their learning moments, and how identity and cultural tensions can be navigated will go a long way in ensuring the success of the international graduate students. Despite all this, my research participants and myself as a researcher-participant encountered challenges and barriers in trying to fit in into our new sociocultural environment in Canada. There were connective threads that run through the findings and I attempted at all times to tie together the various threads to tell a holistic story in the discussion, though with some occasional overlaps between the analysis of the themes.

Understanding the subjective nature of a qualitative research with my added role as a

researcher-participant, and an instrument of data collection, writer, analyst, and interpreter, at all times I was open to the possibility that other researchers might have told a different story given the same data set (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). As a qualitative researcher I agree that there are multiple ways of interpreting data. Two people growing up in similar circumstances will have different interpretations of their realities which means that the particular way in which an individual constructs his or her social reality is contingent on that individual's feelings and general understanding of himself or herself in that environment. Differences in cognition between people reflects differences in decision making and interactive histories (Greifeneder, Bless, & Fielder, 2017). This in no way invalidates the interpretation and meaning that I brought to my study.

The goal of this study in part was to listen to the voices, experiences and perspectives of international students in building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. A considerable proportion of existing literature on international students' experiences, motivations, and aspirations are rarely heard (Campbell 2012; Kimmel & Volet, 2012). This study is a contribution of international graduate students to the discourse surrounding intercultural awareness, diversity, knowledge sharing and learning informing intercultural capacity building and higher education responsiveness in institutions across Canada. This study attempted to answer the need for a greater focus on the input from the students, particularly from international graduate students themselves in research (Kim, 2015). This study listened to the voices, experiences and perspectives of international graduate students.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented an overview, the emergent themes that covered how to build intercultural capacities, the means of support, exigencies of international graduate students, the

insights from learning experiences, the impact of identity formation and culture, and the challenges faced by the international graduate students. I closed the chapter with a brief synthesis of the analysis. In the next chapter, I end with a discussion and recommendation.

CHAPTER SIX: Discussion and Recommendation

Overview

In this study, I used a qualitative case study to examine international graduate students' perspectives on and experiences of intercultural capacities and responsiveness in a higher education institution in Western Canada. There is sparse scholarship and literature regarding the international graduate student experience of intercultural awareness in higher education institutions across Canada. It is my firm belief that this qualitative inquiry will fill an important gap in the literature and be part of the conversations for all stakeholders involved in intercultural capacity building practices and policies in higher education. The goal of this qualitative research was to explore and have an in-depth understanding as a researcher-participant together with six other international graduate students of our perceptions of intercultural capacities and higher education responsiveness in a university in Western Canada. This study provided new knowledge of intercultural capacities and responsiveness from the lens of a group of international graduate students in Canada.

Through interaction with the international graduate students, document analysis and my reflective journal, meaning was made from our experiences to guide and inform this study. The stories shared by the research participants have illuminated and contributed to building an intercultural capacity framework in higher education institutions by advocating for more support systems, addressing the needs of international graduate students, tapping into experiential learning, managing identity and cultural tensions, and striving to eliminate barriers faced by international graduate students. This study also contributes to the broader discourse and scholarship on intercultural capacity efforts in higher education across Canada.

In this chapter, I discuss and further examine the implications for practice from the findings

and interpretations captured in Chapters 4 and 5 with some elements of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1991). In my conversations and interactions with my research participants that focused on intercultural capacity building and higher education responsiveness, valuable contributions to scholarship and existing literature were garnered. Lastly, I offer my recommendations for future research into intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions in Canada.

Discussion

Understanding the phenomenon of intercultural capacities in higher education institutions from the perspectives of international graduate students in a university in Western Canada was the focus of my qualitative case study. The study aimed to build intercultural capacities in higher education contexts to support international graduate students. This study sought to add the voice of international graduate students to the dialogue on cultural awareness and intercultural capacities beyond cultural competencies. Current literature reinforces how higher education institutions employ various forms of cultural competencies to address the intercultural issues faced by international graduate students. The concept of cultural competencies in education literature has several challenges as culture is not static—it is fluid, dynamic, and difficult to measure. The notion of "competency" denotes a form of finite expertise pertaining to understanding culture and responsiveness. Competency implies something that can be measured and that one can actually achieve competency, whereas capacities communicate something more fluid without a finite achievable end goal.

This discussion expands on outcomes from the international graduate students' voices and contributions to the study and, together with the existing body of knowledge as evidenced

from my literature review in Chapter 2, will seek to inform policy and practice in higher education institutions in Canada and beyond.

Advancing intercultural capacities. In terms of advancing intercultural capacities in a higher education institution environment, three distinct findings, namely intercultural communication, cultural awareness, and the agentic role of the international graduate students themselves, emerged from the perspectives and experiences shared by the research participants. According to Mitchell and Sackney (2001), capacities comprise three mutually influencing and interdependent categories or blocks in the form of the interpersonal, organizational, and the personal. There is an interesting parallel from the findings that seem to suggest a nexus between the interpersonal communication between domestic and international students, the organizational role and duty of the higher education institution to be culturally aware, and the personal agentic role of university students to assist in intercultural capacity building. Merging the capacities and the intercultural in the context of this study can potentially foster responsiveness in higher education institutions by creating an enabling environment where cultural competence is replaced with cultural consciousness (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). This involves an ongoing and dynamic developmental process with no endpoint—one that requires active, critical, and purposeful engagement between international graduate students and higher education institutions. It is necessary to move away from the near immutable concept of cultural competencies that denotes expertise and finiteness to adopt a relation of interdependence where culture counts and where learning is interactive, dialogic and spiral (Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010) amongst all stakeholders in higher education institutions.

The international graduate students gave examples of how they could contribute to building intercultural capacities. Though the focus of this study was not on domestic students,

the role of domestic students in building intercultural capacities should not be underestimated in any way. The relationship between the international students and domestic students was integral in the dialogue I had with the research participants. Intercultural awareness, reciprocity, mutual capacity building, and collaboration (Khoo, 2011) between domestic and international students will go a long way towards advancing intercultural capacity building. It is worth noting that the findings contribute to the ever-growing concept of advancing and building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions and it is by no means exhaustive and final. Capacity building in itself is multifaceted (Fullan, 2006) and contextual. For the purpose of this inquiry, intercultural capacity building in higher education contexts to support international graduate students was the focus of this study. From what I found out as a participant-researcher, and what this meant to me, concludes that these findings portray how the participants came to understand the concept of intercultural capacities in higher education. My goal was not to arrive at a fixed and unchangeable definition, but rather an *understanding* of what intercultural capacities meant to the research participants. In all, there were multiple meanings of what intercultural capacities meant to each individual. Advancing intercultural capacities in higher education institutions involve commitment, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of all stakeholders within a university environment. The stakeholders include all members of the university, including administrators, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, domestic and international students. Advancing intercultural capacity refers to a deepened and expanded awareness of cultural differences and to engaging with and responding to cultural differences with sensitivity, appropriateness, purpose and thoughtful intention (University of Calgary, 2020) by all members of the university community on an ongoing basis.

I will further discuss briefly how the components identified by the research participants answered my research question of how they perceived intercultural capacities. In the words of Faith, one of the participants in the study, her summation of the importance of intercultural communication as “the skills that I have to be able to communicate effectively with people from different cultures “ captured the essence of what intercultural communication meant to the participants. It is important to note that this skill should apply to both international and domestic students. This skill would easily hold true for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching staff should be well skilled in interacting with people from different parts of the world. It is quite easy to dismiss the importance of having the requisite skill of knowing how to communicate with others from different sociocultural backgrounds. The importance of intercultural communication in higher education has been widely written on (Abrums et al., 2010; Deardorff, 2006; Leask, 2015; Thomas & Inkson, 2017). Intercultural communication as a tool and medium of interaction serves as a gateway into understanding the other. Through communication, one can intrude into the space of the other to further understand other ways of knowing and being. Dialogue is one way through which an individual can come to know and provides rich fodder and opportunity for exploration and learning (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Kolosova and Poplavskaya (2017) affirm the importance of dialogue on a personal level, and the inherent educational value it cultivates in terms of respect with each other. Higher education institutions across Canada are leading the way in continuously attracting international students and it is imperative intercultural communication should be taken much more seriously. Intercultural communication should extend beyond the settings of the classroom and permeate all formal and informal spaces within higher education institutions. Higher education institutions as part of their mandate in producing global citizens must pay more attention to intercultural communication in a bid to build intercultural capacities.

The majority of participants admittedly agreed that the university as an organization was not culturally aware of the concerns, needs and expectations of the international gradate students. As higher education institutions continue to attract international students from around the globe, Leask (2015) asks of universities to use their campuses strategically to assist all students (domestic and international) to develop greater awareness of their own and others' cultural identities, an awareness that is of value to them, not only in the university classrooms but in the wider world. Being a culturally aware institution is of significant importance to make every international student feel supported and welcome. Institutions should strive to move beyond the mere tokenism of flooding their websites and academic brochures with images of people of colour as bait to attract international students. There appears to be a stark difference between the optics of attracting international students and the lived reality on campuses of higher education across Canada. Higher education institutions should be able to take advantage of the "flow of knowledge and cultures across national boundaries" (Slethaug, 2007, p.5) to become open, tolerant and cosmopolitan places where diverse experiences (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000) and cultures are welcomed. One way of creating cultural awareness in higher education spaces, according to Leask (2015), is "internationalizing the curriculum," which she aptly describes as the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study. Internationalising the curriculum definition encapsulates all forms of learning activities, be it formal curriculum activities in the classrooms, the informal curriculum which includes all support services organized by the universities (this includes all extra curricular activities/internationalisation), and the hidden curriculum involves unintended, implicit and hidden messages sent to student by way of what counts as knowledge and what does

not. Considerable care and thought must be given to other ways of knowing when it comes to internationalising the curriculum. As an international student from Africa and a researcher-participant, I agree with Zeleza (2012), an African scholar who argues that internationalisation that is not grounded and nourished by "other" epistemic roots is likely to reproduce and reinforce the production of pale copies of Western knowledge of little value to "others" and of no consequence to world scholarship.

This segues into the discussion on the agentic role international graduate students can play in building intercultural capacities in higher education. Intercultural denotes an interaction between and amongst individuals of other cultures. Beyond the role of international students, domestic Canadian students also have a role to help build intercultural capacities by challenging the ideology of their whiteness that defines whites as the norm or standard for human, and people of colour as a deviation from the norm (DiAngelo, 2018). Higher education institutions can support domestic students by fostering intercultural interactions where alternative worldviews are exposed and unquestioned assumptions confronted. These experiences can be fearful and discomforting for some (Collett, 2015). Confronting one's fears and challenging assumptions opens up learning opportunities. International students, once they are aware of the possible challenges and barriers they can encounter upon entering a different sociocultural space can learn to see intercultural interactions as a journey with its associated bumps and varied learning opportunities. Transformative learning happens when the international students and domestic students encounter events and disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991) that calls into question what they believe thus revising their perspectives.

Supports in higher education institutions. The second overarching question that informed this study was how intercultural capacities influenced the experience and success of

international graduate students in Canada. The findings of supports from higher education institutions, addressing needs of the students, and positively responding to the challenges and barriers faced by the international graduate students attempted to answer this question of higher education responsiveness. I will expand a little bit more on the needs of international graduate students and the barriers and challenges later in this chapter.

The main support systems identified by the participants were support from supervisors/ instructors, support from other international graduate students, and the overall institutional support. With supports from supervisors and other class instructors the type of support received by the international students fitted with the classical humanist ideology that underpins English educational traditions that attaches great significance to the pastoral role in schooling. It is concerned to build and maintain supportive and individual relationships with students, driven by convictions that such an approach will support academic learning and promote personal development (Bartram, 2009). Not all the participants felt they all got the support they expected of their supervisors and instructors, but a majority acknowledged some positive support from their supervisors. Having these support systems in place is a necessary ingredient in the building of intercultural capacities in higher education institutions, but there is a conundrum that needs to be addressed. More questions than answers are generated in this instance. There is a tendency to paint international graduate students with one big broad brush and see them as one homogenous group. Within that big forest of international students, they are individual trees with their own unique needs, values, and identities. As individual students, international students come with intersecting identities that will require further attention. Will the higher education institutions in Canada, treat all international students the same or attempt to give each student the unique support they expect? This situation leads itself for further research.

The contribution of support from other international graduate students is highly valued amongst international students. As a coping mechanism in a new academic environment international students tend to find support in each other and this seems to further widen the gap between international students and domestic students. Pera went as far as calling for mentorship with other international students because she believed it will "be better if I got a match with an international student." Key learning opportunities will be missed if the relationship between domestic and international students is not properly cultivated and encouraged in higher education institutions. When it comes to cultural gaps between domestic and international students, it appears that domestic students do not want to get close enough to interact with other international students. Zhou and Zhang (2014) conclude that international students who grew up in another culture usually possess different personal interests, ways of communication, sense of humour, daily routines, and perceptions on many things such as friendship, sexual relationships, and privacy concerns which negatively influences their willingness and attempts to make close friends with domestic students. International students should be encouraged to unlearn in order to relearn how they look at the world in a different sociocultural environment. The willingness to shift and question their frame of reference (Mezirow, 1991) will open a host of learning opportunities.

Current institutional supports from higher educations involve seminars, workshops, and student support centres across Canadian universities. There is currently a semblance of diversity and cultural awareness programs that are run by faculties, departments, and schools across universities in Canada. More effort and commitment should be put into such programs to create the multicultural identity Canada is associated with. It is not enough to increase numerical diversity in institutions of higher education. It is important for university administrators and

educators to implement engaged and purposeful diversity programs to help students develop essential dialogic skills to prepare themselves for a diverse democracy. By doing so, universities can provide opportunities for students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to learn how to interact with their peers in a way that creates a sense of community and belonging for all students (Harwood et al., 2012). Some international students come to Canada with very high expectations as evidenced by Micky: "I saw everything like paradise. But behind that, there are certain things that prevent us from enjoying it. Like the weather, isolation, the language, the food." An institutionalized program to celebrate diversity in the form of sharing and exchanging knowledge will be a laudable idea. Beyond the vista of these diversity programs is where the real challenge is, and brings up more unanswered questions of how authentic relational intercultural engagement between domestic and international students can be fostered. Friendships and social ties cannot be forced, but the willingness to know and learn about each other will open up the spaces for real intercultural connections.

Addressing needs of international graduate students. The voices of international students should be heard, and the higher education institutions should be open to listening. More often than not, there is so much emphasis on the voices in educational literature, but very little is written about the listening part of whom these voices speak to. The research participants spoke about their personal needs, the need for them to be recognized, and the need for spaces for dialogue. International students will feel supported by higher education institutions when their concerns and needs are addressed. In the work of Guo and Guo (2017) on internationalisation of Canadian higher education, which examined the discrepancies between policies and international student experiences, similar calls were made to address the needs and appropriate support of international students.

The personal and micro needs of international students encompass addressing loneliness, financial issues, language challenges, academic difficulties, and mental health challenges. These hurdles in adjusting to a new culture, language, and academic environment, which stem from emotions of social isolation, being homesick, and culture shock, to name a few, all have the ability to affect how well the student adjusts (Baba & Hosoda, 2014). Pera spoke candidly about how her mental health challenges affected her academically. She felt the university support centre was looking at her mental health through a western lens and did not fully address her needs. This agrees literature that some international students experience higher levels of stress overall and more psychological issues than domestic students (Chalungsooth & Schneller, 2011). Micky also identified culture shock as an issue for him as an international graduate student. Higher education institutions should be able to help international students adjust so they will be able to adapt and function in their new environment (Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013). With culture shock comes behavioural and cognitive adjustment and adaptation processes that the international student have to deal with (Erichsen & Bollinger, 2011). This process speaks to the acculturation process that exists across two dimensions, behavioural and cognitive as referred to by Berry (2008). The behavioural aspect involves the international graduate student becoming increasingly aware of the values, practices, behaviour, and customs present in the higher education institution. The cognitive aspect involves emotional process that the individual graduate student experiences within the host culture (Capielo, Delgado-Romero, & Stewart, 2015). This emotional process does not always lead to a positive experience for the international students. The higher education institutions including university staff, instructors, support staff and non-academic staff should be made aware of the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism to

make the experiences of these international students a much more positive and fulfilling one (Szabo, Ward & Jose, 2016) to help build intercultural capacities.

The research participants spoke about the need for international students to be recognized as equally important constituents members of the university community. Financially, international students are already contributing a lot in monetary terms to the coffers of universities in Canada. The participants wanted to be considered and recognized just like other domestic students and not just seen as money generating bodies. As heterogeneous as international graduate students appear, so varied were the needs my research participants portrayed. To mention a few, they asked to have a voice, adequate mental health support, financial needs to be addressed, culinary delights in the form of food from their countries of origin, the need to recognize other ways of knowing, and the need for safe spaces to encourage dialogue to transcend and go beyond cultural differences. A point worthy of further discussion was a position held by Mary whose need was personal and involved her drawing on her own sense of agency herself to address her own biases and prejudices towards others of other cultures. From the position of the participants, there seems to be a divide between extrinsic needs and intrinsic needs of the international students that needs to be addressed. The extrinsic needs like financial and mental health needs relies on other parties to bring about change. The intrinsic need of examining the self and shifting paradigms arises within the individual and will be quite of a challenge to address if the international student is not open and willing to embrace that shift. Meeting extrinsic needs for higher education institutions appear much more attainable for institutions to achieve. The need to unlearn, relearn, and learn is an agentic responsibility of the international student coming to live in a new environment.

One way the higher education institutions can assist with empowering students, both domestic and international students is to create that necessary spaces or environment for dialogue. Montsion (2018) sheds light on how university service delivery in Canada is organized for students as a spatial practice that is defined by the interactions between three dimensions of what makes a place: the conceived, perceived, and lived spaces. The conceived space relates to the understandings of a location, such as through what is portrayed in statistics and strategic documents, while the perceived space refers to the various ways in which communities and groups embody and utilize a space, including for official events and partnerships. The lived space comes from people's daily experiences of the location, including how the place fits into one's sense of belonging. A place in this lived space is where international students want to belong.

Experiential learning and knowledge sharing. As an adult learner and researcher, contextualizing experiential learning and intercultural knowledge sharing moments that came up through the interviews with my research participants was key to this study. Meaning-making process ensued through dialogue with my research participants. All the research participants came from countries with different sociocultural backgrounds with their own specific values, assumptions, beliefs, and how they perceive the world. Imbued in these moments are experiences that influences how the see they world. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory that agrees that the learner's experience is the starting point and subject matter of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1995). The Transformation Learning theory seeks to explain how the expectations of my research participants as adults in a higher education institution is framed within cultural assumptions and presuppositions that directly influence the meaning they derive from their experience and how it

allows them to contribute to building intercultural capacities. One of the participants, Mary spoke about being culturally humble as an international student to able to confront one's own prejudices. This goes counter to most existing literature that asks cultural humility of the dominant/majority cultural group. Cultural humility involves having a sense that one's own knowledge is limited as to what truly comprises another's culture (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013; Ortega & Coulborn Faller, 2011; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Not in a pejorative sense, one needs to be humble and willing to be able to understand the culture of the other through which intercultural knowledge sharing can occur.

With regards to knowledge sharing in building intercultural capacities, the study revealed how intercultural knowledge sharing would possibly occur. The form of intercultural knowledge sharing occurred in two distinct ways. International graduate students appeared to have positive learning experiences from other international graduate students through a good sense of camaraderie. Relationships between international and domestic students showed negative learning experiences because domestic students were treated like "outsiders" as Faith put it. It is not to say that higher education institutions are not making efforts on creating intercultural awareness and interactions on university campuses, the issue some of the research participants had was that, they felt most of the attempts were merely " superficial" and did not really address international students concerns. Moving from the superficial in intercultural awareness to the substantial will help in building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions. According to Hadjiyanni (2013), this can potentially be achieved if higher education institutions are challenged to move beyond just teaching about other cultures and towards facilitating student discoveries of what culture means within specific contexts and how such meanings come to be defined. Travel abroad for domestic students can help open up the world to different

perspectives. From the findings from the participants, it will be fair to say internationalisation at home was not making much of an impact on domestic students.

Another form of experiential learning that emanated from this study was the relationship between travel and learning. The few domestic students who had the opportunity to live abroad had a more empathetic and tolerant view of others. Taylor (1994) affirms this by concurring that when a person travels to another country or immerses oneself in a new culture they often experience a transformation. This corroborates Mezirow's (2000) admission that when an individual is open to others' perspectives with reflection and an open-mind, the individual will understand alternative contexts of others. In the case of the domestic students who had international travel experience, these transformations made them stand out as favourable ambassadors of travel as an epistemology. Higher education institutions can draw on the experiences of domestic students who have had international experience to be leaders in transformation of cultural perspectives (Fay & Kim, 2017). The students with travel experience exhibited a shift in perspective that was a result of a critical examination of their own assumptions, value, and beliefs. Their experiences can be utilized as a foundation (Nemec, 2012) on which the higher education institutions can draw on, and advance intercultural capacity building.

Navigating cultural tensions and identity. The research participants spoke about how they became conscious of their identity as individuals when they came to graduate school in Canada. Trying to comprehend the cultural identity of an individual is complex and convoluted. Identity is developed through the interactions with others over the course of our lives (Albas & Albas 2004). Jenkins (2008) goes further to claim that our identity also depends on how others see us. Identity is fluid, ever changing and it is not static. Kroger (2017) agrees that identity is

socially constructed. Back in their home countries the research participants were not conscious and did not pay particular attention to who they were as a person. Being thrust into a new sociocultural environment suddenly comes with a new consciousness. As a researcher-participant and a black visible minority international student in this study, I agree with Sefa Dei and James (1998) who describe the racialization of identity as becoming Black—the political identity one acquires by being Black in North America; this is distinct from *being* Black, and a feeling of racial identity. I always knew I was a black person even before I came to Canada, but I *became* more aware of the politics surrounding blackness as a minority person of colour in my new academic environment. I became more aware of who I was as a person from Africa. With this new knowledge of the self, how I contribute to building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions is predicated on what I know. My research participants found themselves confronted with issues of identity within a mix of different cultures. As Yiljoki and Ursin (2013) contended, identities are not fixed, but are constantly changing, and thus a better understanding of the process of changing identity may frame the change in a positive rather than negative manner. Identity can be harnessed to help contribute to build intercultural capacities. Faith suddenly had to identify as a Latina woman, Margaret had to identify as a person from China. These were topics they would not have ordinarily have thought about before. The notion of difference easily creates an us and them situation. Notwithstanding, international students should be open to learning and sharing knowledge. Mary found her attempts to reach out to domestic students “very, very draining, because you’re constantly trying to figure out the social cues. That’s very challenging.” Trying to build intercultural capacities and attempting to understand the culture of the other will involve critical reflexivity from all stakeholders in higher education institutions to work effectively across differences. Critical reflexivity is an ethical stance that

demands taking responsibility for privilege, reflecting on individual engagement, and always cognizant of power relations (Beagan, 2018) in intercultural interactions between international and domestic students thus minimizing cultural tensions. Also, by enabling productive engagement with difference, university community members will be able to comfortably and effectively work to elicit full potential from a diversity of people, ideas, and perspectives (University of Calgary, 2020).

Overcoming challenges and barriers. Most of the participants did not directly experience overt racism, but covertly they did experience racism and discrimination to varying degrees. Being treated with respect and dignity as fellow students was what the participants asked for. Margaret strongly felt the term "international student" created a sharp binary between international students and that alone in itself made international student to be treated as others. Majority of the participants, with the exception of Mary, expressed strong feelings of alienation, language discrimination and microaggression as some challenges they faced as international graduate students. Alienation of international students, language and accent discrimination and microaggressions are not new in higher education institutions in Canada (Findlay & Kohler, 2010; Hernandez et al., 2010; Houshmand et al., 2014; Lee & Rice, 2007; Nelson & Nelson, 2004). Existing educational literature encourages higher education institutions to understand the subtle forms of racism that students of color and other international students from different sociocultural backgrounds experience in universities as part of contemporary society, because as institutions of higher education become more diverse there are more possibilities for subtle and often unconscious racial microaggressions to occur (Harwood et al., 2012). When spaces for a dialogue are encouraged, courageous, intentional, and purposeful conversations needs to be engaged to confront issues of prejudice and otherness. These conversations come with some

level of discomfort when addressing issues of preformed assumptions, prejudices and biases. Confronting assumptions and preconceptions are opportunities for learning to transform (Mezirow, 1995). Making anti-racism education an integral part of an internationalized curriculum (Leask, 2017) and going beyond other ways of knowing will inform the intercultural building capacities and higher education responsiveness in Canada. By doing so, not only will higher education institutions be ensuring the success of international students, they will also be playing their part in strengthening the multicultural fabric of the Canadian society.

Lastly, Xiao (2018) agrees that fostering international partnerships and collaboration in educational research with other institutions in other sociocultural environments could be a great approach for developing culturally responsive international universities. This could possibly involve continuing to send domestic students and faculty on study abroad programs to take advantage of cultural learning opportunities. This will attempt to address the lack of awareness and avoid a one-way flow of knowledge mobility, thus promoting a reciprocal process in international cooperation and partnerships by including voices from multiple knowledge systems and worldviews in teaching and learning in universities.

Recommendations

This study opens up potential implications for research and opportunities both for policy and praxis in higher education institutions to build intercultural capacities to support international graduates in Canada. Higher education institutions may mean well to create an enabling environment for international students to feel welcome and part of the university community. Despite all the well-meaning intentions, there is still a lot of room for improvement for Canadian higher education institutions in terms of reifying intercultural capacity building on their respective campuses. It is not an easy and straightforward process, but with the right

commitment, higher education institutions can achieve this goal of making all students from different sociocultural backgrounds live, learn, and work in harmony and mutual respect.

Recommendations for International Students

In this section, I address some recommendations targeted at international graduate student and how they can contribute to building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions.

a) Building connections: International students can make an effort to build intentional connections with students from other cultural backgrounds especially domestic students. International students tend to connect more easily with other international students. Striving to build connections with other domestic students is the way to move the intercultural capacity agenda forward. It is not an easy and linear task to get out of one's comfort zone and try to get to know the other. Building connections can start with one domestic student at a time. Being bold, taking initiative to generate conversations and sharing stories can break cultural barriers and move superficial friendships into more substantial long-time relationships. International students can avail themselves and be open to trying new adventures when they are invited out by domestic students to activities, like hiking, hockey and skiing. Bonding and friendships can be built when international students allow themselves to learn new things. Intercultural learning will hence take place when individuals from different sociocultural backgrounds interact. International students in higher education institutions can create the environment for intercultural connections, the onus of building personalized relationships requires agentic tact and responsibility on the part of the international student as well.

b) Open-minded and cultural humility: International students as individuals all have biases, prejudices, norms, social values and ways that affect the way they perceive the

world. International students come to Canada to learn. Learning should not only be limited to what happens within the confines and walls of classrooms and laboratories across the universities. A lot of informal and unconscious learning occurs when students come into contact with other students from other countries. International students are encouraged to be cognizant of this and allow themselves to unlearn and relearn about their earlier assumptions. By so doing one come to know and understand new ways of looking at the world. With such a mindset, it allows for cultural humility in the sense that it allows international students to see things from the perspective of the other. Transforming the mindset and allowing the self to know and appreciate other cultures, is an important step in intercultural capacity building. Being open-minded, culturally humble and willing to know applies to domestic students as well.

c) Knowledge sharing: Classroom environments can be intimidating places for international students. Despite that, it is one place international students can contribute to knowledge sharing by sharing their perspectives and stories. The perspectives of international students in class rooms as safe spaces should be recognized as other ways of knowing in classrooms. Contribution to dialogue and voices of international students should be respected and acknowledged. Such an environment will encourage and allow for other concepts of knowledge and multiple ways of knowing to be approached. Allowing positive contribution from international students in the classroom will allow for stereotypes to be dismantled and provide a learning opportunity for all other students in the classroom. It is important to point out that knowledge sharing does not only occur in the classroom. Workshops and seminars on international experience knowledge sharing can move beyond just inviting international students, domestic students are encouraged to

be part of this forum so that the learning is not only between only international students. Intercultural knowledge sharing will be much more effective if all students are invited to participate instead of only focusing on international students. Domestic students are an integral part in the conversations around intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions, but are often overlooked in discussions surrounding intercultural awareness in various literature.

Recommendations for Domestic Students

The role domestic students play in building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions cannot be ignored. The intercultural learning of students, particularly domestic students in Canada, is lacking (Garcia-Perez & Rojas-Primus, 2016). They should be a part in the conversations on intercultural building capacities in higher education institutions.

a) Diversity appreciation: Domestic students are to be encouraged to appreciate the benefits of diversity in higher education institutions and how it can beneficial to their own developments as global citizens. For those students who do not have the opportunity to travel abroad to immerse themselves in other cultures; living, working and learning with international students is an excellent opportunity for them to broaden their horizon and outlook on the world. There is so much they can potentially learn from other students, to enrich their own knowledge base. By sticking to their own circle of domestic Canadian students, they will just be reinforcing tribal knowledge and miss out on new knowledge from others from a social background that differs from what they know. Individuals tend to be apprehensive about what they fear and do not know. Having agency to lean in and attempt to learn from other international students will foster intercultural learning, knowledge, and understanding. Domestic students can also be

encouraged to reach out and get to know more about others who are different from them. Learning to appreciate cultural differences is essential to building the necessary skills and behaviour to interact with others from cultures outside Canada. Domestic students are in a privileged position to be vanguards of a multicultural Canadian society and should leverage on this position to deliberately and consciously make connections with international students to foster intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions.

b) Linkages: Mentorship and buddy systems currently exist in higher education institutions in Canada. Making these channels much more effective and efficient in building connections to increase intercultural relations is the issue at hand. There is a need for a genuine, authentic relationships where these superficial relationships can be moved to something more real. Beyond just peer mentorships, where domestic students are paired with international students, it can be expanded to include faculty and staff to connect with international students from other cultures. This relationship has the added benefit of allowing international students to integrate into the system both socially and academically. Beyond the domestic and international students intercultural relationships, building intercultural capacities in higher education should be a holistic approach and involve all stakeholders across the university. Leadership by example can exploited if the administrators at the top echelons of the university can lead the mentorship agenda if they can be directly involved in mentoring international students as well. Individual faculties can also be involved by connecting international students with faculty and support staff to meet and connect once in a while to foster intercultural connections.

c) Travel abroad: Living and learning abroad for domestic students could be highly

encouraged across universities across Canada. The research participants from the study provided enough evidence to show that domestic students who had lived abroad and had interaction with other cultures had a different worldview and were much more open, empathetic and understanding of international students. Their behaviour was remarkably different from domestic students who had not had any international exposure. Higher education institutions will need to invest in having domestic students travel abroad. This is in no way to discredit internationalisation at home where domestic students get to interact and learn from other international students. More evidence of intercultural awareness was exhibited from students who had the opportunity to live abroad.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

In this section, I present recommendations purposefully targeted at higher education institutions in intercultural capacity building. Besides listening to the voices and contributions of international graduate students, the following areas identified below will push the intercultural capacity building agenda forward.

a) Intercultural communication: Communication is a key enabler in building any kind of relationship. Communication in any intercultural setting takes varied forms, written, unwritten, verbal, non-verbal, images, and pictures all send across messages. Higher education institutions across Canada should aim to create an environment and space where intercultural communication can thrive. Fostering intercultural communication across campuses should not be a one-off activity in the form of organized workshops and seminars. It should be part of the identity and way of life in and around university campuses across Canada. There is a tendency for intercultural communication to have different meanings in different higher education institution across Canada. It will be

prudent to have a framework on what intercultural communication as a vision and a mission means to each higher education. Once this is clarified, the intercultural agenda can be trickled down for implementation at the respective schools and faculties within the university. Within this broad agenda, Holliday (2011) suggests increasing the awareness of institutional, cultural racism, and power structures in intercultural communication learning. The mechanics of implementing the granular and fine details of how intercultural communication learning will work should fall under the auspices of intercultural, diversity and inclusion teams in higher education institutions. Intercultural communication could arguably be one of the important pivots that drive a continuous and ongoing intercultural capacity building agenda framework of higher education institutions in Canada.

b) Anti-racism education: A key aspect in internationalising the curriculum (Leask, 2015) will be to integrate anti-racism education as part of the curriculum. This will involve education on inclusivity and the equality of all as human beings. Mansfield and Kehoe (1994) call for going beyond multicultural education in higher education institutions. For them, multicultural education is usually focused on intergroup harmony, celebration of diversity, and cultural heritage and pride, while antiracist education pushes the boundaries and attends to educational disadvantage, systemic racism, power relations, politics, and critical analysis. There is a tendency to tow the line with the taken for granted assumption that as multicultural country, Canada is fairing well on addressing issues of race and discrimination. In higher education institutions, beneath the veneer of what appears to be a multicultural environment, racism and discrimination is pervasive, albeit in a covert form. Some higher education institutions are putting in commendable

efforts with regards to giving a place at the table and acknowledging indigenous knowledge. Nevertheless, it must be noted that there are challenges and tensions of grouping indigenous students with international students under the internationalisation agenda of higher education institutions. More efforts can be extended to not only dismantling, but demystifying the otherness about international students from other parts of the world. Antiracism education as part of the internationalisation curriculum could possibly be made mandatory in higher education institutions across Canada.

c) Increasing intercultural awareness: Higher education institutions in Canada can make it a prerogative to make intercultural awareness on their campuses much more visible and part of the academic culture. I am careful to ascribe to training programs in diversity because if care is not taken the concept of culture can be reduced to a static and monolithic concept that involves the celebration of food, international days, and cultural costumes. Culture is intangible, shapeless, fluid, and dynamic. Further caution should be taken in the sense that these intercultural awareness sessions should avoid reifying and stereotyping cultures, which can potentially undo the benefits of the workshops and is as damaging as ignorance (Locker, & Findlay, 2006). In attempting to build intercultural capacities, becoming culturally competent is not the end goal. It is a challenging prospect to become truly competent at the culture of another. Intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions should be premised on the acceptance of one's lack of competence in cultural matters of the other, which acknowledges that our knowledge is always partial (Dean, 2001). From this perspective, intercultural capacity building will be a continuous and ongoing processes of building relationships and understanding the contexts and histories within which cultures develop (Hiranandani, 2012). Besides

workshops and presentations on topics like diversity, inclusion and equity, awareness on topics like gender, sexual identities, indigenous knowledge, and race issues should be part of subjects incorporated in the curriculum and pedagogy for all students irrespective of course offering. This will be an opportunity for students new to Canada to understand tolerance and appreciation of diversity in Canada as a society. This window of opportunity to learn about diversity will help to minimize some culture shock international students face. Care should be taken in these intercultural awareness sessions so it does not come across as attempts of indoctrination and validating the status quo of the dominant cultural way of knowing.

Additionally, the presence of a diverse faculty of different races and sociocultural backgrounds is an important visible marker that will portray a multicultural environment. An exemplar of tangibility of intercultural awareness and a manifestation of a culturally diverse institution for minority international students of colour is to see faculty members who look like them. Beyond attracting international students to increase diversity, higher education institutions in Canada should consider employing more faculty of colour on merit to represent the diversity they uphold as institutions of higher learning. The possibility of amplifying the optics of diversity across campuses will be to have a physical space that flies the flags of all nations that have their students represented on university campuses across Canada.

Recommendations for Future Research

For further research in the future, I end with some suggestions for researchers who are interested in intercultural awareness in higher education institutions. There are many opportunities to conduct more studies and explore the under-researched area of the input of

students in intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions. Below are my recommendations for further research:

a) A recommendation for potential future research will be to broaden the base and explore other potential additional inputs that can help expand on the building blocks identified in this study. This study participants identified intercultural communication, cultural awareness, and the role of the international graduate students in building an intercultural capacity framework in a higher education institution. From this study, this was how the participants perceived and understood the concept of intercultural capacity. These inputs were from the perspectives of group of international graduate students in one institution. Intercultural capacities is a complex and difficult concept to grasp and I believe other participants in another study will illuminate this concept by adding other perspectives. Undertaking a comparative case study across multiple Canadian universities can potentially generate more data to offer other dimensions on intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions. Stretching this a bit further, the comparative study between the universities can be a longitudinal study that could capture the total duration of the time spent in the universities and how intercultural learning evolved over the time span spent by the international students.

b) Another area that could benefit immensely would be to investigate and seek to understand the perspectives and experiences of domestic Canadian students with respect to intercultural capacities and responsiveness in a higher education contexts. My study has explored the views and opinions of international graduate students. The international graduate students in this study were very outspoken on how there was an almost non-existent relationship between international and domestic students. It will be fair and

balanced to listen and understand the narratives of domestic Canadian students in higher education institutions. A potential study that explores the voices and perspectives of domestic Canadian students will not only broaden the knowledge base on intercultural capacities, but offer a holistic, balanced, and comprehensive view into the world of domestic students and how the navigate cultural tensions in their quotidian moments with international students.

c) I would also recommend for further studies on an exploration on perspectives and experiences of African students and intercultural capacity building in Canadian higher education institutions. International students come to Canada from all over the world. In contrast to student coming from Asia, especially China, there is substantial literature on the experiences of Chinese students and how they navigate the cultural landscape in Canada. Though the number of students coming Africa are still in the minority in terms of representation in Canadian universities, it will be worthy of academic significance to listen to their stories and how their identity plays a part in intercultural engagement in their new academic environment. These differing perspectives will go a long way in advancing intercultural capacities in Canadian higher education institutions.

Personal Reflections

I came into this study as a researcher-participant and an international graduate student. Together with my research participants we have been able to add our voices to the debates, dialogues, and discussions on intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions across Canada. It is my desire that this work will be one of the many sparks that will ignite further conversations on intercultural learning, awareness, inclusion and diversity within Canadian universities. International graduate students have been able to contribute their quota to

new learning by way of their experiences and perspectives. This study will add to the already existing literature on intercultural knowledge and learning in academic institutions. I believe that policies, programs, and practice in Canadian universities and beyond will be positively influenced by the findings of this study. The work of intercultural capacity building calls for the joint efforts of international students, domestic students, administrators, teaching and non-teaching staff of higher education institutions for it to be a success. Building intercultural capacities is a journey and not a destination. The collective goals of intercultural capacities will be achieved by overcoming challenges that present during the course of the journey.

Undertaking this research has a personal transformational endeavour. I have added to my repertoire of existing knowledge, unyoked myself from earlier biases and prejudices I held, and continue on my life-long journey as an adult learner. I came into Canada as an international student with a burning desire to learn. I personally learnt a lot with interacting with other students from different cultures and it was one of the main reasons I decided to undertake this study. Some findings surprised me, opened my eyes, and allowed me to see things from a different perspective. Among them are the lack of cultural awareness by non-academic staff, especially essential workers who work in places like the food court and how they interact with visible minority international students, mental health concerns seen from a western perspective and how it did little to address needs of international students, and lastly need to acknowledge the identity and voices of visible minorities to contribute to the intercultural capacity building framework. The study gave an in-depth understanding on the complex phenomenon on intercultural capacities and what it meant to the research participants.

Lastly, the existing literature in education suggested sparse input from international students when it came to contributing their quota on cultural awareness issues and diversity in

higher education institutions in Canada. From this study, it is evident that the voices of international graduate students have offered favourable suggestions and input to higher education institutions to be more responsive to the needs of international students in Canada, and for prospective international students who chose to come to Canada to pursue their education. It is my wish to see further research in the near future to expand on areas within the intercultural capacity building discourse.

Conclusion

Building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions to support international graduate students was the focus of this inquiry. My study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse by adding to research and literature, potential practical application, and improving policies in higher education institutions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015) by building an intercultural capacity framework by working with domestic students, international students, and higher education institutions in Canada. The findings, analysis, and discussion from this qualitative case study highlighted the perspectives and experiences of international graduate students in a higher education institution in Western Canada. International students experiences in higher education have been explored under the broad auspices of internationalisation in various studies, but under-researched when it came to capturing the voices of international graduate students in the conversations around diversity, cultural awareness and inclusion in Canadian institutions. Together with my research participants and myself a researcher-participant in this inquiry, I used a constructivist paradigm to get an in-depth understanding of the various perspectives in a bid to attempt to answer my research questions. The findings identified key building blocks in intercultural capacity building in higher education institutions, advocated for the necessary support systems for international students by meeting their needs. All this can be made feasible

by harnessing the learning moments experienced by the international students, and how identity and cultural tensions between domestic and international students could be ameliorated to create a conducive environment for people of diverse cultures to work, live and learn together. This goal can will be achieved when the challenges and barriers international graduate students face in higher education institutions are addressed. Building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions goes beyond checking competency boxes. It is a continuous, cyclical, ongoing acknowledgement of cultural awareness in higher education institutions with no finite end goal in mind. Awakening the consciousness about the strength in diversity and differences of peoples of different cultural backgrounds in higher education institutions in Canada is what this study sought to achieve.

It is my fervent desire that the results of this inquiry may contribute to the ongoing conversations on cultural awareness, diversity, and internationalisation amongst international students who continue to chose Canada as the country of choice in furthering their education.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Form

Hello,

My name is Benedict Kojo Otoo. I am a PhD student at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. I am conducting a research that focuses on understanding the perspectives and experiences of international graduate students regarding intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts in a university in Western Canada. This study involves your approval to participate in the following activity:

a. Participation in an interview (60 minutes)

Selection of participants will be through a convenience sampling due to my accessibility to other international graduate students. This recruitment form together with a one-page project description that discloses the purpose of the study will be included in the email. In addition, a written consent form will be provided, signed by each participant in advance of his or her participation, and filed for future reference.

Participation in this research would involve being interviewed by myself, as researcher. This interview could be face-to face, via Skype, or over the telephone. If you are interested in participating in this research, the scheduled interview would take place at your convenience, sometime between February 2020 through to May 2020.

There is no financial remuneration for participating in this study.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. However, the final decision about participation is yours and your participation is

completely voluntary.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at [email address] or by telephone at [telephone number]. I will then send you a confirmation that you are interested in volunteering to participate in this study. At that time, I will also provide you with further information.

Sincerely,

Benedict K Otoo (Interviewer)

Werklund School of Education

University of Calgary

[telephone number]

Email: [email address]

Dr. Colleen Kawalilak (Supervisor)

Werklund School of Education

University of Calgary

[telephone number]

Email: [email address]

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Mr. Benedict Kojo Otoo, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Werklund School of Education, [telephone number, email address]

Supervisor:

Dr Colleen Kawalilak, Werklund School of Education

Title of Project:

Intercultural Capacities and Higher Education Responsiveness Contexts: Perspectives and Experiences of International Graduate Students

Sponsor:

(*If applicable, identify the project funding source here)*

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue

participation at any time during the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to inform my PhD degree research and focuses on developing an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of international graduate students regarding intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts in Canada. This study will focus on the perspectives of the international graduate students as they perceive their own socio-cultural identity and the intersections of integrating into a new academic environment. This study may contribute to the work around the voices of international graduate students in building intercultural capacities in higher education institutions in Canada and beyond. Guided by a qualitative case study methodology, I seek as a researcher to explore and interpret the perspectives and experiences of research participants. As a researcher-participant, I will gather the narratives of participants as they tell their story and bring out their unique cultural experiences of being international graduate students in Canada.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

This study requires your participation in the activity below:

a)Participation in an audio-taped interview (approx. 60 minutes)

Participants will be asked to share what they understand by intercultural capacities and how it goes to inform their experiences as international graduate students in a higher education context. Examples of the types of questions that will be asked on include the following:

What do you understand by intercultural capacities?

In what ways can you help build intercultural awareness/capacities as an international student?

Participants will be expected to share their thoughts, perspectives and experiences as an international student. Participants will have up to four weeks to review and express any questions

they may have in terms of how aspects of the interview may be used. After the period to review the interview data has expired, participants will not be able to withdraw their data. If a participant does not respond to the request to review materials during this time, approval of information will be assumed.

All and any participation in this study is voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or repercussions. Participants will be informed before the interview of the right to withdraw from the study verbally and in writing on this consent form.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected ?

Identifying information including your name, age, telephone number and email address will be collected in this study. I will make every attempt to ensure data are anonymized. Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide gender, age and country of origin. Your name and contact will be known to myself and my supervisor, in all notes and recordings you will only be referred to with a pseudonym. In addition, audiotape recordings and transcripts from the interview will only be available to myself and my supervisor and will not be made public. For the interview, participants will be expected to share their thoughts, perspectives and experiences as an international student. Participants will be invited to meet with the researcher to participate in the interview at a location of their choice. Follow-up procedures will involve a copy of the transcribed interview delivered to the participant to clarify or change any of the information collected within a week.

You will be audiotaped and no one apart from myself as a researcher and my supervisor will have access to the recordings. The recordings will not be made available to the public. There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can

choose all, some, or none of them. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No:”

I grant permission to be audio-taped: Yes: ___ No: ___

I wish to remain to referred to by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____

You may quote me and use my name: Yes: ___ No: ___

Are There Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

There is some minimal risk that, in responding to my research questions, some emotional concerns may arise, considering the possible sensitivity around issues of cultural identity. If this happens, you may request that the interview be terminated without penalty, and you may withdraw from the study. If you desire, I will provide you with contact information on counselling and support services available to you.

Benefits of participating in this research may include the opportunity to advance the work of providing support to international graduate students in Canada. This study will allow you to express your learnings and understanding related to issues of intercultural capacities and responsiveness in higher education contexts for professional advancement in the area of adult learning.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the information collected from the interviews. If you choose to participate in an interview, you will be asked to provide your name or a pseudonym of your choosing, and contact information (email address or phone number).

All participation in this study is voluntary and participants may refuse to participate

altogether or withdraw from the study no longer than 4 weeks post-interview without any penalty or repercussions. Participants will be informed before the interview of the right to withdraw from the study verbally and in writing on this consent form. Information contributed before the withdrawal may be retained and used. Information collected will be used with complete confidentiality and anonymity. All files containing identifiable data will be encrypted. Data containing identifiable information will also be encrypted. Due to the small number of participants, anonymity cannot be guaranteed, I will be naming the institution as a university in Western Canada in reporting of my final report.

Only the researcher and the supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the interviews. No one except the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the taped interviews. Pseudonyms as a means of ensuring anonymity will be used. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results. The interview schedule are kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and supervisor. Paper documents will be shredded. The data will be stored for five years on a computer disk, at which time, it will be permanently erased.

"Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results? Yes: ___ No: ___

If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number)"

_____

_____

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to

participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Dr. Colleen Kawalilak

Werklund School of Education/Faculty of Graduate Studies

[telephone number, email address]

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix C-One Page Project Description

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Research Project: Intercultural Capacities and Responsiveness in Higher Education

The primary purpose of this project is to understand intercultural capacities and higher education responsiveness through the lens of international graduate students who have been in graduate school in a Canadian post-secondary institution for a minimum of one year.

The main questions that will guide this research are:

a. How do international graduate students perceive the concept of intercultural capacities

b. How do intercultural capacities influence the experience and success of international graduate students in higher education in Canada?

Other guiding research questions in addition to the above over-arching questions listed will be used in conducting the interview. My position as an international graduate student informed my decision to do this research. I have a first-hand experience into the complexities of being an international graduate student in a higher education institution in Canada.

This study will employ a qualitative single case study methodology (Merriam, 2009) to explore and understand international graduate students' perspectives on intercultural capacities and higher education responsiveness in a university in Calgary, Canada.

The choice of a qualitative case study as per Merriam (1998), is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting educational phenomena that can directly influence policy, practice, and future research.

The research will seek to draw out themes and patterns from the narratives of the participants, from which the findings will be identified.

The study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on cultural awareness by adding to research and literature, potential practical application, improving policies in higher education institutions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015) by building an intercultural capacity framework by working with and not for international graduate students on intercultural capacities. This research will be submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

For more information about this project, please contact:

Mr. Benedict Kojo Otoo
Werklund School of Education/Faculty of Graduate Studies
[telephone number, email address]
and
Dr. Colleen Kawalilak
Werklund School of Education/Faculty of Graduate Studies
[telephone number, email address]

Appendix D-Guiding Questions for Interview Participants

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Werklund School of Education

Interview Schedule (for use with participants)

Perspectives and Experiences of International Graduate Students: Interview

INTERVIEWER GUIDE

Participant Name: _ _____

Location _____Calgary_____DATE: __

A. *Interviewer: REVIEW terms of and sign consent form with participant.*

B. *Interviewer: RETAIN Consent Form*

C: Interviewer: READ to Participant: **Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview on the perspectives and experiences of international graduate students. This interview will take approximately 1 hour. I appreciate your participation. I will ask you a series of questions and record them, then later you will have a four-week window to review the interview transcriptions and edit them for meaning as you like, to offer corrections. Do you have any questions? Concise, direct answers will keep us on time please. Are you read to begin?**

C. *Interviewer: Turn Recorder on. Begin Interview. (Interviewer: KEEP THIS completed guide and file).*

Questions

Prelude (Tell me about yourself–a)name, b)level of education, and c)country of origin)

1. I am really interested to know what you understand by intercultural capacities in this study.

Prompt: Intercultural capacities to me…..

2. As you reflect on graduate school experiences, what are some of the significant learning moments (incidents/ experiences) regarding intercultural awareness/ moments that come to mind? *Prompt: The significant learning moments…..*

3. From your experience, please share some of the cultural challenges or barriers you face as an international graduate student in your new academic environment. *Prompt: The barriers or challenges…..*

4. Please describe any particular supports or experiences that you recall that made you feel welcome. *Prompt: The supports… The experiences …..*

5. Describe the level and type of supports or activities you have received from the institution *Prompt: The level of support…. The type of support….*

6. As you recall your own experiences, has these supports assisted you in fitting in or feel alienated? Please describe. *Prompt: These supports assisted me by….. These supports made me feel…..*

7. Describe how your cultural background and ethnicity has aided or hindered you in adjusting to life in the university? *Prompt: My cultural background has aided…. My cultural background has hindered….*

8. Describe your relationship and learning moments with domestic students as an international student and how you believe this relationship can be improved . *Prompt: Areas you would like to strengthen, improve upon …*

9. And, in what ways can you learn from other domestic and international students in and outside the classroom…..

10. Drawing from your experience and the knowledge you have, what suggestions do you have for the university to support the integration and success of international students…….

11. Any suggestions on building intercultural capacities by the university….

12. As an international student, how can you also contribute on building intercultural capacities…..

13. Are there any specific barriers you face as an international student in integrating into the university culture or way or life…..

14. How did you feel as an international graduate student when you first arrived in the new environment? *Prompt: I felt…..*

15. And what will you describe as your needs as an international student…..

16. Describe what you believe the university can do to respond to your needs as an international graduate student from a different socio-cultural background. *Prompt: The university can respond by…..*

17. In your opinion how culturally aware is the university to the unique needs of international students…..

18. Tell me about any other experiences (stories) that you would like to share about your intercultural experience in graduate school. *Prompt: My experience…..*

19. Other comments or questions…

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your sharing of experiences and perspectives are tremendously important to this study!

Interviewer: Keep this paper page, with your notes, keep any documents the participant offers, file and retain.

Contact information:

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Appendix E: Member Check Message

On completion of transcribing the interview recordings, I will e-mail you a copy of the transcript. You will have a week to review the transcript. If you are comfortable with the content of the transcript, please reply to me within a week. Transcripts will be finalized unless participants indicate any issues within a week's time.

If you wish to have your contribution to the transcript changed, you may add, revise, or delete your information from the transcript as you see fit, save a revised version, and return it within a week.

Appendix F: Reflective Journal Sample Entry

Intercultural Capacities and Responsiveness in Higher Education Contexts: My Perspectives and Experiences as an international graduate student

29th January 2020

As part of my data collection methods for my doctoral dissertation, I have decided to start the journaling my experiences as an international graduate student to a university in Western Canada. Writing as an epistemological moment and escape allows me as a researcher – participant in my study allows me to look deeper into the self and bring to the fore my story. By telling my story, I share my world with others who will also bring meaning to this inquiry.

I came to graduate school from a Ghana in West Africa, a country with a population of approximately 28 million people. This was an environment in which I felt comfortable and completely at ease with myself as an individual. I never had to question my identity on who I was. I plucked myself out my comfort zone and decided to pursue a new adventure for varied reasons and decided to come to Canada. I found myself back in graduate school after a long hiatus with post-secondary education. In 2016, I was formally admitted into graduate school in Canada. It was a totally new experience. Different ways of doing things from what I was a accustomed to from back home in Ghana. From meeting people in the hallways, elevators and corridors of the university, who avert their gaze from you to avoid being greeted. I literally greeted almost everyone I met back home, even if I knew them or not. I quickly learned how to act in this new environment. It is quite different meeting when I meet people of colour just like myself. The “black nod” as a way of greeting amongst other people of African descent on the university campus was and is an exception. This is not to be expected of all black people on

campus. Some just look away nevertheless. It is comforting and reassuring to get that nod from another black person on campus. It is a form of silent acknowledgement of the feeling that we are in this together.

I have had to negotiate my identity and ask myself on several occasions who I was in this new space, I feel almost invisible at all times. I have few people I can call friends. Loneliness and detachment as a person of colour is what I feel most times. Could it be that because I perceive myself because I am much older than my cohort? I could be totally wrong. I came to grad school with some knowledge, cultural experiences and a lot to share, as well willingness to learn from others. I do ask myself how can the HEI make international graduate student feel a part of the university community without feeling alienated. This study will seek to unearth and advance the conversation regarding intercultural capacities within the space of HEI in Canada. As I begin this study, I start to consciously put my ear to the earth to listen to subliminal messages from the ground. I immerse myself into this inquiry by paying particular attention for elements that will inform my study. I draw from my well of experiences and the vista of my perspectives to make meaning of what new knowledge I bring to this study in advancing existing knowledge. So much has been written on intercultural epistemologies in higher education especially with regards to cultural competencies in higher education. Competency denotes expertise, meaning one can be an expert in the culture of the other with a finite end. My inquiry seeks to traverse beyond the study of cultural or intercultural competency. I have in mind building or starting the conversations around an intercultural capacity framework within the context of higher education within Canada, with a symbiotic relationship that benefits both international students and HEI across the country. This will be an active and ongoing relationship with no endpoint. This will involve, programs, policies and learning to ensure the success of

international graduate students in their own environment.

I will begin my foregrounding what I mean by intercultural capacities within the context of this study.

30th January 2020

My conceptualization of what intercultural capacities means for the study is all activities, programs, policies and learning in a higher education institution environment that allows for learning from international graduate students to share what they bring from their cultures and what they can also learn in their new space. Learning about the cultures of others is not a straightforward and linear process. There is a lot of tension involved in trying to learn about others. My belief is that one cannot be an expert in the culture of the other. This being said, this does not take away from us the quest to know about the other. Culture in itself is an amorphous and complex concept to grasp. Which aspects of culture comes into mind when we are trying to know about the other so as to live in harmony with the other on the university. I am looking forward as a researcher-participant to see what conversations, reflections and perspectives my fellow participants will bring to the table.

Intercultural capacities to me means all continuous and cyclical activities from both international graduate students and higher education institutions to get to understand the world of the other to ensure the success of international students in graduate school. One interesting observation on my part is how international graduate students from similar socio-cultural backgrounds gravitate towards each other in social settings. One will typically find black students huddling together. It will be interesting to find out how people of the same ilk tend to hang out together. A way of getting to know the other is to make a conscious effort to lean in to the space of the other to get to know the other. This has to be a voluntary effort on both parties.

This cannot be done with coercion. My thoughts is also drawn to the nature of societies in Canada. Hofestede talks about individualistic and communal societies. As researcher-participant, I come from a culture where we aby nature communal, we tend to naturally occupy each other's spaces. Life in Canada on university campuses, tend to be very individualistic. Apart from the individual efforts of one to get to know the other, how can the higher education institution help to foster an environment or space where knowledge sharing and exchange can take place? Will just be one-off activities per semester to do cultural events? Will there be a robust curriculum in place to address intercultural capacities? How does the strategy of the university address these concerns? International students continue to come to Canada on annual basis. With USA closing its doors due to the policies of President Trump, students all over the world continue to flock to Canada. Due to advancing technology, the world gets closer. The idea of nurturing, developing and understanding the world of the other through intercultural capacity building should be one of the driving agendas on internationalization. It is not a clear process. I am looking to frame a concept of intercultural capacities in higher education with this inquiry. I am shying away from a concrete definition of intercultural capacities in the interim. This is work in progress. I proceed with care when it comes to definitions. I am avoiding building a monolithic, cast in stone definition. This study is to lay the foundation bricks of what intercultural capacities mean in higher education. With time, others can continue to join ny expanding on this body of knowledge on what intercultural capacities is all about. In the interim, this study is within the context of higher education in Canada. Though this study is in its embryonic stage, this concept can be transferred to other places like the work environment that can foster employer-employee engagement among other. I come to this study with humility, because I do not know and seek to know.