Chapter 3

International Students
Classroom Exclusion in
U.S. Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this synthesis of research was to explore how classroom inclusiveness affected international students in U.S. higher education based on published studies. Data were collected from 15 peer-reviewed published studies that included international students’ experiences in U.S. higher education. Some of the themes that recurred in the review of research included the following areas: classroom differences between students’ home countries and the United States; classroom participation expectations, including professors’ and students’ perspectives of those expectations; and denial of equity in education by production of whiteness and the relationship between language and power. The author concluded from the results that classroom practices existed that, instead of promoting integration of international students into classroom activities, facilitated exclusion and segregation of these students. The classroom practices that promoted exclusion of international students included the following: (a) unstructured class discussions, (b) lack of guidance from the professor during class, (c) little value placed on international perspectives, (d) overrepresentation of oral classroom participation as the only mode of participation, (e) lack of respect for other educational cultural norms, and (f) reinforcement of production of whiteness by professors and American students.

INTRODUCTION

International student mobility has increased in recent years as a record high number of 886,052 foreign students enrolled in United States higher education institutions during the 2013-2014 academic year, according to The Institute of International Education (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). This number reflected an 8.1% increase from the previous academic year. The top three nations with the highest numbers of international students in the U.S. in 2013-2014 were China with 274,439 students, India with 102,673 students, and finally South Korea with 68,047 students (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014).

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Researchers projected that the number of foreign students would triple by the year 2025 (Altbach, 2004). One of the factors affecting this increase is the gap between the educational supply and demand of many countries of origin. For instance, researchers estimated that India educates only about 10% of its population at a higher education level (Tiwari, 2005). The capacity of India to offer more higher education opportunities to its citizens was almost non-existent. At the same time, the middle class in many of these emerging countries has been increasing and because of this increase in income more students have the opportunity to study abroad. As an example, researchers calculated in 2006 that the middle class in China was composed of 15% of its population, which translated to nearly 201,619,500 people (Chen & Lu, 2006). The economic fluency of millions of people will impact international student mobility. At the same time, some experts argued that a motivating force for accepting more international students in institutions of higher education in the U.S. was higher international student tuition fees.

A few studies have been published about the experiences of international students in U.S universities (e.g. Andrade, 2006; Kamal & Maruyama, 1990; Klomegh, 2006; Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003; Sharma & Jung, 1985; Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992) and even fewer studies have been conducted about experiences of international students in the classroom setting (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Tatar, 2005; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Only two studies (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Diangelo, 2006) were focused on classroom inclusiveness as one of the main topics. As defined by Karagiannis, Stainback, and Stainback (1996), full classroom inclusiveness provides students an equal opportunity to meet their educational goals in a regular setting, in this case, regardless of the diverse cultural and language background of international students. The gap in the literature about classroom inclusiveness of international students in the U.S. has led to the main goal of this review of literature.

The purpose of this review of literature was to explore how classroom inclusiveness affected international students in U.S. higher education based on published studies. The review also explored the perceptions of students about being included in classrooms and consequently, what factors contributed to international students being included in classrooms. Therefore, the research questions that guided this review of research were (a) How has classroom inclusiveness affected international students? (b) What were the perceptions of international students about being included in classrooms? (c) What has contributed to international students being included in classrooms?

BACKGROUND

The theoretical framework used for this research of literature represents a combination of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory of mind and Gramsci’s (1971) hegemony theory. Sociocultural theory of mind was based on the assumption that learning and development occurred through teacher-learner discourse in social and cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). A high level of importance was placed on social interactions, and researchers believed that they played an essential role in the development of intellect. One of the main concepts of sociocultural theory was the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This concept was founded on the notion of the existence of a space in which learners, who are cognitively ready, are able to develop fully by interacting with more experienced peers. Hegemony theory was based on an assumption of the existence of a ruling class that establishes and maintains control over the working class. One of the main ideas of this theory was the power of ideology. Gramsci (1971) argued that the ruling class forces its own ideology, which is then passed on to and adopted by the working class as “common sense” (Lemert, 2010).
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