



## Transcultural teacher development within the dialectic of the global and local: Bridging gaps between East and West



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- Teachers' roles in creating successful futures for both individuals and society.
- Transformational learning fostering global citizenship and social justice.
- Transcultural collaboration to counter Western hegemony of knowledge.
- Narratives of East-West transcultural journeys as teacher educators.
- Personal practical and professional knowledge and transcultural teacher development.

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### ABSTRACT

Amid far-reaching global social and economic changes, increasing diversity and growing interdependency, teachers play important roles in creating successful futures for both individuals and society. Within the dialectic of global and local, and with increasing connectivity amongst teachers, opportunities for transformational learning fostering empathy, global citizenship, and social justice are unprecedented. Thus, teacher education reform should facilitate transcultural collaboration, collegiality and critical perspectives to counter Western hegemony of knowledge, Eurocentric education, neo-colonialism, and neoliberal/conservative agendas. This paper investigates these issues and teachers' personal practical and professional knowledge through narratives of West-to-East and East-to-West transcultural journeys as teacher educators.

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### 1. Introduction

In this paper we argue for transcultural thinking in teacher education through our West-to-East and East-to-West cross-cultural comparative narratives as teacher educators. With decades of transcultural experiences — one from Canada to Japan and the other from China to Canada, we are building bridges between East and West, while honoring the traditions within different cultural contexts. Moreover, we aim to transcend the false dichotomies of “theory vs. practice” and “East vs. West” in our cross-cultural and transcultural teaching and research (Howe, 2010; Xu, 2011a, 2011b).

Following the Introduction and narrative inquiry Conceptual Framework are transformational learning and teaching narratives presented in the form of “teacher to teacher conversations”. This dialog is further elaborated in the Discussion, focusing on teacher relationships, teacher education research, and transcultural teacher development. In order to situate our conceptual framework within the broader areas of narrative inquiry and teacher education, first it is necessary to show how we as individual teacher educators have arrived at our current shared viewpoint. While from very different cultural backgrounds, we both identify strongly with the experiential approach of narrative inquiry and recognize it as influential in our own practices. It is a bonding agent, a kind of “glue” that connects us personally and professionally. It forms the basis for our shared conceptual framework.

We first met as doctoral students in 2001 at the University of Toronto. The curriculum course taught by renowned scholar, Professor Connelly, introduced students to make meaning of

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curriculum and the significance of teachers' personal practical knowledge and professional knowledge landscape through narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In this course, various narrative tools were used: educational chronicles, journal writing, metaphors and images, memory boxes, family stories and more. Most importantly, when each of us presented our educational chronicle, the rest of the students were required to write response letters to the presenter to reflect on and make educational meaning of our lives. This course became a catalyst for our sharing of transcultural insights into curriculum, teaching and learning when five doctoral students met and formed a study group to engage in weekly discussions. This provided the five of us with a unique opportunity to engage in a cross-cultural and transcultural learning experience. We called our group DO-AS-a-Team, an acronym created by Shijing for our group out of the first letters of our given names (Neilson, Xu & Stevens, 2003; Stevens, Neilson, Xu & Howe, 2005). We learned from one another as each of us brought diverse personal, social, cultural and professional knowledge into our weekly readings and discussions. We developed team spirit from our group coursework, including shared writing, peer revisions and collaborative assignments and supported one another through the comprehensive exams, thesis proposal writing, ethical review process, conference proposal writing, and presentations (Neilson et al., 2003; Stevens et al., 2005). When Ted moved to Japan, we sustained our team spirit through Internet connections and conferences. The DO-AS-a-Team experience has had a profound influence on our curriculum, teaching and learning as well as on our research (Howe, 2005a; Xu, 2006). The group narrative inquiry of the group (Neilson et al., 2003; Stevens et al., 2005) has shaped our thinking as teachers. When Ted teaches in Japan and Shijing teaches in Canada, our own teacher education classes mirror our university lessons and other cross-cultural experiences during this formative stage of our development as teacher educators in a cultural context different from our own. Thus, what we teach and how we teach is strongly influenced by what we ourselves have experienced together in our learning and research. While separated by great geographic and cultural distance, we have been connected through narrative inquiry on a professional knowledge landscape that is shared, constructed and reconstructed by teachers and teacher educators.

Teachers can recover and reconstruct personal practical knowledge through an exploration of "images, personal philosophies, rules, practical principles, rhythms, metaphors and narrative unity" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 59). Teacher knowledge is a narrative construct which references the totality of a person's personal practical knowledge gained from formal and informal educational experience (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 221). In fact, DO-AS-a-Team experienced this narrative construct in a transformational sense as we shared our stories lived in diverse cultures. Our "teacher conversations" helped each other to recognize and make explicit our personal theories of teaching and brought to the surface our deeply held beliefs and our tacit personal knowledge of curriculum, teaching and learning; i.e., our personal practical knowledge (Neilson et al., 2003; Stevens et al., 2005). The intercultural dimensions of our relationship have enabled us to gain new perspectives from our personal stories and the most dramatic example of this was the realization that various cultures may possibly recognize common "best philosophies" of learning and teaching (Stevens et al., 2005). Our DO-AS-a-Team experience has made us learn the power of story and narrative inquiry. The richness of our collective thoughts illustrates the power of collaboration and the growth in professional understanding that can spring from conversation.

Ted and Shijing have continued this journey through a large number of email correspondences and Skype conversations over a

3-year period (May 2010 to June 2013). The Skype conversations tended to last anywhere from 30 minutes to over an hour. Some of these conversations were digitally recorded. Also, both authors made electronic notes after each conversation, articulated new stories and revised previous stories. The telling and retelling of the stories have been a process of constructing and reconstructing our cross-cultural journey, illustrating a narrative point of view and *the experiential study of experience* raises the distinction between *phenomena* (what is studied) and *method* (how it is studied) (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Our conversations served as a catalyst to a narrative inquiry into our cross-cultural lived experience. There have been hundreds of conversations, reflections and revisions to this work. In the process of storying and restorying our cross-cultural lived experience, we learn to understand what Connelly and Clandinin mean by *thinking narratively*. That is, narrative inquiry as a methodology is a way of thinking about phenomena. With the narrative thinking of our cross-cultural lived experience as the phenomena in our inquiry, the themes for our paper emerged (or in some cases became submerged) over time through our reflexive reiterative conversations and telling and retelling of our stories.

While narrative inquiry as a methodology is relatively new in China and Japan, the power of "teacher conversations" is acknowledged in both countries, where teachers are expected to spend considerable time talking with colleagues about teacher issues as part of their professional development routines (Howe, 2005a, 2005b; Paine & Ma, 1993; Wang & Paine, 2003; Xu & Connelly, 2009; Yonemura, 1982). Hence, the current collaboration between Ted and Shijing, in many ways, is a carried-on endeavor of our DO-AS-a-Team cross-cultural and intercultural "teacher conversation" (Xu & Stevens, 2005). By retelling Ted's West-to-East and Shijing's East-to-West learning and teaching journeys, we hope to narratively construct the common "best philosophies" of learning and teaching uncovered in our teaching practices in two different education systems and cultures.

We find Clandinin's (1992, chap. 8) illustration of narrative inquiry best articulates what we have experienced in our inquiry journey:

Narrative inquiry as research method builds on the process of growth, that is, on the constructions and reconstructions of personal practical knowledge as we story and restory our lives. Narrative inquiry is the storying and restorying of our narratives of educational experience. The narrative account of an educational event that we wrote as researchers constituted a restorying of that event. (p. 126)

When we go through this reflective process, we restory our cross-cultural teaching and research journeys, "on a continuum with the processes of reflective restorying that goes on in each of our educational lives" (Clandinin, 1992, chap. 8, p. 126). Thus, the telling and retelling of stories is an ongoing inquiry journey that is "a matter of 'entering into' the phenomena and partaking of them" rather than "a matter of the application of a scholarly technique of understanding phenomena" (Clandinin, 1992, chap. 8, p. 126). In this way, we are able to make meaning of our cross-cultural educational experience not only personally and locally, but also socially and globally.

## 2. Conceptual framework: a shared narrative inquiry framework for transcultural teacher education and comparative and international education

While multicultural and multiculturalism as terms are still widely used, we prefer to use the term *transcultural* as it better describes what is presently occurring around the globe and what

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