Acknowledging and Bridging the East-West Cultural Divide in the Classroom

By

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Abstract

Teachers work to create lessons that will reach all of their students. However, in their effort they miss a group of students who have not been recognized: those who have been educated in a different culture of schooling and often in another language, who need support to adapt to Canadian classrooms. This paper will specifically examine the differences between the educational cultures in East Asia and the West, including Canada. It will investigate their educational histories and present views on independence, logic, critical thinking, motivation and group work. A qualitative study was conducted, including two interviews with each of five teachers from a Greater Toronto Area (GTA) school. The interviews revealed that the teachers were unaware of which of their students had been educated in a different culture, unless they were identified as English Language Learners (ELL). This observation supports the premise that this group of students is not recognized by teachers, making it difficult for them to provide appropriate support to student learning and development in the aforementioned areas. The discussion will suggest that it is possible to recognize and provide greater support for these students by teachers becoming aware that a student’s past educational culture does have an effect on learning.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

There was once a time in North America when teachers were not concerned with specifically who their students were or how well they performed (Earl, 2006). It was the teacher’s job to pass on their knowledge and the students’ job to learn. The number of students who passed and failed was irrelevant, and a single student’s ability to excel or not was linked to their perceived level of intelligence (Earl, 2006). Times have changed.

There have been shifts in views not only regarding how teachers teach and what is taught, but also of the place of education in Canada. The new outlook views every student as having the potential to succeed. It is now the responsibility of the teacher to recognize differences in students, individually and in classes as a whole, and then to adapt lessons to suit all needs. Lessons can be differentiated for interests and skill levels, they are created to meet the needs of English Language Learners and students identified with special needs as well as those students who seem simply to be struggling or excelling in one subject area.

Even with all of these considerations about our students when teaching, I suggest we add another. It is my view that in a multi-cultural society, there is another important group of students that may be getting overlooked. Differences in culture can lead to different ways of viewing the world. These differences are not simply figurative, but rather, they are quite literal. People can view the exact same image, but those who come from different cultural backgrounds notice different parts of the image first (Nisbett, 2003). These differences in perception extend to all areas of life and therefore,
I would argue, to all areas of the classroom. As there are many different educational-cultures world-wide, the scope of this paper will be limited to the differences between the educational-culture in Canada (and similar Western countries) and those countries heavily influenced by Confucian educational ideals. The specific definitions of the terms used to describe ‘culture’ in this paper can be found in Appendix A. The purpose of limiting the scope is to allow for a more thorough evaluation of the cultural differences between two specific groups in education.

This paper will look at Canadian educational-culture as one that is grounded in the Socratic Method. This instructional method encourages the use of questions to persuade students to think more deeply about topics they are studying (Palmer, 2003). The Socratic Method encourages students themselves to ask questions in order to increase their understanding and broaden their learning. The Confucian educational-culture, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on mastering ‘known’ material and practicing ‘known’ methods (Palmer, 2003). Historically, those materials would have been the work of the great sages. Today, they can be the works and theories that are generally accepted in society. In this style of education, respect is shown to the teacher by repeating what is learned and questioning by the student is discouraged. The cultures that commonly use this method are those of East-Asia and South-East-Asia.

This paper examines what cultural variations from East-Asian classrooms affect students in the Canadian education system. Specifically, it seeks to determine in what ways high school teachers observe learning-style differences manifesting between East Asian and Western-educated students? In Chapter 1 my interests and reasons for addressing this concern are outlined. Chapter 2 follows with an examination of the existing research and a selection of specific areas of interest. The methodology and
procedures used are outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter also includes the limitations of the study. Chapter 4 addresses who the participants in the study were and provides the data collected. Chapter 5 discusses what was learned through this study and makes recommendations for practice as well as for further study.

**Personal Background and Interests in this Area**

I first became interested in cultural viewpoints when I began to travel internationally as a teenager. My interests were strengthened when I moved to Asia after completing my Bachelor’s degree. As an English-speaking Canadian I was able to travel to Japan to teach English with little teacher training or experience. I was struck by some of the differences in culture, and also by the similarities. However, in that first year I did not observe how these differences affected the education system. This was in part due to the newness of the situation in which I had placed myself and to the material I was teaching. In Japan, I taught English conversation and so was not regularly exposed to higher order thinking in the classrooms.

The following year I moved to South Korea. It was in Korea that I saw how culture affects student work. Many of my classes at this new school were of students who could communicate in English at a high level. They were learning History and Science from American textbooks designed for native-English speakers. So it was a great surprise to me when I began teaching these students and encountered serious problems. Although they seemed to understand me and the questions I asked, they would answer with quotations from the text book. I did not understand why. I came from a ‘typical’ public school background in Canada, and I had been encouraged through my school career to think for myself. I now believe that I was projecting my own educational culture onto my students and expecting them to react to my questions the way I would
have reacted at their age. I became determined to get them to read more into the material they were learning and thus spent months using the Socratic Method to lead my students to think for themselves, to work their way through problems using linear logic and to make connections between different parts of the text and their lives.

At this point in my career, I had very little training as a teacher. I did not understand what was happening nor did I know any of the correct terms for what I was doing. All I really knew is what I could observe in my students. Since many of the parents had expressed desires that their children be qualified to enter foreign universities, my goal was to help them to be able to express themselves as would be required in Canada.

Separately from what was happening in the school, I was also growing and developing as a person, and coming to understand the culture in which I was immersed. I read Korean history books, traveled to important cultural sights, ate all sorts of new and different food, and learned to read and write the language, but not to speak it.

From these experiences, I began to understand what I was seeing in my classroom. I discovered that some of the positive results I was receiving were accidental, as they resulted from methods used with a different purpose in mind. For example, early on, I began rewarding students who pointed out my spelling errors with candy since they did not offer this help automatically. I felt it was important that their notes were spelt correctly and the students were copying what I wrote on the board. Therefore, my spelling needed to be corrected. With the incentive of earning a candy for finding a mistake, my students became comfortable bringing my errors to my attention. What I did not realize was that this simple act, over time, would lead to a
huge change in the culture of my classroom. My students told me that in public schools in Korea, students cannot question their teachers. This would be considered rude and inappropriate. They are not even allowed to ask questions about the material, never mind questioning the teacher’s ability (i.e. his or her making an error). Thus, by rewarding a behaviour that was so foreign for my students, I had begun to change my classroom. My students began to feel comfortable not only with finding my spelling errors but also with asking questions when they had trouble with a new concept.

This idea may seem alien to people who have never been immersed in another culture so vastly different from their own. On the outside, many cultures worldwide are similar: parents want their children to succeed, people strive for an education, and cities all over the world bustle with people trying to make it in a modern, global environment. But when you scratch the surface, you see that the ways in which various cultures prepare their children to pursue these goals are quite different. It is this diversity that I will explore. The approach to learning that I observed while teaching in Asia affects how students consider questions, tests and assignments. It is these differences that I believe cause many Asian students to struggle more than is necessary within the Canadian school system. Thus, I believe it is important to identify the differences so that teachers can help to ease a new student’s entry into the education system in Canada by scaffolding for their particular challenges.

Discovering the Academics

Richard Nisbett in his book The Geography of Thought (2003) discusses many of the ways Eastern Cultures and Western Cultures differ. I first read this book during my seventh year in Asia. I had lived in Japan, Korea, China and Thailand. The research discussed in Nisbett’s book struck a chord as it explained using research so many of the
observations I had made over the years. Much of what he discussed was very obvious living immersed in those cultures, but other things, even after more than half a decade, were striking.

It was not long after reading The Geography of Thought that I entered the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Having had the benefit of years in my own classroom I was able to relate much of what we were learning to real students. As I started to grasp the terminology and the classifications that were being used to identify students, I noticed that culture was not often considered. We spent a great deal of time in our first year considering how to create inclusive lessons designed to reach all students. In doing so, my classmates and I were encouraged to consider the exceptional students to ensure that they all could be active participants in the lesson. The exceptional students were usually defined by their academic aptitude or their English language ability. Heavy emphasis was also placed on individual learning styles, however, it was never suggested that learning styles or preferential methods might be shared amongst members of a given culture. This intrigued me, as I had noticed a definite shared set of strengths and weakness within the students I taught in Korea. There was individual variation, but as we look for individual variation in all categories in which we label students, I wondered why cultural background was not included in the categorization that we were learning.

In my experience within teacher education, often cultural differences are lumped in with English as a Second Language concerns. It seems to me that the thought is once students are highly proficient in English they will also begin to work to our cultural standards. Culture, on the other hand, is often mentioned in terms of materials to be used in class, and of a global education. We are taught to consider
cultural backgrounds when teaching so that we can create inclusive classrooms in terms of course content, but the idea that a student’s educational cultural background, or where they have attended school, may affect their understanding of the content, their intrinsic motivations, or the perceived quality of their work has not been considered.

In trying to determine why this group of students has been neglected, I am left with more questions. Is it because grouping students by culture is politically incorrect? Culture is often closely linked to race. If we start making links between a student’s cultural background and education, will these links be considered as racist? At this point, I also think it is important to point out that a student’s educational-culture is influenced by where their education has taken place. Students raised and educated in Canada are likely to have a Canadian educational-culture in most respects, as the classroom environment they are accustomed to has been that found in Canada. I believe these cultural differences are strongest for students arriving from East-Asian countries who have studied English before coming to Canada and therefore, have the language proficiency needed to perform in the classroom. So maybe this issue is left out simple because of limited time? I understand that everything taught in a pre-service class could be expanded and taught as its own individual course, however, if cultural influences on student learning are to be considered by teachers, they need to be mentioned in the pre-service program. That leaves the idea that there is not enough research in this area. Therefore, this paper will attempt to evaluate in what way high school teachers observe learning-style differences manifesting between East Asian and Western-educated students.
Chapter 2: Issues, Theory and Research

The Development of Education East vs. West

The roots of the current education systems that exist in the East and West today can both be traced back approximately 2500 years. At this time, two very different men, one Chinese, the other Greek, advanced philosophies that would drive the development of thought and later formal education in their respective cultures. For the purpose of this research the ‘East’ will be considered to be East-Asia including China, Japan, Korea and other countries with Confucius-influenced educational cultures. The ‘West’ will be considered to be Canada, the USA, the UK and other countries with educational cultures influenced by Socrates.

Confucius was born in 551 BC in the Chinese city of Qufu and his philosophical theories revolved around morality and relationships (Tweed and Lehman, 2002). Confucius opened a school that taught his philosophies and that school was continued after his death by his grandson. The graduates of his school would go on to write state exams and eventually to hold official positions in the Chinese government.

As the Chinese at the time considered modern-day Korea to be a part of the Empire, education envoys were sent to Korea, and the Korean kings paid tributes to the Chinese emperors (Eckert, Lee, Lew, Robinson and Wagner, 1990). Eckert et. al (1990) describe how educated Koreans learned to read and write Chinese as the written Korean language was not developed until the 1500s. This sharing of education led Confucianism to spread across the mainland of East Asia. The Koreans even developed a similar system of exams to that of the Chinese to allow middle-class citizens to study and move their way up in society. These exams were based on a students’ ability to
memorize, understand and finally apply the philosophies of Confucius, and his contemporaries who had elaborated on his teachings.

Palmer (2003) states, Confucius created a school and in Confucius’ lifetime over 3000 students were believed to have been educated there. After his death, his descendants continued his school. The imperial examinations which selected government officials were based on Confucian teachings and continued in the same format in China until 1905 (Palmer, 2003). This tradition that was created by the overarching influence that Confucius and his followers had in East-Asia is believed to still influence cultural view of the importance of formal education. Palmer (2003) describes one belief that the strict focus on memorizing the classics stagnated China’s advancement in science and technology by limiting innovative thinkers.

Over time, Confucianism became interwoven with the more prominent religious teachings, and so when Buddhism spread from India through China and into Japan, so did Confucianism (Eckert et. al; 1990). The Japanese at this point also did not have their own system of writing and began using Chinese as they were taught from the Buddhist missionaries. Again, this system of education requiring the memorization of the beliefs and teachings of Confucius and now Buddha, had spread.

While living in East-Asia and working with students there I came to believe that part of the educational focus on memorization stemmed not only from the teachings of Confucius, but also from the language medium in which it was taught. Chinese is not a phonetic language. To become a scholar in ancient times with such a language required a great deal of time and effort as each character and stroke had to be memorized individually. This is still true in great part today, and children in much of East Asia study characters well into their high school years.
The development of thought and education in Greece happened at essentially the same time but in a very different way. It is generally considered to have begun with Socrates who taught Plato who in turn taught Aristotle. Confucius lived from 551 to 479 BCE and Socrates from 469 to 399 BCE (Palmer, 2003). Palmer (2003) describes how the teachings of Socrates, as described through Plato’s dialogues, are believed to have given rise to the Socratic Method still used today in Western education. This method involves using a series of questions aiming to dig deeper to get at the heart of the matter. This style of teaching can be very antagonistic and necessitates that students think for themselves and permits the students to question their instructor (Palmer, 2003). Socrates himself was known for talking to people in the streets and asking them questions seemingly endlessly. He used methods of inductive and deductive reasoning that have come to form the basis of sound arguments in science and mathematics. The Socratic Method does not rely on memorization as the Chinese method did, but rather, on exploring all possible links and connections to a topic.

According to Palmer (2003), the Socratic Method was rediscovered in Western Europe in the 13th century. Palmer also states that this method is known to be a huge part of the education in law classrooms in universities. However, asking questions of children is simply and more broadly a part of Canadian and other Western Cultures. This basis of questioning the world around you and applying inductive and deductive reasoning to argument formation is the basis of the Socratic Method, and it is included in the modern Canadian classroom from elementary school (Tweed and Lehman, 2002).

The use of inductive and deductive reasoning did not come directly from Socrates, but was greatly influenced by him. These reasoning methods were formalized
by Aristotle who was a student of Plato who in turn was Socrates’ student (Palmer, 2003). Aristotle thus became the founder of a logical system of thought that essentially persists in modern Western education today. Aristotle’s teachings spread across Europe with the Romans and endured through the Renaissance (Palmer, 2003). His idea of logic and the use of Socratic Method became an integral part of education in Europe and by extension in the colonies of the European Empires.

As modern day education systems are linked to these ancient pasts, they are also built on vastly divergent views of thought, one based on memorizing the works of masters and the other based on questioning such works. In order for students to be able to adjust from one to the other they need to learn to view education and the expectations placed upon them differently. The students who have recently arrived in Canada need to be guided to aid them in adjusting to a school system with divergent expectations from those to which they are accustomed.

**Independence vs. Interdependence**

In Nisbett’s book *The Geography of Thought* (2003), he devotes an entire chapter to the idea of independence in the West and interdependence in the East. He describes how Western societies are often portrayed as independent and how independence is something Western parents try to instil in their children from a young age. Nisbett (2003) uses many examples to illustrate this including how for the most part, in North America, babies sleep separate from their parents, in cribs or bassinettes. However, in much of the rest of the world, including East Asia, nursing infants share the bed with their parents. From that early start, Western parents then encourage toddlers to make their own decisions about many things such as what kind of snack they want, what clothes to wear, what books to read. Nisbett (2003) describes how Westemers
often feel that this independence in decision-making is natural. However, in East Asia, the training is different. Beginning with co-sleeping, the babies and toddlers once old enough to sleep on their own still spend almost all of their time with their mothers (Nisbett, 2003). Their mothers make all their decisions for them under the theory that ‘mother knows what is best’. This creates a bond lasting through adulthood that is often hard for Westerners to understand (Nisbett, 2003).

The Western independence extends beyond just the children’s view of themselves but also to their view of the world around them. Nisbett (2003) discusses how Western parents talk with their toddlers and young children about objects in terms of physical qualities. ‘The ball is blue and round.’ ‘Can you bounce the ball?’ If the ball then is bounced into the wall a Western parent might ask the child not to do that as they could break something. According to Nisbett (2003), the Eastern parent is more likely to focus on feelings: ‘The wall hurts when you hit it with the ball.’ Giving inanimate objects feelings is rather common in conversations especially between Japanese mothers and their young children.

These differences in focus that begin in early childhood lead to much larger differences as adolescents. Nisbett (2003) continues to describe the general sense that Western youth strive to define themselves individually. They want freedom and equality and there is a common belief that status should be earned. Eastern youth strive to fit harmoniously into a group. In general, they prefer collective action and accept prescribed status based hierarchies. The exception to this in Asian cultures is described by Campbell and Li (2008) who note that there is a great deal of competition for grades in Asian schools. Students from Asia are used to striving to outperform their classmates.
Tweed and Lehman (2002) note that Western students who question ideas in the classroom are asserting their own independence which they observe is a cultural ideal. This plays a key role in how teachers perceive the work of their students. If the educational ideal is individualism, as demonstrated by questioning the ideas of others, then how do teachers perceive work that is less individualistic and more dependent upon the ideas of others? Tweed and Lehman (2002) introduce Chomsky as one who epitomizes this ideal of independence and note his own observations “that students from Asian backgrounds find his classes particularly difficult.”

An intriguing study by Yamaguchi, Gelfand, Ohashi and Zemba (2005) found that the feelings of Japanese adult participants in a task were more likely to coincide with success if the task was collective. Conversely, if the same task was done individually, the American participants were more likely to perceive success. Their results indicate a strong link to the desired independence in Western cultures and group-orientation in East-Asian cultures.

As most of us have only been exposed to one educational-culture in our lives, we naturally think what we are accustomed to is ‘normal’. When I worked in China with young children I noticed that the children from Western families asked a lot of questions and those from Eastern families did not. This had nothing to do with the individual student’s intelligence, but rather with the educational-culture they had been exposed to at home, as they were only four to six years of age and were just beginning to be exposed to formal education. Stigler and Hiebert (1999) in their study of mathematics education in the United States, Japan and Germany determined that education and teaching are cultural activities. They write of Albert Shanker, a former leader of the American Federation of Teachers who “understood that teaching, like eating, is a
cultural activity and that it is governed by powerful forces that function largely outside of conscious awareness…” (p. 107) If we understand that teaching and education are cultural, then we can grapple with the idea that while there is variation from teacher to teacher within a culture there is much greater variation from one culture to another. That we, as teachers in a multi-cultural setting, are welcoming students into our classrooms from another culture, and that those students will necessarily be accustomed to a different style of learning. It would therefore behove us to recognize this group of students so that we can provide appropriate accommodations to help them succeed in their new educational-culture setting.

It is my belief that these general principles of society transcend language and that they may remain with a person for many years, even when education begins in a new cultural surrounding. In the next section, I will examine some of the effects cultural differences might have within a Western education system, with specific reference to how they might apply to a multicultural region like the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Three areas have been chosen to evaluate: logic, motivation and group work. These themes were chosen due to the prevalence of research and my belief that they are directly affected by the choices and/or expectations of the teacher.

**East-Asian Student Performance**

There is a perception in Canada and much of the west that East-Asian students excel in school. This perception has become so standard that it forms one of the most common stereotypes of East-Asians. A recent episode of Glee, a popular American Musical Drama, was entitled “Asian F” (Brennan and Gomez-Rejon, 2011). In this episode, one of the main characters, Mike Chang, receives an A- in Chemistry. His parents, especially his father, are upset and order him to improve or to cut out his
extracurricular activities. This exemplifies the view of how East-Asian students perform in school; Mike Chang gets straight As to the point where an A- is an aberration. It also depicts the cultural stereotype of East-Asian parents pushing their children to perform at all costs.

From my experience, this stereotype does have some basis in reality. A huge job market exists in East-Asia for native-English speaking teachers to teach not only in the public school system, but often to teach in afterschool 'academies'. In Korea, I taught in two different schools, but both times I worked until nine at night and the Korean-English teachers taught until 10 or 11 at night. In both these schools, students from grades seven to nine would study outside of their homes until 10 or 11 each night in order to improve their performance. My students told me of going to several academies or 'cram schools' so that they would excel in school. These schools have become so prevalent in Korea that they are being seen as a problem. In 2009, according to Kim Rahn in a Korea Times article, the government began to make changes to the private education system, trying to reduce the costs and the perceived dependence on these academies in order for students to succeed in school. However, in that article, the government officials do not sound optimistic about their ability to make large-scale changes as they admit there is a culture that has developed around this additional education.

This perception has been backed by the numbers of Asian students being accepted into major universities in the United States. The number of students accepted has now made some students concerned that if they identify as Asian, they will have a lower chance of being accepted. This topic was discussed in a Washington (2011) article published by the Associated Press and republished by many online sources. In
this article, Washington discusses the stories of many mixed-race students who in applying to Ivy League schools choose to represent themselves only as the race that is not Asian. This article shows that many Asian students do perform very well - well enough that they are represented in Ivy League schools at a higher proportion than they are in society in general. The article looks at students who have been raised in the American education system however, does not consider the success of newly arrived students from Asian countries. Those students with Asian background would however be affected by this stereotype that they are expected to perform at a high level. Newly-arrived students may be well prepared to succeed in areas that can be studied using the techniques they are familiar with, but in this new educational-culture, they may require more explicit assistance in areas such as critical thinking that are likely to be culturally new.

A recent study by The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters & Phythian, 2010) found that Asian immigrants were significantly more likely to attend university than other immigrant groups or than third-generation Asian-Canadians. This study was interesting, as it addressed specifically a Canadian context and looked at the success of students in Canadian schools. Some key numbers from this study include that 72% of Eastern-Asian immigrants attend university, and that 13% drop out of high school. Additionally, it found that only 30% of Eastern-Asian immigrants take ESL classes in high school. That low number can in part be explained by the arrival of many students during their elementary school years, but it is also indicative of the number of students who have language training before arriving in Canada. As well, a recent report by Miles Corak (2011) for Statistics Canada found that students arriving in Canada before they turn nine are significantly more likely to graduate from
high school than those who arrive after the age of 13. This indicates that high school teachers need to be particularly aware of this risk and of this group of students. Corak discusses the idea that ‘skills beget skills’. The skills Canadian students learn in their early years of education play an important role in their high school classes. Students arriving from East-Asia have a number of skills; however they may not yet have acquired some of the skills that Canadian educational culture stresses as important. As such, if high school teachers are aware of this group of students in their classroom they are more likely to be able to help them acquire these skills.

**Eastern Culture in a Western Classroom**

**Logic and Critical Thinking**

As mentioned earlier, logic as used in the West originated with Aristotle (Palmer, 2003). It was further developed into the formal logic of today in the 19th century. Formal logic, when studied on its own, is often considered to be a Mathematics class. The rules are straightforward and built on simple true and false statements. If all $\heartsuit$s are black then there can be no $\heartsuit$s that are red. This clear-cut logic has been used to create the laws and theories that abound in Math and Science.

This is jarring when set next to the more Eastern logical philosophies, whose principles are based more on holism. There is the idea that something is different from situation to situation and that that change is natural. One example of this type of logic is that ‘wealth means poverty is just around the corner’ (Nisbett, 2003, p. 177). Western logic would separate wealth and poverty as opposites, but Eastern logic sees them integrally linked. Nisbett (2003) does discuss that Easterners understand and use formal logic, but that it is limited in scope. Formal logic might be accepted for hypothetical or artificial situations, but it does not fit into their view of the everyday.
In the West, however, logic is used in the discussion of texts and in thinking about cause and effect in the real world. Therefore, the use of this style of logic is found throughout the modern Western education system. Furthermore, the use of logic is one of the key components in the various parts of the Ontario Curriculum. In each of the curriculum documents, an achievement chart is placed near the beginning. For example, in the Ontario Math Curriculum for grades 11 and 12 (2007) the thinking section of the achievement chart under processing skills requires students to be able to reason, justify and prove, all of which involve the use of logic. This form of logic is often considered to be integrated with critical thinking. Part of Canadian educational-culture is to create critical thinkers who will evaluate with a sceptical lens all they see and hear, who will question the world around them, and will make connections between what they learn in school and what they experience in life. Making these connections and questioning what they see and hear is closely connected to the use of linear logic.

One Canadian study out of the University of British Columbia, examined the use of the Confucian verses the Socratic method and found that North American educators tend to find fault with Eastern learning styles as they are not analytic nor do they involve critical questioning (Tweed and Lehman, 2002). Critical analysis involving logical thought, is a necessary component of all core secondary subjects in Ontario and is encouraged even at a young age (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The idea of teaching critical thinking through the Socratic Method has become so common place that it was discussed by Nancy Trejos (2001) in a Washington Post article. She spoke to teachers and students using the Socratic Method even in primary grades to increase critical thinking. When Campbell and Li (2008) spoke to Asian students studying in New Zealand many students said they enjoyed independent learning, but then when
questioned about the methods their professors used to encourage such learning they said that they found these methods did not mesh with their expectations. They found it difficult to adjust to the required analytic skills. These three examples show that this style of teaching is pervasive across Western countries.

People who have the ability to transition from one culture to another are considered by Hong, Morris, Chiu and Benet-Martinez (2000) to be bicultural. They describe a bicultural person as one who can switch their thinking from that of one culture to that of another. Nisbett (2003) discusses similar studies that looked at ‘priming’ people to think in a certain way. I can relate directly to both descriptions of biculturalism and find it to be a very apt descriptor. After having lived in Asia for about two years, I began to be able to successfully predict behaviours. This may sound like a normal thing to do, but for over a year, my predictions were mostly inaccurate. As I became accustomed to the culture of the country I was living in, I was able to switch my cultural thinking and make altered (from my norm) and correct predictions.

A unique environment to study bicultural people in Eastern and Western philosophies is Hong Kong, due to its current and historical ties to both China and the United Kingdom. As such, it provides the perfect background for examining cognition as it relates to cultural backgrounds since the participants have grown up in a society in which Chinese and British cultures are both distinctly present. One such study by Hong et. al. (2000) looked at university students and their ability to be primed to think in either an Eastern or a Western manner. The students they studied were all culturally Chinese, were attending an English-language university and had been educated at English-language high schools. They, therefore, had internalized two cultures from childhood. A group of 75 students was involved and they were divided into three groups: an Eastern
prime, a Western prime and a control. The researchers found that they were able to prime students to respond in a culturally predictable manner. This indicates to me that students raised in a culturally Eastern home in a Western city like Toronto learn over time to adjust to the Western classroom. It could be extrapolated that most secondary students born into this situation would be able to switch to a Western outlook for the school day and could therefore learn to use both linear and holistic logic in culturally appropriate situations. However, as an educator, I would expect to have to work towards this ability with students who were new to Canada. The idea of switching between cultures is substantiated in other studies cited by Hong et. al. in regard to other cultural combinations.

Tweed and Lehman (2002) took this idea further and examined the differences in the Confucian and Socratic methods in schools. They first discussed the basic differences between the two methods as outlined in this paper. The Confucian approach involves learning the material, coming to an understanding and then applying it. They argued that the Confucian method can include questioning, but that it would only appear at the end after application of knowledge. The Socratic Method involves questioning from the beginning; the learners finding knowledge within themselves through the aid of progressive logical questioning. The pair believes that using a mixture of methods would be beneficial by enabling students to essentially become academically bicultural. They suggest that the Confucian approach works well for gaining the knowledge and skills needed to be applied in the classroom. Following that with a more Socratic, linear logic approach would then elicit the necessary skills needed for a laboratory approach to a science class. Further connections could be made to other subjects in which an understanding of knowledge
and facts is needed before in depth analysis begins. Math is a clear example, but also Music, History and language courses could all possibly benefit from their idea of using a Confusion approach to form a foundation and a Socratic approach to build upon that foundation.

In a different study that looked at preferences for logical verses intuitive decisions, Buchtel and Norenzayan (2008) studied university students in British Colombia. The students came either from East Asian backgrounds or from European backgrounds. The average participant had been in Canada for approximately 15 years, and thus language was not considered a factor. Scenarios were presented to the participants and they needed to make a decision either following intuition or a rule. The study showed that the European Canadians generally chose to follow the logical rule and the East Asian Canadians tended to follow their intuition. It found that even after an average of 15 years in Canada the participants’ native culture still had the strength to influence decision-making.

Motivation

A big issue education today is motivation (Zhu and Leung, 2010). Tweed and Lehman (2002) note that since Dewey in the early part of the 20th century stated that education should be intrinsically motivated, that has been seen as a pinnacle in the West. Pre-service teachers are not taught much about using external motivators, whether positive or negative, but are rather encouraged to use differentiation methods to intrinsically motivate students.

However, Tweed and Lehman (2002) also show that Eastern students often have an external motivation involving the practical outcomes of education. They link this motivator historically to Confucius’ time, when those who studied were provided with
positions as officials. I would add to that argument, from conversations with my students and co-workers, that currently most East Asian countries have a perceived need for post-secondary education. For example, as Korea has developed economically, its people have seen personal advancement in the skilled labour workforce, which requires post-secondary education. This has continued to the point that by the late 1990s Korea began employing foreign migrant workers to do the unskilled labour jobs that Koreas did not want (Park, 2004).

Tweed and Lehman (2002) cite research into extrinsic motivation in the West that shows that students who strive for marks or other external goals are less intrinsically motivated. However, another study cited by the pair found that for Chinese students extrinsic motivation tends to occur jointly with intrinsic motivation. These are key findings as teachers endeavour to find motivators for their students. An Asian student who expresses the extrinsic motivator of parents or future prospects may not lack intrinsic motivation, the extrinsic motivator may simply be easier to express.

Another key motivator in the West has been choice theory put forth by William Glasser in the 1960s (William Glasser Institute, 2010). This theory has been largely adopted by the education community and is considered a common and fairly simple way to increase intrinsic motivation in students. It is felt that choice is natural; students will have a greater desire to master a learning goal if they can do so through a conduit of their choosing. Iyengar and Lepper (1999) challenge the inherent nature of choice as a motivator. They note that the research done on choice has been done largely in a western context, and thus does not take into account culturally divergent views on choice as it links to individuality.
First Iyengar and Lepper (1999) looked at American and Japanese undergraduate students in Japan. They asked the students to catalogue all the choices they made in a day. They found that the American students saw 50% more choices in their day than did the Japanese students. They also noted that this occurred on a backdrop of the American students being new to Japan and not likely being aware of all the choices available to them. Their research extrapolated suggests that Westerners are more likely to see choice where Easterners do not. This can be seen embedded in the two societies. Where for one meal a Westemer may record many choices (e.g. type of sandwich, type of bread, condiments, side dish, etc.) most Eastemers would just choose the meal as a whole. This situation typifies the view of choice in the two cultures.

In an additional study by Iyengar and Lepper (1999), choice was looked at as a motivator on school tasks. They performed their research in San Francisco, California where the students involved were either Anglo-American or Asian-American, but all were educated in America. The situation in California could easily be seen in other big Canadian cities especially the GTA and Vancouver. The Asian-American students involved were able to speak their first language not only at home but also among friends in the community, and at shops and restaurants allowing their Asian culture to be present in many aspects of their lives. Iyengar and Lepper conducted two similar tests. In one, some students (Grades two to four) were given a choice and others were told of the choices, but then told which one their mom would like them to do. The results showed that while the Anglo-American students performed best when given the choice, the Asian-American students preformed best when told which activity their mothers had chosen for them.
In the follow-up study, Iyengar and Lepper (1999) tested similar groups of students but this time, the options were: chosen by their classmates, chosen by another class, or free choice. Again, as predicted, the Anglo American students performed best when they were able to choose on their own but the Asian American students performed best when their classmates made the choices for them. The conclusion drawn from these studies by Iyengar and Lepper was that the Asian students were motivated more by choices being made by in-group members, which linked closely with the cultural ideal for group harmony. Conversely, the Western students desired to express their individual identity in making their own choices.

Motivation links closely with a student’s ability to work independently on a task. Elementary school and high school teachers in Canada work hard to motivate their students and encourage them to work independently. In the Campbell and Li study (2008) they found that the Asian students they spoke to reported independent learning as their biggest achievement after studying in New Zealand. Many commented about teachers always pushing and monitoring progress in their home countries and on not needing to personally motivate themselves. This was a skill they needed to learn in order to succeed in the New Zealand University.

**Group Work**

The Asian cultural desire for harmony and integration into society fits nicely with group work that is often done in Western classrooms. Teachers often include group work activities in order to work on skills such as collaboration, teamwork and co-operation. These are seen in the Western context as skills that need particular attention. In an Eastern context, however, these may be the skills that come more naturally implying that more effort is needed in teaching the skills required for independent work. The
Ontario policy document Growing Success (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) outlines six learning skills and work habits that are considered integral to student learning; they are responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative and self-regulation. Of those, independent work and collaboration clearly link to individual and group work situations. The remaining four, however, will relate to both situations in different ways. For example, initiative needs to be completely self-driven in an independent work situation. However, in a group situation, only one student needs to show initiative and can take a leadership role while other members may take initiative within more specific aspects of a project in which they excel. I believe that many Western educators expect students to be more comfortable with these skills for individual tasks and less comfortable during group tasks. Therefore, more time is spent actively teaching these skills during group activities. I would argue that in multi-cultural classrooms, especially those with a significant number of Eastern students, time should be split equally referencing these skills during both individual and group tasks.

A study by Yamaguchi, Gelfand, Ohashi and Zemba (2005) looked at the preference for group or individual experiences in Japanese and American college students. The students were told that they would be drawing numbers and the sum of the numbers they drew would either have no effect or lead to a negative experience (drinking a bitter drink). They were randomly assigned to different tasks either drawing four numbers individually or drawing 4 numbers as a group of four (one number each, each person in a different room). This study found that Japanese men felt safer in the group situation and American men felt safer in the individual situation, as expected. However, there was an interesting difference in that both Japanese and American
women did not show a distinct preference for either situation. This indicates that the desire for group rather than individual outcomes have both a gender and cultural bias.

In a study discussed by Nisbett in The Geography of Thought (2003) people from various countries around the world were asked to choose which of the following definitions best represented a company:

   a) A company is a system designed to perform functions and tasks in an efficient way. People are hired to fulfill these functions with the help of machines and other equipment. They are paid for the tasks they perform.
   
   b) A company is a group of people working together. The people have social relations with other people and with the organization. The functioning is dependent on these relations.

   (p. 83)

More than 75% of Americans chose option A along with more than 50% of Canadians, British, Australians, Dutch and Swedes. More than 66% of Japanese and Singaporeans chose option B. This is highly indicative of the Western-Eastern divide, as option A clearly describes a company as a group of individuals working more or less independently where as option B describes a company as an interrelated group. Even more interesting was that the French, Germans and Italians scored in between the two groups indicating that the preference towards a group society may be more of a cultural grey scale.

One study by Christopher Earley (1989) of managers in business situations looked at working individually, with in-group members or with out-group members. In this study, he found that Chinese managers worked better when working with in-group members. However, their American counterparts worked best on their own or with out-group
members. This indicated the Chinese desire to benefit the group is limited to their in-group.

Finally, the interviews Campbell and Li (2008) conducted in New Zealand of Asian students clearly showed that the independent work expected of them was more difficult at first. All participants in the study discussed being very comfortable in group situations. Many stated that they liked being able to share ideas with a smaller group and that the small group situations made them less shy and nervous. However, the same students did not enjoy group work situations in which work to be marked was produced and all students were to receive the same grade; they felt they performed better on their own. This Campbell and Li linked to the idea that the one area in which Asians strive to outperform others is in education. They discuss the competition and the drive to be the best. This desire to surpass others works against the need to help in order that the whole group will succeed. In many Asian countries, students write regular tests and exams, many of them standardized locally or nationally. In Korea, these exams become a regular part of a student’s life in middle school, as their performance will determine which high school the student can go to. Only the top performing high school students from the top high schools are believed to be accepted to the top three universities. There is huge competition among students to ace these exams. I have seen students cry having received marks in the high 90s because they did not receive a perfect score.

Considering all of these culturally influenced areas of education, I conducted interviews to determine if teachers were observing these differences in their students. The methods used in these interviews are discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This is a qualitative research project that focused on a review of the literature surrounding educational-culture in East-Asia and the West and two interviews with each of five teachers in a Greater Toronto Area (GTA) school. This chapter will outline what occurred at each stage in the research and the limitations of this study.

Procedure

Literature Review

The literature review was conducted prior to the primary data collection. The purpose of the literature review was to familiarize myself with the areas in which Eastern and Western educational-cultures differ in order to inform the questions used during the interviews and to inform the later data analysis. Relevant sources used during the literature review process included academic journal articles and books as well as government documents and mainstream media publications. The majority of the materials used focused on education, although there was also some use of literature that focused on historical figures who have had a great impact on modern educational-culture in both the East and the West.

Data Collection

I conducted two interviews with each of five teachers from a single GTA school. The purpose of conducting two interviews with each teacher was to give the teachers a chance to become familiar with the topic and to consider which of their students may be affected by having been educated in East-Asian schools prior to arriving in Canada. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview style. I, as
the researcher, chose this style of interview because I felt it was necessary to ask each
interviewee essentially the same questions, while having room to prompt and reword
questions to ensure a clear understanding.

The question lists for both the first and second interviews were developed prior to
the first of each set of interviews and were approved by my research supervisor. The
questions are attached as Appendix C. The main area the questions seek to address is
whether the teachers observe learning-style differences in their students who have
been educated in East-Asia before arriving in Canada. Additionally, the questions
focused on the areas highlighted in the literature in order to specifically focus the
interviews on areas I felt would be relevant to the educational-culture differences.
These areas were individualism, logic, critical thinking, choice and group work.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and the scripts were thoroughly analyzed by
finding consistent themes in each of the interviews. The literature review was used to
indicate themes. This was primarily because the literature informed the questions that
were asked of the participants. As such, certain questions were aimed at specific
themes in the literature. Those themes included critical thinking, individual verses group
dynamics, and the idea of choice. The scripts were first analysed and highlighted for
reference to the themes in the literature.

Next, the interviews were analyzed again to find commonalities that did not fit in
the literature derived themes. There were several new themes that emerged in this
review of the transcripts. The most dominant was that of language ability, but others
included work ethic, socialization and gender concerns. As these concerns were not
specifically aimed at with the questions, they did not appear in all interviews. However,
they did each appear in more than one. Language concerns were raised in every interview and in relation to several different questions.

The transcripts were reviewed a third time to look specifically for answers to the research question - In what ways do teachers observe learning-style differences manifesting between East-Asian and Western educated students? - and to the sub-questions - In what ways, do these differences influence the academic performance of the students? In what ways do teachers scaffold to improve student performance?. In respect to these questions specifically, they were at times dealt with in relation to earlier themes. However, a few were added specifically to address these concerns. One such theme was that of labelling students and how the participants felt about the usefulness of this practice. Other themes that came out of this section were student performance on various question types, and differentiation in the classrooms.

Finally, all the themes were reviewed a final time for cohesion. The themes were discussed with some classmates to ensure the interpretation was clear to others who were removed from this process.

At this point, each transcript was shared with the interviewee by email and they were all asked to comment. This member-checking was done in order to ensure that the participants felt like they were accurately represented and to allow any further comments upon reflection. Three of the five participants responded to the member-checking saying they felt the transcripts were accurate and did not add any further information. Two of the interviewees did not respond.

During the analysis of the data there was a consistency in many responses from participant to participant. I felt that this consistency could be best highlighted by connecting the responses from the various interviewees in each theme without having
the additional connection of what each participant said. As such, no names or pseudonyms are used. In this way, the responses can be viewed on their own and not as connected specifically to subject areas or to individual people. On a few occasions this was not possible as the subject matter or position of the interviewee played a specific role in the answer granted in which case that subject or position was identified.

Participants and Participating School

The interviewees were all teachers at the same GTA school. The choice to ask several teachers to participate from the same school stemmed from the need to examine a specific demographic. I first chose a school which had a significant portion of East-Asian students (approximately 20%). This group of students includes some students who have been fully educated in Canada and others who are new to Canada. Once I had selected the school I made contact with a teacher there who helped to recruit others in order to cover a range of subjects.

All five interviewees taught different subjects and so were able to observe students in different learning environments. The teachers currently taught Art, Physical Education, Guidance, History, or Math. Two of the participants also had experience in Special Education and Science. The teachers were all experienced, with their years of teaching ranging from seven to over 25 years in the classroom. The majority of the teachers I interviewed were born and raised in Canada, having attended public schools in Ontario for their own education. One of the teachers immigrated to Canada as a young child and completed her education in Ontario public schools from Grade 2. The participants mostly attended schools that were not very culturally diverse prior to their post-secondary education; however one teacher did attend very culturally diverse schools with many students who were new to Canada.
All the interviewees had been teaching at the GTA school for at least six years, but most had been there longer. The school has a student body that is mostly South-Asian with a significant portion of students who are East-Asian. The majority of students were born in Canada and have attended Ontario public schools, however, there is a significant minority who have immigrated to Canada, who have been educated abroad, some in East-Asia. The majority of the East-Asian students in this school are from China, with a few from South Korea and Hong Kong.

The interviewees were asked to consider those students who had been educated in East-Asia and to consider them in comparison to those students who had been fully educated in Canada or Ontario specifically.

Ethical Review

All of the participants were advised of the interview process that the interviews would be taped and transcribed. The interviewees agreed to the process, including that they would be able to review their own transcripts through a process of member-checking. The participants signed an agreement (Appendix B) to participate in the study with the acknowledgement that their names and the school name would be kept confidential. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time up until the research project was complete.

Limitations

This project had two major limitations. The first was finding a definition to help make it clear what students I wanted the interviewees to consider. In the end, I defined the students who had been educated in part in East-Asia as East-Asian born. For the purposes of this study the location of a child’s birth was not important, but it seemed to make it clear to my research participants who they were to be considering.
Additionally, the teachers participating in this study had no access to records (with the exception of one who worked in Guidance) which would state the student’s place of birth. This definition was simply used to describe students who had completed some of their schooling in East-Asia prior to their current schooling in Canada. Finally, this study is limited in its scope, as it is only able to address what the teachers have been able to observe and not what the students themselves have experienced. As such, this research will be looking at what has been observed by teachers in comparison to the literature, most of which addressed how students react to and feel about the differences in educational culture.
Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter will outline the overall findings from the data collected during two interviews with each of five participants. The first interview was approximately 15 minutes long and was designed to introduce the participants to the topic and to allow them time to observe their students before the second interview. The second interview took place approximately one month after the first interview and was 30-40 minutes in length. The majority of the substance of this chapter came from the second interviews as those interview questions aimed at more specific and substantive issues. The questions for both interviews can be found in Appendix C. The interviews were conducted with five teachers who teach in the same school, where the population of East-Asian students is estimated to be approximately 20%. Several themes emerged during the interviews and those themes have been grouped together to present the ideas in a more cohesive manner. The thematic groups are as follows:

- Recognition of Students Educated in East-Asia
- Academics
- Socialization

Recognition of Students Educated in East-Asia

Labelling in General

All of the interviewees were asked if they found the labels such as English Language Learner (ELL) and Learning Disabled (LD) to be helpful, and all agreed that they were. Three out of the five teachers were careful to state that they do not want to ‘pigeonhole’ or to ‘create a whole identity for a student’, while two of the teachers agreed absolutely. The interviewees stated that the labels used in education, like ELL
and LD, are useful because, in the words of one interviewee “...it helps us to support the kids with the needs that they have.” Another teacher commented: “At least [the label] gives you a base to deal with so you’re a little bit more sensitive to all the needs that may arise...” For these teachers it was clear that labels which aid them in recognizing the needs of groups of students were considered to be useful tools.

This idea is central to this research, as the study is suggesting that high school teachers should be recognizing the students in their classes who have been educated abroad, thus providing a new label. The scope of this study is limited to those from East-Asia however, it can be and is suggested in much of the literature that educational-culture differences are found around the world and so this idea would not be limited to knowing about East-Asian students.

**English Language Learners**

One of the most common themes running through the interviews was the difficulty that the teachers had in determining which students were educated abroad. Specifically to this study, there was at times some confusion about which students were from ‘East’ Asia. When this confusion arose the definitions found in Appendix A were shared with the participants. This generally occurred during the first interview. Within this confusion all participants fell back on the obvious group, those labelled as English Language Learners. It was clear to all interviewees that if a student was an ELL, then clearly this student had recently arrived in Canada. Although some teachers recognized in their interviews that there may be some recently arrived students with higher language skills, in responding to the majority of questions, the interviewees all referred to ELL students, to language in general, and to language difficulties.
One interesting note was that one teacher in response to the first interview asked some students if they were born in Canada, and if not, when they came to Canada. “I asked before this [second interview] were you born here, were you born in China? Some of the kids I thought were not born in Canada were born in Canada, which I was surprised, and vice versa.” The teacher continues to explain that some of the students not born in Canada who he thought were born in Canada had only been in the country a few years. This highlights the difficulty teachers can have in identifying this group of students.

In response to many of the interview questions, which will be discussed in greater detail to follow, the interviewees all made reference to language level and to language difficulties. I was unable to separate the issue of educational-culture from that of language learning. The interviewees often recognized their newly arrived students as those with accents or with language difficulties and were therefore unable to comment solely on the learning-style differences without relating those differences to language. However, embedded in descriptions that reference language difficulties are also statements regarding behaviour that can be compared to the literature and that demonstrate possible insight into the cultural nature of some of the students' actions, behaviours and understandings.

Support

The teachers interviewed for this study all expressed concern for their students and an awareness of the need to differentiate and to support all students by recognizing their individual needs. One interviewee specifically spoke of differentiated instruction saying “[it] is finding ways for the different students to express their strengths and share with me their knowledge of the curriculum.” This interviewee went on to
discuss different methods used in the classroom to emphasize the student’s strengths and push them forward in areas where they are weaker. Another teacher discussed recognizing limitations based on a student’s past experiences saying: “I have a student right now from East Asia...and she is not comfortable, she has very little background with dance...I have made up separate assignments for her to work on so she does not have to present the dance.” This teacher working in a Physical Education classroom sees students who are not familiar with the some activities taught in Canada and is able to accommodate those students with concern for their comfort as well as for their learning.

In several interviews, the teachers referred to working with the students one-on-one as a way to provide support and more fairly evaluate them. One interviewee stated: “For these students one-on-one engagement helps me to understand their process and it’s [fairer] for me to evaluate them in the end rather than judging their work based on the final product.” Another teacher discussed using private conversations to help assess a student’s understanding if the student had not performed well on some test questions. The teacher said: “...then I verbally called them over one at a time privately and just asked them some questions without them realizing that I was actually re-testing them.” It was clear in these responses that these teachers were using individual time with students to both help the students to understand and to assist themselves, as teachers, in assessing the students’ learning.

Several of the interviewees also referred to checking in with students they believed to be from an East-Asian education system. These comments were usually made in reference to English Language Learners and to checking in so as to ensure that the students understand the language being used. One such example was a
teacher who said: “With ELL learners I spend a lot of time walking over [to them]. So if I give instructions to a task, I’ll make sure to check in with them; did you get that?” This type of response, and awareness of the language concerns of ELL students in their classrooms, was typical of all of the teachers interviewed.

**Academics**

**Critical Thinking**

One of the areas that is the most studied in the literature is in relation to critical thinking. In the literature review, I make a case for critical thinking as it is often viewed in education in Canada today as being related to linear logic and that it links back to Socrates and Aristotle. As such, critical thinking is taught within the Canadian education system from the primary grades. Children in Canada are often encouraged to be inquisitive and the only restriction placed on this behaviour is that of wording questions respectfully. This belief was exemplified in a response from one interviewee who discussed teaching both ESL Science classes and regular Science classes. The participant said to the students: “You should always question authority if you don’t know what they say, if you think what they say isn’t right, or you want to question it, as long as you do it politely or with reason. For good reason you just say excuse me, can I ask about that?” This teacher in Grade Nine and Ten Science made the need to question and address authorities explicit to the students.

During the second interview, I asked each of the participants about the critical thinking abilities of their students educated in East-Asia and those educated fully in Canada. The responses were similar in that most teachers felt that the newly arrived students had trouble with critical thinking, although they often explained that difficulty by linking it to a language deficit. One teacher spoke of how the East-Asian students
take in information, but do not like to answer questions, especially those questions that do not have clearly defined answers. This was in response to the question on critical thinking and thus implied that open-ended questions with subjective answers required critical thinking and that the East-Asian educated students in those classes preferred not to answer those questions. This teacher speculated: “I think the fear of those who don’t like to speak up, again it is the fear of being wrong.”

Another participant made the connection more explicit saying:

“The East-Asians that have been born in Canada seem to be able to make connections a little easier with cultural things and things that are outside their culture that are in Canada. They relate a bit more easily, I think [the East-Asian educated students] just have to work a little bit harder at it to draw from their [experiences]; they don’t have the same background.”

This teacher did not draw the connection to language but rather to background. This same teacher talks about using questions to scaffold a student, to help that student see that she understands more than she is aware of. The interviewee said: “I give a lot of formative feedback, non-stop, and I ask and I try to prod and ask questions of them to let them know more than they actually understand that they know.” In this way, this teacher is helping to lead these students through an exercise in critical thinking that might help them to be able to accomplish this task on their own in other situations.

The fourth teacher commented on how the students talk about how the critical thinking is difficult because they are accustomed to rote learning. This participant said: “...there is more rote answering and not higher level Bloom’s taxonomy where they are going to make an application and a connection. And a lot of the kids don’t do well
here then they come and they say, they tell us [it is] because they come from rote learning and memory.”

The only participant who did not see any difference in critical thinking ability between students educated in East-Asia and those educated fully in Canada was the Math teacher I interviewed. This teacher stated: “I think the kids who have a really, truly good understanding of the mathematical concepts are more comfortable with the critical thinking, and the kids who are struggling with the basic concepts are not going to perform well with the critical thinking.” This answer was the only one in all five interviews which recognized that the East-Asian educated students were very capable of critical thinking when applied within an area the students are comfortable with. Earlier in the interview this teacher also recognized that generally the students educated in East-Asia, although stereotypical, were in fact proficient at the algebra skills required by the high school math classes.

Performance

All of the teachers were asked to consider the academic performance on tests and assignments of their East-Asian educated students in comparison to those born and educated in Canada. This question led to a lot of referencing the language abilities of the students. The Math teacher, in stating that the East-Asian students were generally proficient at algebra, admitted that the same students had trouble with word problems. The teacher gave examples of vocabulary that the student might find to be difficult, terms like ‘the angle of depression’ and specific directions like ‘due east’. In recognizing that ELL students have trouble with this language, this same teacher had mentioned earlier that it was routine to check in with ELL students during the class and during tests to ensure they are understanding the language.
In relation to Math class, when interviewing the teacher who worked in the guidance office, reference was made to what classes new students were placed in. It is possible that math classes incorporate students with greater language deficits, as in guidance they will place a new student in an academic grade-level math class while they are still enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

One of the responses that I found to be particularly interesting was because it reflected my experiences in Korea so perfectly. This interviewee talked about how the students educated in East-Asia will write down the information given in class word for word on a test. The teacher said:

...those with a little bit more difficulty with English would tend to write down answers that are almost exactly the same that I had on the Powerpoint. They give me answers, if I write down a, b, c, d or if I taught them points a, b, c, d, in a Powerpoint during class, on the test they will write word-for-word a, b, c, d. It is so interesting.

The same teacher went on to describe how those students fully educated in Canada had more wordy, and not memorized answers. Then, in describing how both groups approach more open-ended questions, the interviewee talked about those fully educated in Canada as being very expressive while those new to Canada are more blunt in their answers. This teacher saw this as taking away from the quality of the answer in a question of this type.

Another teacher responded to this question of performance by again referencing the language difficulties. This teacher felt that the students would perform at their personal best if the questions they were given were straightforward and did not require long answers. The teacher recognized that when long answer questions had
marks associated with fluency, grammar and style these students necessarily faltered. However, when tested with short-answer questions that allowed for varied responses the students often performed well. In one part of this response the teacher said: “I would say that our more recent Chinese immigrants would benefit not necessarily from the close ended but from the short answer where you’re not being marked as much on the style of the response it’s more on the substance, the content.” This teacher felt that many students, regardless of their educational background, did well with short answer questions, as they assessed the student’s abilities without requiring the elegance of language that is necessary in long answers or the specific trickiness of language that can be present in multiple choice questions.

An interesting difference in opinions of two of the participants occurred around what was expected within short-answer questions. While the teacher above expected that short-answer questions did not require much writing, as they could involve graphic organizers or could be answered in various ways to demonstrate an understanding, another teacher felt that short-answer questions were difficult for those students who were new to Canada because of the language difficulty. This teacher observed that the East-Asian students did well “…usually [on] the straightforward multiple choice, true and false, not so much the fill-in-the-blanks, the short answer not as well because of limited writing ability in some cases. So they’ll provide an answer but in some cases it’s sort of short…” This teacher found that short-answer questions did require enough writing to make them difficult for ELL, and therefore newly-arrived students.

**Differentiation and Choice**

‘Choice’ has often been used in Canada as a form of differentiation. This method differentiates for interest. The teachers were asked specifically if they used
choice to differentiate for interest on tests and assignments and if they had noticed any differences in how their students reacted to the choice. None of the teachers interviewed noticed any differences in how their students reacted to being given choices in class, on assignments or on tests.

Work Habits

The views of the teachers in this study on the work habits of the students new to Canada, are quite different and bridge the gap between the academic concerns and the social concerns that teachers have for these students. The two different views were ones of wonderful work habits that were evident in high test scores, or poor work habits as an expressed result of being accustomed to a stricter environment. Additionally, in this area of work habits some teachers observed differences between the boys and girls in their classes. One teacher commented: “I see the boys very often very immature...Whereas I see the girls as sort of the opposite, they’re way more organized, way more on the ball, they’re way more dedicated to their studies...their work habits are way better.” So this teacher observed the work habits to vary between the boys and girls in the classroom.

Another teacher noted the difference that occurs when students are not accustomed to the casual atmosphere in the classroom and in the school.

And then they don’t come with a lot of self-discipline because they haven’t been taught self-discipline because they have been under a whip. So when we say you need to be a self-advocate and self-motivated and you decide when to do your homework they don’t know what to do with that.

Yet on the other hand, a different teacher commented:
East-Asian educated students] do very well on knowledge and understanding and I think it is always a guaranteed success for them...I guess their studying habits are a little bit better than those who maybe have not had some education in other parts of the world.

Evident in these two observations are the opposite views of the study habits of students from an East-Asian school system. Some students seem to struggle with the freedom within the school where the teachers expect the students to ask questions, to ask for extensions if needed, and to schedule their own work. The teacher who made the first comment found that the students who struggled in this way had a hard time adjusting. The second teacher found that the students knew how to study for tests and thus, were often better prepared than their classmates for those tests.

Socialization

The work habits are very clearly linked to the socialization of students. While one teacher above discussed how the strict school systems in East-Asia do not help the students to learn to self-motivate another had noticed that the students excelled on the knowledge and understanding questions because of their study habits. These are issues related to the socialization of these students. Additionally, when asked about how the East-Asian educated students would do if they moved on to post-secondary education, most participants were more concerned about the social aspects of their lives at such institutions rather than the academic challenges. The participants said: “For me it’s always a social thing. It all comes down to connecting with other people and breaking out of their shell a little bit” and “The greatest concern for these students will be the freedom. We often worry about these students when they haven’t taken a bus anywhere by themselves.” It was also commented that “being involved in other types
of activities going on at the school. I think a lot of times they’re driven to just stay focused on the academics and may not experience the entire college or university…”

All three of these comments point to concerns about these students fitting into the social atmosphere away from home and at the post-secondary institution. To note, the two teachers who did not comment on socialization instead responded about the importance of language and being able to cope with the high-level of English required in university.

Individualism and Group Work

This area was also one with slightly divergent views among the teachers who were interviewed. Some teachers found that the East-Asian educated students preferred to work independently while others found that they preferred to work in groups; however the caveat to that was that those students were not handing in group work, but rather working together on practice work. Again, with the common language theme that runs through many of the interviews, many of the teachers commented that the students like to work independently because of communication concerns. One such example is: “Those who I guess are new to the school or are new to the country they really prefer working independently in their own space and not being put in situations that would ...be expressive in any way verbally.”

Another teacher found that East-Asian educated students found group work to be difficult because it often requires that the students are producing the knowledge which the teacher associated as an educational-culture difference. This teacher said: “I think it’s a change for them in terms of that idea of the students being responsible for coming out with the idea. [It] is perhaps more challenging for students who are more accustomed to being on the receiving end of the information.” While these difficulties
were noted in academic situations, many of the teachers interviewed discussed how the East-Asian students often stuck together and worked together during class and outside of class.

Relationships with Authority

One of the most noted cultural differences, both educational and general, noted throughout all ten interviews were those that relate to approaching authority figures (teachers) and the general relaxed nature of the school and classroom. All of the participants made reference to this dynamic at some point during their interviews, even though no direct question was posted to inquire about this topic.

One teacher commented about how the students want to fit in and they do not want the teacher to think they do not understand. This teacher said “I don’t think [concerns are] verbalized maybe as often as they should be. A lot of head nodding, like understanding, and when it comes down to it you can see that they weren’t [understanding].” The teacher observed these students wanting to portray an image of understanding when in fact they did not understand. Another teacher related this to the students wanting individual clarification of points, not wanting to ask in front of the class: “They are the ones who want instruction one-on-one, clarification just between the teacher and the student, who will never raise a hand up to ask a question or address anything in front of the class.”

The Guidance counsellor spoke of how the incoming students react when they first arrive:

They are completely nervous, I can definitely say [that] about their behaviour. They freak out when they get here because we’re so loose and relaxed. Even when I interview them in guidance they sometimes stand up to
answer a question, or they speak completely differently to answer a question.

This observation is very similar to classes I have taught when newly arriving in an Asian country. I have taught students who are new to having a foreign English teacher and they would stand every time they address a teacher. Also in China, when I worked with young children in a Montessori setting, we had special classes for those students going on to local elementary schools to teach them how to behave in a standard classroom, including standing when speaking.

One participant did say: “Sometimes they will actually come out and say ‘I am having trouble understanding English, I am having trouble understanding the question.’ But in general they’re very quiet; there is not a whole lot of self-advocacy going on.” This statement does express how most of the teachers felt these students who had been educated in East-Asia dealt, or did not deal, with their difficulties.

There are clearly a number of concerns that the teachers I interviewed have noticed within their classes in regards to East-Asian students who have newly arrived in Canada. These areas will be looked at in more detail and compared to the research in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: Discussion

I began this research after having worked with students in Asia for many years and observing differences in learning-styles. Upon returning to Canada for teacher-education, I was surprised that these differences were not discussed, and therefore decided to research in what ways teachers observe learning-style differences manifesting between East-Asian and Western educated students. Definitions have been provided for the geographic terms used in the research in Appendix A. Also, I examined how these differences affect the academic performance of students and in what ways teachers work with East-Asian educated students to improve their performance. Through the early part of this research, what became immediately apparent was that the teachers I spoke to did not clearly recognize this group of students in their classes. However, once the students were identified, the teachers I spoke to were able to provide some insight into how students who have recently entered the Canadian education system from East-Asia might fare.

In discussing the findings of this study, this chapter will look at how the data collected relates to the literature, discuss the implications of this research, and make recommendations for further study.

The Literature and the Data

Chapter two discussed a number of studies that have looked at how Eastem-educated and Western-educated people view and interact with the world. These studies, while recognizing that there is always a great deal of variation within a population, note there are similarities in educational-culture that affect how people interact with the world. The data collected through ten interviews with five teachers
shows that while the teachers recognize some of the educational-culture differences in their newly arrived students, other cultural differences are not observed at all. This section will look at these areas of overlap and at those that are opposed to one another in order to interpret these results.

**Logic and Critical Thinking**

In Chapter Two, the research of Tweed and Lehman (2002) was discussed in relation to critical thinking and critical questioning in Canadian schools often requires linear logical answers. They discussed how this expectation can be detrimental to East-Asian students who are accustomed to a more circular form of logic and a different style of classroom environment. During my interviews, many of the participants commented on the difficulty that newly-arrived East-Asian students have with critical thinking questions, but that difficulty was linked to two factors: English language ability and shyness.

In relation to the evidence of critical thinking on written assignments, the teachers interviewed observed that since the students were English Language Learners, they necessarily struggled with questions that required a longer explanation. While I do not want to detract from the difficulties faced by those communicating in their second language, I do believe that most students who are capable of understanding the topics discussed in class should be able to express their thoughts on those same topics, if not with eloquence, at least in such a way that is clearly understood by the teacher. I want to suggest that maybe the answers that lack evidence of critical thinking do so because the students are not accustomed to critical thinking and therefore are not employing this strategy in their answers.
During a Special Education class that was a requirement of my teacher education program, we examined the work of a Grade Nine student who was both an English Language Learner and Learning Disabled. While this student’s work was difficult to read due to a large number of significant spelling and grammar errors, once it was understood the depth of thought was evident. I believe that while students may have trouble expressing themselves in English this difficulty should not be the difference between evidence of critical thinking and a lack thereof.

The study by Hong et. al. (2002) in Hong Kong concluded that bicultural students can predict what will be culturally expected of them in various situations. Students who come from an East-Asian educational background may arrive in Canada unaware of what is culturally expected of them in the classroom. The teachers I interviewed, all of whom expressed a desire to help their students to do well and to progress in their learning, still found that students had trouble answering critical thinking questions due to the language barrier. My question here would be, is that difficulty one of language, or is it one of being able to predict what is an expected answer? One of my East-Asian students at a school in Toronto, in response to a question assigned as review, told me she does not like questions like this (critical thinking, opinion) because she does know what is expected of her. I believe that response is common, that these students need more exposure to this type of question in situations where assessment is for and as learning before they appear on summative assessments.

The second reason that was used to account for difficulties in being able to evaluate an East-Asian student’s critical thinking skills was shyness. This was often used to explain why this group of students often did not offer to participate in class discussions. However, I would suggest that these students may not be ‘shy’ in general but may
rather be unsure of what is expected of them in this situation. Critical thinking and linear logic are learned skills that are introduced to Western students at a young age (Nisbett, 2003). As such, students who have not been introduced to these skills may need to have them more explicitly explained so that those students can master those skills in order to participate in discussions and to answer as expected on critically thinking questions. Tweed and Lehman’s (2002) study suggested that asking questions in class is a way for Western students to assert their independence and that it is viewed positively by Western teachers. While none of my interviewees seemed upset that their newly-arrived East-Asian students were quiet in class, they did link this to not always knowing how much those students were understanding.

**Choice Theory**

One of the areas in which the literature was quite clear but in which the interviewees did not observe any differences was in the area of choice. In researching this area I found two studies to really encompass the difference in the idea of choice from East to West. Both studies were conducted by Iyengar and Lepper (1999) one looked at undergraduate views of the choices they make during a day and the second examined choice as a motivator for young children. Although neither of these studies dealt directly with high school aged students, I still believe that the information was valid. So when all of the teachers I interviewed stated that they used choice on assignments and tests and that none had observed any reaction to the choice that was different in the East-Asian educated students, I gave this area a great deal of consideration.

The Iyengar and Lepper (1999) study which looked at choices made by the younger students showed that those students performed best when the choice was
made for them by a member of their in-group. A teacher, as a respected member of the community, would be considered an in-group member. I have noticed during my experiences in schools in the Toronto area that when teachers provide choices they usually do so within clearly defined parameters, with the possibility of going beyond those parameters with permission. As such, I wonder if, in providing a limited number of choices, those choices are seen as suggestions made by an in-group member?

This is an area where I believe teachers were not able to give the most insight as they cannot know what the East-Asian students were thinking. One thing that could be taken from the lack of observable reaction to choice is that this may not be an area that is having a significant effect on the performance of these students.

**Individual verses Group Work**

One of the most commonly discussed differences between Eastern and Western cultures is the predilection for individualism in the West and for interconnectivity in the East (Nisbett, 2003). Campbell and Li (2008) noticed that the East-Asian university students they interviewed found individual work to be more difficult than group work, but that they disliked group work that was to be assessed. Their research corresponded nicely with what my interviewees noticed. All of the teachers commented on their East-Asian students liking to work informally in groups and talking to each other while working on tasks. However, many also commented on those same students having trouble in group work situations that involve assessment. The exceptions here were the Math teacher, who stated that he never assigned group work for assessment, and the Physical Education teacher who found group work to always be helpful for the students.

As with all areas, language ability did appear in this discussion as well. When the East-Asian students appeared to struggle in group work situations the teachers who
noticed this sort of struggle related it to a level of fluency in English. These teachers felt that the East-Asian students were having trouble keeping up with and participating in their group discussions. One teacher related this to the students not being accustomed to producing the ideas. This then circles back to culture. If these students are not accustomed to this style of group activity, which involves a great deal of opinions and critical thinking, what can teachers do to help scaffold their learning to improve their performance in these situations? Can these sorts of group activities be introduced in a more structured way that will lead students in increments to the desired outcome?

Group and individual work seem to also be linked to the subject areas of the classes. The Physical Education teacher made reference to using a lot of group work, both formatively and summatively. However, this teacher noticed no concerns or changes in student behaviour from the formative to the summative tasks. The other teachers in more traditionally individual disciplines found the students liked to work together on formative tasks, but not on summative tasks. This does link to the work of Campbell and Li (2008) who found that East-Asian students prefer individual summative tasks but group time to work through ideas. It is possible that the group-oriented nature of the physical education environment leads to a different comfort level within that classroom for ‘team’ summative tasks.

Implications

This research has provided me personally with a lot of insight for how aware I would like to be of the backgrounds of my students. For me, the most significant piece that came out of my interviews was that of awareness. The teachers I interviewed needed prompting to consider which of their students were new to Canada, and that understanding was mostly based on the individual student’s language skills. I would like
to be aware of the educational-culture that my students come from. I believe the literature shows that educational-culture makes a difference to how a student learns and to what sorts of activities that student is accustomed. Corak’s (2011) study showed that students arriving in Canada after the age of 13 had a significantly higher likelihood of dropping out of high school. I found that statistic, in light of the fact that the high school teachers I interviewed were not aware of this group of students, to be disconcerting. While language difficulties were cited as one of factors in this increased dropout rate, so were skills deficits, in that incoming students often had different skills from their previous education than those required in Canada.

Considering these ideas, it is important to know that currently there is no indication for teachers of where their students are coming from. Also, understanding that there are privacy concerns around a student’s background is equally essential. As such, I plan to ask my students about their backgrounds informally on an initial questionnaire, with an option to leave sections blank. I think this is a solution that all teachers could easily employ. I have seen information sheets handed out to students that the beginning of the year asking about their time commitments and course schedule. One teacher I have worked with asked what course the students had taken to prepare for this current course. I would take that question a bit further and ask for the students’ past two or three years. Where did the student study last year and the year before? This should help me to know where the student is coming from.

This study has looked solely at East-Asian students, and as such, can provide some recommendations and suggestions for bridging this particular cultural gap. However, I do not believe every teacher can be aware of the needs of students from every different culture. I see this knowledge like the other labels used in education. All
of the teachers I interviewed found labels helpful with the caveat of not allowing them to create an entire persona for the student. I see this label of newly-arrived students in the same way. It should allow me and other teachers to be more aware of where those students are struggling. I would then be able to ask more pointed questions to find out if their struggles are due to a difficulty in understanding, or are rather due to the newness of an activity. Both responses would be helpful in planning for the class and for that individual student.

In relation to the difficulty with critical thinking newly-arrived East-Asian students seemed to have, my interviewees made many references to a lack of self-advocacy on the part of the students. I believe the teachers felt that the students were not understanding due to language difficulties and were not asking for help. However, if these students understood the language they may not have realized that they did not understand the expectations of a critical thinking question as this type of question is outside their previous educational-culture expectations. Teachers need to remember that students cannot self-advocate for something they do not realize they are missing. Therefore teachers need to be aware of their students' different educational-culture backgrounds so they can read into difficulties to find the appropriate causes and plan accordingly.

Stigler and Hiebert (1999) stated that teaching is a cultural activity. As such, I think it is important for teachers in a multicultural environment, where students can arrive from abroad at any point in their schooling, to be aware of the cultural aspect of education. I believe that all the teachers I spoke to wanted to help all of their students to succeed. I would suggest that an awareness of the cultural aspect of education is
simply another tool to help teachers in the planning for the differentiation of tasks and for the scaffolding necessary to help their newly-arrived students to succeed.

Specifically when working with newly-arrived East-Asian students, I think teachers should formatively assess critical thinking skills early on in the term with the understanding that variability that exists within a culture is great and some students could be well versed in critical thinking. However, if difficulties lie in this area, then teachers would be better able to plan activities that would scaffold critical thinking, with such activities broken down into more manageable pieces.

Generally, I think that when working in a culturally diverse classroom with newly-arrived students from varied cultural backgrounds formative assessments are essential to determine where each of the students is beginning. This can then be used as a tool to plan for each student to try to teach those skills required in Canadian schools that may not have been necessary in the student’s previous schooling. Teachers also need to remember that difficulties that may appear linguistic may actually have a basis in educational-culture and related expectations. This awareness will enable teachers to make better assessments of a student’s work.

I do believe that teachers can help their newly-arrived students to succeed, but the first step in doing that is knowing who those students are. In order to identify this group, the teachers can simply ask their teenaged students. The next step is an ongoing one of formative assessment and feedback. Using this assessment to identify areas where specific students need help, they can finally develop scaffolding methods that fit with the individual teacher’s style while teaching the concepts that need strengthening within that particular class. This is not a new strategy. Formative assessment is required by all teachers in Ontario as outlined in Growing Success (Ontario Ministry of Education,
I am simply suggesting that an awareness of where a student’s difficulty may stem from might be beneficial in specifically addressing that concern.

Finally, I would like to suggest that while working with a student’s language level is extremely important, it is additionally as important to look past language difficulties to substantive deficits. The desire to blame the lack of substance in a short or blunt answer on language was clear in my interviews, and I think it is also natural. However, having personally worked with a number of students and coworkers with various English levels, it is clear to me that short, blunt answers can be very substantive. If there is a lack of depth in an answer, I would suggest that teachers should look beyond language to determine what steps to take next to help that student to progress. Here I believe the key is in asking questions, not in an antagonistic way, but in order to determine what the student knows and what they need help with. Being direct with a student can, in my experience, help to determine what that student needs.

In order for teachers in schools with newly-arrived students to best meet those students’ needs, they need to first be aware of which students in their classes are in fact new to Canada. Once aware, teachers can then read more into diagnostic and formative assessments in order to better plan to meet those students needs. This is not an issue of stereotyping or pigeon-holing new students to Canada, but rather of recognizing that they may have come from a culturally different classroom and thus require assistance in becoming accustomed to the new educational-culture.

**Further Research**

One of the biggest limitations of this study was that it did not incorporate interviews or surveys of students. There are many students arriving in Canada from East-
Asia every year and so there is no lack of students to work with. The insights that students themselves could provide into all the areas discussed in the literature is immense. While the teachers I interviewed saw no effect of choice on their East-Asian students, in talking to those students we may get a different response. So I see this research continuing by talking to students.

Additionally, students who have been in Canada for a year or two may be able to provide insights into best practices. I do believe that some teachers, whether aware of the cultural aspects of education or not, do an excellent job of scaffolding all student learning. As such, some students may be able to shed light on what teachers at the high school level have done to help them in the areas in which they needed help.

An ideal further study would take place over several years at a school, or several schools wherein the students can be interviewed several times and the teachers are worked with so that they become more aware of educational-culture concerns. This type of study would provide feedback on whether this label for newly-arrived students actually helps teachers to consider those students more efficiently in their planning, instruction and assessment. A study like this would allow for a greater assessment of whether teachers having this background knowledge would be beneficial to the learning of the students.

The other limitation to this study was the scope that focused only on East-Asian educational-culture. There are many different educational-cultures worldwide, and a study with a broader scope may provide teachers in diverse classrooms with more information to work with in terms of predicting what help their students may need. Some of the studies referenced in Chapter Two did in fact look at cultures outside of the East-West divide and found that there is a very grey scale on many of the issues discussed
herein. This indicates, as with all work involving people, that there is no one simple answer to how to best help those students arriving in Canada at the high school level. However, the more research that is available to high school teachers, and a greater awareness of the educational-cultural differences worldwide, may help Canadian teachers to recognize the areas in which their students most need their help.

**Conclusions**

Any time that culture is looked at as an aspect of education, some people become concerned that students will be seen as having innate deficits. This study has tried to recognize that cultural differences may be seen as deficits, but that those are actually only differences and that all students are capable of learning what is required of them in a new culturally-biased education system. The first key to this is to recognize that the Canadian education system is culturally-based, just as are other systems worldwide. Second, students arriving in a new educational-culture are ready to learn, but they are prepared for a different environment and so they need to be prepared for the Canadian environment by their first teachers in this system. Third, it is important to recognize that as we cannot fully predict how any given learning disabled student will do in a class based solely on their disability, neither can we predict how any newly-arrived student will do based solely on their previous educational-culture. The variation within a group is great and so cultural awareness should be seen as a tool to help teachers, and not as a method of pigeonholing students.

Culture is a divisive issue at times, but really it is a source of abundant new ideas and views of the world. Different cultures should be celebrated in the classroom, but there are also certain expectations within the Canadian education system that need to be met, and celebrating culture should not lead to passing over deficits because they
are cultural in origin. More importantly, avoiding looking at deficits as being related to a student’s previous educational-culture may reduce a teacher’s ability to provide appropriate and timely support to such a student. Recognizing a student’s cultural past for both the richness it can bring to the classroom, and for what it may not have covered within the Canadian expectations would better equip teachers to prepare all their students for what lies ahead.
References:


Appendix A: Definitions

Educational-culture:

**East Asia & Eastern**: These terms and their variations will be used to describe people from East Asia including but not limited to China, Korea, and Japan. These cultures are believed to have education systems and educational-cultures that often have a basis in the teachings of Confucius.

**West/Western**: These terms and their variations are broader and will be used to describe those people descended from Northern European cultures. They will include the UK and mainly Anglophone former British colonies including the US, Canada, and Australia. These countries have educational-cultures often rooted with a basis in the Socratic Method.

**Canada/Canadian**: Where possible specific references will be made to the Canadian educational system. References will assume the dominant educational-culture is based in the Socratic Method. This however is not to imply that it references every individual school, teacher, or student.

**Confucius/Confucian**: For the purposes of this paper I will refer to the modern-day interpretations and implications of these ancient teachings.

**Socratic Method**: This will refer to the mild form of the Socratic Method that is often used in Canadian schools. This method has teachers asking questions and listening to student answers; allowing students to figure out the answers on their own.
Appendix B: Letter of Consent

Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: _________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying culture in the classroom for the purposes of a graduate research project. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the research process this year is Dr. Patrick Finnessy. My research supervisor is also Dr. Finnessy. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My research data collection consists of a 15 minute initial interview and a 40 minute follow-up interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final research paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Saralyn Covent
Phone number, email: 647-881-8139, scovent@gmail.com

Instructor and Research Supervisor’s Name: Dr. Patrick Finnessy, pk.finnessy@utoronto.ca
Phone number: 416-978-0078
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Saralyn Covent and agree to participate in interviews for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): __________________________________

Date: ______________________
Appendix C: Interview Questions

Introductory Interview

1. Can you tell me a bit about your past? Where did you grow up and go to school?

2. Can you tell me a bit about your history as a teacher?

3. Can you describe the cultural diversity in the classes you have taught, with a specific focus on your current classes?

4. Can you describe any observations you have made about your East Asian students in comparison to your Canadian born, English speaking students in terms of their learning-styles and study habits?

5. Can you describe performance differences that you have observed between your East Asian students in comparison to your Canadian born, English speaking students?

Thank you for taking the time to discuss this today. I would like to ask you to consider the cultural differences you may observe between your East Asian students and your Canadian born, English speaking students over the next few weeks.
Secondary Interview

I would like to begin by clarifying a definition for the purpose of this interview. When I am referring to students who are East-Asian born I am referring to those who have completed much of their education in East-Asia, regardless of their English level. I am usually asking to use students born and raised in Canada as a comparison, regardless of their home culture.

1. Would you like to start by sharing any thoughts you have had or observations you have made since our last conversation?

2. Do you find that the labels commonly used in education (for example ELL, Learning Disabled, reference to socio-economic status) helpful in understanding your students? (Why? Why not?)

3. Considering the varied learners in the classroom what are some methods that you use to try to reach all of the individual students in your classes?

4. When giving students choice for assignments and tests, have you observed any differences in reactions between your East-Asian born students or your Canadian born students?

5. In observing students during group work and individual work settings, do you find that some students (East-Asian born vs. Canadian born) generally seem more comfortable in one or the other?

6. Can you describe any changes in a students’ comfort level with group work between class work and work that will be assessed?

7. In a testing situation have you observed any differences between East-Asian born students and those born in Canada?

8. On what types of questions do East-Asian born students tend to perform at their personal best?

9. Generally (in a testing situation, or in a classroom discussion), how well do your East-Asian born students do when asked critical thinking questions, in comparison to those born in Canada?

10. When East-Asian students have struggled in your classes, have you observed any commonalities in the areas in which they struggle?

11. When East-Asian students have struggled in your classes, have you observed any commonalities in their expressed reasons for their difficulties?
12. For your East-Asian born students who intend to go to university when they graduate, what do you think will be the most difficult part of their transition (on average) from high school to university?

13. Would you expect your Canadian born students to have the same struggle (on average)?

14. Is there anything you would like to add to this conversation?