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3. LEARNING FROM DESIGNING AND ORGANIZING AN INTERCULTURAL STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China's rapid development has drawn attention in all parts of the world. This has happened in a time when globalization and internalization are terms that frequently occur in the Danish educational context, and several ministerial reports call for more internationalization and an expansion of international activities to go beyond the borders of Europe and the West (The Danish Government, 2006; Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalization, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

In the North Denmark Region many primary and lower secondary schools (*grundskoler*) have shown a growing interest in offering courses in Chinese language teaching, even going so far as to arrange student exchange programs (Du & Kirkebæk 2012). In response to this, the Confucius Institute for Innovation and Learning at Aalborg University (CIAAU) initiated a student exchange program between Danish and Chinese schools in early 2012. Two visits to Danish schools from Chinese schools were conducted within half a year, with the aim of facilitating both institutional development toward internationalization and individual student development toward becoming global citizens for both participating schools. In addition to benefitting the students and schools involved, the design and operation of the student exchanges provided learning opportunities for the designers¹ of the program. We will discuss these learning opportunities in this chapter, drawing inspiration from John Cowan's reflection theory.

The design of the student exchange program was inspired by Etienne Wenger's concept of the community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998). In this chapter, a theoretical framework is developed by linking the concept of culture to communities of practice in order to understand and analyze the cultural and intercultural issues of cultivating a CoP. In order to understand, reflect on, and evaluate the program, we, the designers, documented the process using multiple empirical methods: interviews, video recordings, participant observations, student portfolios, and student diaries. These different pieces of documentation will be included in our analysis.

After the implementation of the experimental program, we reflected on the methodology of the design and the research conducted during the program. In this

chapter, we present our reflection by addressing two research questions: What are the challenges and possibilities involved in facilitating the creation of an intercultural CoP via such a student exchange program? What did the designers learn about culture in the process of designing and conducting an intercultural CoP?

In this chapter, we aim to present the design and conduction process of the exchange program, and reflect upon the methods that were used. The framework of culture and learning theory will be employed to analyze and discuss our empirical work, including methodology and process as well as the outcome of the program. Based on this information, we developed several recommendations on how to improve similar student exchange programs in the future. However, we begin with a brief introduction of the background of the student exchange program.

THE STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM

The student exchange was an unexpected opportunity that arose in December 2011 and left us, the designers, with less than two months to prepare. Originally, the CI AAU had not planned to initiate any student exchange programs until later the following year, but after a successful delegation trip of 26 Danish primary and lower secondary school principals to Beijing earlier that year, there was a mutual interest in arranging a student exchange program. As a result, when a school in Hangzhou, China, planned a study trip to the northern part of Germany for 22 students of ages 13 and 14 and found that there would be time for them to spend four days in Aalborg, Denmark, no one hesitated to make the arrangements.

As this was a pilot study for the CI AAU, the short duration of the visit was considered ideal for an experiment, and we were quickly able to make agreements with a Danish partner school that would be willing to find 22 same-age host students and suspend regular schooling for the visiting days. The entire student exchange program turned out to be a meaningful learning experience not only for the students and schools involved, but also for us the designers, due to the data we were able to collect in relation to the student exchange and the reflections that took place during every phase of the program.

LEARNING FROM REFLECTION

To dig deeper into the analysis of our own learning processes, we will focus on reflective learning, inspired by ideas of Donald Schön (1983) and John Cowan (2006). This will act as a meta-level analysis of our own learning in the designing and conducting of the exchange program as a CoP. Thus, we regard ourselves as what Schön (1983) would call “reflective practitioners” and see the entire process of designing and conducting the exchange program as a learning cycle in itself.

The concept of reflection for learning has been developed and discussed intensively by Chris Argyris, Donald Schön and John Cowan, all of whom supplement and build on each other’s work. Based on the ideas developed with Chris Argyris (Argyris &

Schön, 1978), Schön continued developing his concept of reflection in *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 1983). Likewise, Cowan (2006) builds on ideas from Schön. We took inspiration from both of their works to look at our own learning process.

Reflective learning is often described as following a certain pattern with different reflection phases. Certain elements seem to reappear in most theories on reflective learning, while the role and placement of reflection changes. The reflection is most frequently centered on an experience, activity, or action, and the reflection related to this leads to a conceptualization or generalization that can be described as learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schön, 1983; Cowan, 2006).

In order to structure this chapter in a chronological way, we find inspiration in Cowan's theory that describes the intervals of reflection as *reflection-for-action*, *reflection-in-action*, and *reflection-on-action*. Reflection-for-action is an anticipatory kind of reflection that takes place prior to an action. It is based on prior experience and knowledge related to an impending task or action. Reflection-in-action is, as implied, found in the process of operating or conducting an action and covers reflection that can lead to improvisation for solving challenges as they occur. This kind of reflection consists of both anticipatory and retrospective thought. Finally, reflection-on-action describes reflection taking place after a learning experience. It includes thoughts on what was done in the situation and tries to analyze and summarize the past experience and extract generalizations which will be of future use (Cowan, 2006, p. 36).

These three phases of reflection will be connected to different stages of our learning process from the student exchange, which are: theoretical considerations of learning and culture for the design of the exchange program (reflection-for-action), the design and conduction of the exchange program (reflection-in-action), and evaluation of the program (reflection-on-action). We go through each phase in detail in the following sections.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON LEARNING AND CULTURE FOR THE DESIGN OF THE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

In the *reflection-for-action* phase, we discussed what we knew from previous experiences and what could be brought into future student exchange activities. We discussed our anticipations, needs, and expectations, and invited the two schools involved to do the same, particularly the Danish school. We also reviewed and discussed learning and culture theory in order to strengthen our standpoint and prepare for the future. These theoretical considerations will be the main focus of this section.

Culture

To begin, we find it important to clarify our concept of culture since this should correlate with how one would choose to design the contexts in which it is learned.

Our understanding of culture in relation to learning is clearly reflected in our choice of learning design for the exchange program.

Definitions of culture vary; we found many different views and understandings of what culture is. In an attempt to connect this to a learning program, one will quickly realize that keeping to only one school of thought can be problematic. Classrooms and student exchange programs each provide different contexts and opportunities for learning about culture, and we believe that different culture understandings fit different contexts. Iben Jensen (2007) categorizes two types of culture concepts, which can be described as two opposing ideals: the descriptive and the complex concept of culture. We can use these two concepts in mapping how we use different elements of culture understandings for providing contexts in which to learn about culture.

The descriptive concept is characterized as the more static understanding of culture where the individual is part of a larger cultural holistic system, which, to a large extent, determines the individual. Culture is, in this sense, a homogenous group of people with a similar cultural identity, which is formed and reproduced in every individual through his or her socializing and growing up in a specific culture. In contrast to the descriptive concept of culture, the complex concept does not perceive culture as a self-reliant system to which all values and meanings can be referred, but instead one that is much more dynamic. The individual agent is not determined by culture, but plays an active part in the negotiation and creation of culture. Culture is created between people rather than inside people, as is the case in the descriptive concept (Jensen, 2007).

In reality, most culture theories have elements of both concepts. Geert Hofstede and colleagues (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), for example, have a very descriptive approach in their analysis and description of national cultures, but they also follow the more complex understanding of culture in distinguishing between cultures, subcultures, and intercultural meetings. Both Hofstede and Danish culture theorist Hans Gullestrup (2006) understand culture in layers with different grades of dynamics. Hofstede illustrates this using an onion shaped figure with a core and outer layers, while Gullestrup uses a bucket with core culture layers in the bottom and manifest culture layers in the top. Both consider culture in its core (including such things as fundamental world conception and basic values) to be hardly changeable, and in its peripheral or upper layers (including such things as manifest and perceivable culture aspects) to be highly dynamic and constantly in negotiation (Gullestrup, 2006; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

In our design of contexts to facilitate learning about culture, we consider both concepts. We acknowledge, like Gullestrup and Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, that the complexity of the culture concept makes it difficult to delineate a sharp division between the two culture concepts in practice. We find student exchanges apt for designing learning based on the complex understanding of culture. The actual meeting can facilitate a context-based environment with cultural negotiation and practicing of culture as described in the complex culture understanding. However,

we also found ourselves reverting to a more descriptive understanding of culture in the process of designing the exchange program, trying to anticipate possible cultural reactions and differences. This understanding and practical approach to culture will be connected to our standpoint on learning in the following section.

Learning – Constructivism and Situated Learning

There is a great deal of variance in approaches to exploring what learning is and how learning happens. A constructivism standpoint is employed in both the design of this program and our research process. This approach does not only focus on how individuals learn through interaction with other people and their environment, but also gives attention to the social dimension or context for learning. John Dewey (1938), one of the well-known representatives of this approach, gives specific weight to the social nature of learning. By focusing on ‘doing’ and ‘experiencing’ things that create meaning, Dewey believes that learning takes place mostly through communication and purposeful interaction with others.

Dewey’s theories on learning through problem-solving and experiences have been further developed by scholars on learning and implemented in diverse educational practices. Echoing Dewey’s propositions, Lev Vygotsky (1978), from a sociocultural learning perspective, further suggests that individual learning and development takes place through participation in cultural practices and interaction with others in the social contexts.

Inspired by these works, this study is based on the belief that learning is an interactive process that occurs in interpersonal, social, and cultural contexts. Learning is constructive rather than reproductive. We also see social interaction as an essential aspect of learning; thus, learning takes place in situated activities (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, participation, activities, contexts, and culture are important elements in making learning happen; as Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) propose, learning is a process of participation in communities of practice.

Situated learning gives more weight to contexts, interactions, activities, and social construction of knowledge instead of decontextualized, abstract, and general knowledge. This perspective of understanding learning is often related to learning activities outside of a formal curriculum. In relation to the design of a culture-learning program, it is important for students to be engaged in meaningful activities so that they can learn about other cultures through intercultural experiences.

To summarize, in this study, we take the standpoint that learning is not only transferring knowledge, but more importantly, transforming lived experiences into knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs (Wenger, 1998; Jarvis, 1992, 2003, 2009). Therefore, in relation to culture learning, we depart from the complex culture concept, creating an environment in which learners actively participate in the process of creating knowledge and building up practices, beliefs, and values, which are complex and context-dependent. In order to provide students with this sort of

culture-learning opportunity, it is essential that the designers create the right context for facilitating learning by creating cultural experiences and practices.

Designing a Reflective Intercultural Community of Practice for Culture Learning

Our design for the culture learning exchange program is connected with our understanding of the concepts of culture and learning, both of which are associated with social practices and contexts of negotiating and creating new knowledge (and culture). In effect, the learning of culture becomes the practicing of culture. Originally, Wenger did not implement thoughts on culture in his CoP theory, but there are times in which meetings of CoPs are also meetings of different cultures, which is why culture matters to those involved in these meetings. Wenger's theory on CoPs is based on a sociocultural understanding of learning. According to this understanding, learning is not merely the transfer of knowledge in decontextualized spaces, which are contexts differing from those in which the knowledge originated, such as most classrooms. Instead, Wenger argues that learning takes place everywhere and at all times, including in classrooms – in which the intended content is not necessarily all that is learned – and is related to social contexts and processes found in communities of practice.

Through our design, we wanted to give the students the opportunity to experience and practice culture. People participate in a variety of social practices and communities all the time, whether at a playground, in families, or in work teams. Membership in these different communities shapes who we are and what we learn (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998). Our design promotes a community focused on the practice of culture and learning. For the individual, this means that learning is participating and contributing to the CoPs of which you are a member. For designers of programs like ours, the task at hand is to facilitate the right conditions for the development and cultivation of a CoP. This entails providing resources and tools for the participants of the CoP to develop and immerse themselves in the practice (Wenger, 1998).

To summarize what took place in this phase, was that we learned that theoretical knowledge of culture and learning are important resources in the creation of meaningful and ideal intercultural contexts for learning. Thus, based on the theories discussed above, an ideal, reflective intercultural program was designed, and in order to document the Danish and Chinese students' culture learning process², multiple methods were employed for data generation, including interviews, video recordings, participant observations, portfolios, and student diaries. Before starting the program, we had expected there would be a great deal of complexity in learning and culture theory, but this complexity became even more apparent as the actual organization and conduction of the student exchange program unfolded.

ORGANIZING AND CONDUCTING THE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

In the *reflection-in-action* phase, we both planned activities for the students, particularly in cooperation with the Danish school, and carried out the actual student

exchange. We took positions as participant observers throughout this phase, making adjustments based on the students', schools' and designers' reactions to the program as it progressed.

The events from the student exchange program selected for this analysis will be presented in chronological order under headlines presenting different scenarios. We tell two stories detailing events that happened in the process of preparing for and conducting the student exchange. Each story includes scenes showing highlights of culture learning from the designers' point of view. They are presented with the following focuses:

- What did we, the designers, learn in the process of designing? What did we have in mind about our own and other's culture?
- How did the student exchange program unfold, especially with regard to intercultural interaction?
- How might we improve future student exchange programs?

The style of the narrative will be rich in descriptions and interpretations, and the points of analysis will be descriptions of selected scenes as they were experienced and interpreted by the designers. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) inspires this style of presenting data, for which he coined the term "thick description". This is useful from a methodological point of view since it allows the researcher to present data from a cultural context to the reader in a meaningful way. By presenting the events and reflection processes together, we aim to provide a meaningful way of presenting our data and analyses to the reader, and also to use these examples to illustrate our own learning as designers.

Let Us Go Ice Skating

In the time leading up to the Chinese student exchange, many practical details had to be addressed, and most of the planning of and communication about the program between the Chinese and Danish sides went through the CI AAU. During the planning process, we held several internal CI AAU meetings to discuss the planning of the activities. In this process, the CI AAU's own cross-cultural composition often became apparent and was put to good use since the Danish and Chinese colleagues had different takes on what would be possible to plan and how the Danish and Chinese schools would react to the proposed program. The proposition of an ice skating activity can serve as example.

The two Danish CI AAU designers and the Danish school had come up with the idea of taking the Danish and Chinese students ice skating since the visit would take place in the winter months. This idea was intended to create an opportunity not only for the two groups of students to gain a better understanding of each other by participating in the same enjoyable activity, but also for the Chinese students to experience the local culture of ice skating since many of them are from Southern China where snow is rare. The Danish designers felt no anxiety in response to this

activity and were relieved to have found an outdoor activity despite the fact that it was winter. The idea of going ice skating was later presented at an internal CIAAU meeting, and the Chinese colleagues quickly voiced their concerns. They explained that as hosts, the CIAAU and the Chinese school would have a great responsibility to the Chinese students' parents. The physical safety of the students would be of utmost importance while travelling, particularly in a situation without parents around. Safety concerns are especially crucial when the students are from single-child families, since they carry many concerns from parents and grandparents while travelling.

It was difficult for the Danish colleagues to understand these worries because ice skating is a somewhat normal leisure activity during winter in Denmark, and it did not pose any risks in their mind. Thus, the debate took more than half an hour during the meeting, which was unexpected given the meeting's agenda. Although it was difficult for the designers to reach a common understanding on this matter, it was eventually agreed to adopt a conservative and flexible strategy. It was ultimately decided to temporarily remove the activity from the program and planned to ask the Chinese teachers of their opinion on it upon their arrival.

However, it happened that the Chinese teachers did not have any concerns regarding this activity. In fact, the Chinese students had already gone ice skating in Germany, and it was therefore decided not to include the ice skating activity in the final version of our program (see [Table 3.1](#)).

This event is a clear example of the complexity of culture and the unpredictable nature of cultural behavior and thinking. We were incapable of predicting reactions and attitudes about ice skating because culture and human nature are complex, and this was the case both for the Danes and the Chinese. Also, the episode illustrates the prejudices that can exist towards one's own culture, as was the situation for the Chinese, which demonstrates that although everyone has prejudices and expectations that are based on past experiences, it is necessary to remember that these are not always useful for predicting future experiences.

Workshops

For the day of the Chinese students' arrival, we cooperated with the Danish teachers to plan three different workshops: Two with a Chinese theme and one with a

Table 3.1. Final version of the program

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| Day 1 (Thursday): Arrival at noon. Workshops during the afternoon and communal eating at the school in the evening. |
| Day 2 (Friday): Regular Danish school day in the morning. Then visit the CIAAU's Learning Centre ³ in Aalborg and go on a GPS-run in the afternoon. |
| Day 3 (Saturday): Spend the day with the host family. Dinner at a Chinese Restaurant for students and host families. |
| Day 4 (Sunday): Departure in the morning. |

more Danish theme. The students were divided into groups and assigned different workshops.

The idea behind the workshops was to create an intercultural CoP learning context. The workshops were designed to incorporate meaningful activities stimulating mutual engagement and creating joint enterprises and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998) that were easy to take on and could lead to interaction by, for example, creating tutoring roles for part of the group. Room for an open dialogue was considered equally important. The workshops would also give the participants the opportunity to shape their own learning experiences by exploring together and inspiring each other.

The Danish-inspired workshop involved letting the students cook dinner for everyone in the school's home economics kitchen. Danish and Chinese cooking traditions vary greatly, and participation in and experience with the cooking process was considered a good theme and an opportunity for knowledge sharing.

We expected most Danish students to have cooking experience both from home and from home economics classes at school, and most Chinese students to have little or no experience; to our knowledge, the intense Chinese school curriculum leaves no room for non-academic classes such as home economics, and many Chinese students do not play an active part in cooking at home since their job is to study hard. Thus, we expected the workshop to be an interesting experience for the Chinese students in particular.

The workshop played out with the Danish students taking the lead in the kitchen and helping to instruct their peers in the cooking process based on the tasks given by the teachers. Typically, the Chinese students worked in pairs with their Danish hosts, who would explain to them how to use the kitchen tools with which they were unfamiliar and the general rules of being in a kitchen and handling different kinds of food. Thus, the practicing of the workshop theme created the culture meeting and facilitated a learning context for the students to interact and inspire each other, while also developing basic cooking skills. In practice, this resulted in a number of workstations preparing various parts of the menu, with the teacher managing the overall process.

When dinner was ready, the Chinese students were surprised to find that one of the dishes was plain, raw carrots. The Danish teachers had prepared a menu that they believed was very Chinese-inspired (rice, stew, and raw vegetables on the side) to make sure it would be to everyone's liking; however, they soon realized that the Chinese guests were not used to eating raw vegetables. As a result, only a few Chinese students politely tried eating the raw carrots.

The second workshop was about Chinese paper cutting, which is a very old, traditional art in China and is regarded as a part of the national culture. For this workshop, we expected the Chinese students to have a great deal of experience and to be able to instruct the Danish students, allowing interaction and communication to take place. However, it turned out that most of the Chinese students did not have any experience, especially the Chinese boys, who lacked interest in the activity. They

appeared a bit puzzled, asking the teachers why they needed to do this and saying they did not know how to do it. This came as a surprise to us and we realized that paper cutting might not be as common an interest among Chinese students as we expected, so we had to come up with a solution. At first, we tried to let the CIAAU's Chinese language teachers do the instruction instead, but while the Danish students appeared to enjoy the activity, it seemed that the workshop theme simply was not of interest for the Chinese. Ultimately, we decided to redistribute all the students to the two other workshops.

Most of the students from the paper cutting workshop went to join the other Chinese inspired-workshop, which worked better both overall and in promoting cooperation between the Danish and Chinese students. The students were to paint something related to the Chinese New Year (which was to occur shortly) on a wall in an "international corridor" inside the school. They were not told what to paint, but through creativity, knowledge sharing, communication (mainly using English as lingua franca), interaction, and the use of Google Images as inspiration, the two groups reached a decision on something with which they wanted to decorate the wall (Chinese zodiacs and a dragon). The Chinese students helped the Danish students choose the right colors for the objects painted, explained to them the story and meaning behind them, and helped them write their names in Chinese characters. Having seen this, we tried to expand the task based on the large amount of student interest in the activity and asked the students to discuss the composition of the painting and what other elements should be included.

To summarize, during the *learning-in-action* phase, we made use of the descriptive concept of culture in our attempt to predict how the various workshops would unfold, despite us being well aware that culture is highly complex and difficult to predict. In some cases, we received the results we expected, while the complexity of culture was made clear in others.

We had designed workshops as situated CoPs in order to provide the students with contexts to learn about culture through interaction and practice, and we learned that the students' participation and negotiation in the workshop was the actual nexus for culture learning rather than the content of the workshop. This was clear in the design of the Chinese New Year workshop, which provided a good framework for intercultural communication, knowledge sharing, intercultural cooperation, negotiation, meaningfulness, creative thinking, and active participation for everyone involved.

The unsuccessful Chinese paper cutting workshop lacked many of the CoP elements mentioned above and was unable to stimulate a common interest among the students. Instead of working together to reach a goal, the students worked on their individual paper cuttings. Thus, despite intercultural communication, knowledge sharing, active participation, and creative thinking being possible, this workshop lacked the possibility of intercultural cooperation and negotiation since everyone was working on his or her individual paper cutting. Moreover, the workshop activity

lacked meaningfulness; where the others would prepare dinner for the group or create a painting on a wall for the school's students to enjoy in the years to come, this workshop group was only making some paper cuttings to put on a notice board.

EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

In the *reflection-on-action* phase, we invited the schools and students to reflect on the experiences of the student exchange program, asking them what they had learned, what was successful, and what could be improved in the future. We made use of a variety of evaluation and reflection tools: We had the Chinese students' journals and Danish students' portfolios, and we carried out focus group interviews with the Danish students. Additionally, we organized a self-evaluation process with the schools involved. And, finally, we held several meetings to discuss and reflect on the entire process; these took place both immediately after the student exchange and in the months afterwards.

From the Chinese students' journals, we found that most students chose to describe their experience with reflections on an activity rather than the activity itself. For example, on the second day of the program, the Chinese students spent a regular day in school together with their hosts, and the experience left a big impression on the Chinese students. They attended different classes and therefore had different experiences, but nearly half of them specifically chose to describe the atmosphere in the classrooms, whereas only a very limited number of the Chinese students mentioned the actual teaching content. The mere participation in and experience of the atmosphere in the classroom gave the Chinese students an understanding of the Danish classroom atmosphere, Danish student-teacher interaction, and Danish teaching and learning culture.

For the Danish students, the focus group interview situation also provided a framework for culture learning. The diversity in the students' experiences yielded insight on the complexity of culture. Often, the phrase "all the Chinese" was used initially, but in many cases it was changed to "some of the Chinese" as more information and other experiences were shared by other students.

Based on more in-depth talks with the Danish teachers, we learned that numerous Comenius projects⁴ had given them valuable experiences which could be transferred and/or used as inspiration to an even greater extent in future international projects and student exchanges between Danish and Chinese schools. These teachers were able to offer information on how to deal with the host situation, thoughts on prompting cooperation between the students involved in the time leading up to the student exchange, and more ideas for designing learning contexts for the students.

To summarize, through the students' reflections, we learned that the experience of an activity left a greater impression than the activity itself. This could also support our learning from the workshops; that it is not so much the content, but more the experience and participation that is the nexus for culture learning.

From the Danish teachers' reflections, we learned that their international experience from European contexts is a valuable source of inspiration which needs to be included in the design of learning contexts and in the student exchange program in general.

OUTCOME

A few things become clear upon looking back on our experiences. Firstly, a descriptive understanding of culture based on previous experience and learning can be useful for anticipating how the future cultural meeting could develop in the designing phase. For us, this activity of anticipating and designing based on a descriptive culture concept is also a reflection process in which preconceptions of cultures, both others' and our own, are articulated and discussed, and thus the individuals' own knowledge and preconceptions are submitted to reflection (reflection-for-action). However, because of the complexity of culture and general human behavior, one can only prepare and design the practicing of culture to a certain extent. Different motivations lie behind human actions and decisions and culture is merely one of them. In practice, humans do not strictly follow certain cultural templates, but these theoretical templates can still be useful in designing and planning. The design and expected outcome will not always be consistent with how the actual events unfold, but this only provides a learning experience for the designers.

Secondly, we have learned that culture in its complex form, in the actual meeting between cultures, is an apt context for generating learning. The learning of culture comes with the practicing of culture. In the actual conduction of our learning design, we met unexpected situations. These situations had to be dealt with and triggered us to reflect on how to understand and resolve them. The workshops we had designed as situated CoPs gave the students a context to interact and practice culture, both in the sense of practicing activities related to the general national cultures and in the sense of working together and negotiating the activities. As designers of the activities, we learned that the simple participation, observation, and negotiation in practicing were the actual nexus for culture learning rather than the activity itself. This is reflected in both our own observations and in the Chinese students' journals.

Limitations

During the different phases of the program, we became aware of certain limitations that affect the possibility of a successful outcome for a Chinese-Danish student exchange. Firstly, communication via English as lingua franca posed more difficulties than anticipated. Despite the fact that the Chinese students were attending a Foreign Language School, their English was rather limited, and for many students even very simple conversation was challenging. Feedback from the host parents to the Danish teachers emphasized communication problems, and the international coordinator at the Danish school suggested putting two Chinese students in each host family in

the future, or at least putting students with limited English together with students with more well-developed English communication skills. Also, in relation to CoP-designed workshop activities, communication problems caused difficulties in terms of creating joint enterprise. In an ideal setting, joint enterprise is the result of a collective negotiation process among members of a CoP, but it is difficult to negotiate without effective communication.

Secondly, the Danish teachers noticed a huge difference in the interaction level between Danish and Chinese students compared to previous student exchanges with European countries via Comenius. More research is needed in order to explain this behavior, but possible explanations are: The Chinese students' more limited English skills, the non-existent communication between the two parties in the time leading up to the actual student exchange, and the fact that a maximum distance exists between Western and Eastern cultures, which increases the acculturative stress on the students involved (Burnett & Gardner 2006). No matter the reasons, there was, with a few exceptions, a tendency for the Chinese and Danish students to stay with their own groups. This speaks to the importance of designing a framework for the students to interact and communicate to an even greater extent in the future in order to facilitate intercultural learning.

Lastly, it is important to be aware that intercultural meetings can potentially confirm existing or establish new stereotypes about others (Stangor, Jonas, & Hewstone, 1996). Whether or not short-term sojourns between Denmark and China are likely to confirm or disconfirm such thinking also needs further research.

Future Exchange Program Designs

For the future designing of exchange programs, we will build on a similar framework of culture and learning theory combined with knowledge learned during the pilot study. We cannot predict cultural behavior or foresee intercultural clashes, even though some behavior may happen more frequently than others. What is important in future student exchanges between Denmark and China is the refining of our work in creating contexts to facilitate culture learning.

Based on these pilot study experiences, we will focus more on designing activities that require interaction and cooperation between the students, putting special emphasis on ensuring that students do not limit their interactions to their own group. The activities should provide a context for participation, observation, communication, cooperation, and negotiation of practice, and also be meaningful to those involved.

With all of this in mind, this reflection loop has ended and will be the foundation for the next exchange program in this growing international cooperation between Denmark and China at the school level.

CONCLUSION

For the purposes of learning and writing this chapter, we have taken a very practical approach to culture and culture theory. We found value in both the descriptive

and complex concepts and made use of them respectively in our own process and learning design. Looking back, using Cowan's understanding of reflection has explicated our own cultural backgrounds. In daily life, we are often unaware of, or pay little attention to, our own preconceptions of people from either foreign or shared cultures. In the course of cultural negotiation, these become clear, and in this chapter we try to stress the importance of always looking back and reflecting, as this will provide footing for future negotiations. Writing this chapter and reliving the situations through discussion and data analysis has generated as much learning as the conducting of the exchange program itself. In that sense, our quest of facilitating learning for others has been a good opportunity to take a closer look at our own process, and Cowan's reflection phases have been most useful in structuring this chapter as well as our experiences.

NOTES

- ¹ The designers are the four authors of this chapter: Two have a Chinese and two a Danish ethnic background.
- ² Findings of data concerning the students are reported in another on-going article
- ³ The CIAAU's Learning Centre is open to schools and the public and is a facility to provide Chinese language teaching and experience Chinese culture.
- ⁴ Comenius is part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Program and aims to boost the quality of European school education and provide individuals with skills and competences necessary for personal development and future employment (European Commission 2012:2).

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LEARNING FROM DESIGNING AND ORGANIZING

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