Chapter 15

Social Constructivism as a Theoretical Foundation of Cross-Cultural Mentoring for Foreign-Born Faculty

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ABSTRACT

Globalization results in the diffusion of people across geographical boundaries. Over the past twenty years, the number of foreign-born faculty has continued to increase in American universities. Foreign-born faculty represent a significant labor force in the global academic settings; they bring in diversity, new perspectives, and innovative skills wherever they teach. Research asserts that foreign-born faculty encounter huge cultural change that make their lives tremendously difficult in the host country. Furthermore, studies also suggest that cross-cultural mentoring may serve as a solution to help foreign-born faculty adapt to the host countries. However, there has been a lack of theoretical justification to conceptualize cross-cultural mentoring. This chapter proposes the theory of social constructivism as the theoretical foundation and suggests an action-reflection practice to help the theory building inquiry and conceptualize cross-cultural mentorship for foreign-born faculty.

INTRODUCTION

The development of new ways of living in the world together is pivotal to further human progress; we must learn how to see things through the eyes of others and add their knowledge to our personal repertoires (Chen & Starosta, 2008, p. 215).

Globalization results in the movement of people across geographical boundaries (Baruch, Budhwar, & Khatri, 2007; Giddens, 1991). In America, the immigrant labors have underscored the country’s economic success. The increase in globalization results in dramatic shifts and rapid changes in the United

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States’ demographics in educational institutions and other workplaces. Richmond (1988) declares that there is a growing demand for importing highly qualified immigrant intellectual talents. In the United States (US), foreign-born academics are considered as “an invaluable asset for U.S. institutions of higher education in their internationalization and globalization endeavors” (Gahungu, 2011, p.3). The demand of foreign-born faculty is on the rise due to cultural pluralism in the US (Hser, 2005; Lin, Pearce, & Wang, 2009; Marvasti, 2005; Richmond, 1988). Notably, in the past 20 years, the number of foreign-born faculty has continued to grow steadily in American universities, making universities the most internationalized institutions (Kim, Twombly, & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). Altbach and Yudkevich (2017) assert that academicians’ global mobility has become a signification phenomenon in the 21st-century.

According to the report of Open Doors 2017 Executive Summary, published by Institute of International Education (IIE, 2018a), there were 1,078,822 international students enrolling in U.S. higher educational institutions; the rate increased 3.4 percent increase from 2016 to 2017. The number of international scholars in the United States has increased from 115,098 in 2009-2010 to 134,379 in 2016-2017 (IIE, 2018b). Nearly 75 percent of foreign-born faculty originate from China, India, South Korea, and Germany; they concentrate their fields on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Additionally, foreign-born represent diverse educational and cultural resources that promote campus internationalization. In higher education, over one-third of the institutions include international education in their mission statements (Siaya & Hayward, 2003). In academic terms, internationalization can be interpreted as the transformation of campuses into more international-oriented institutions. This can be achieved through the implementation and integration of international elements into the curricula to increase international faculty on campus (Deardorff, 2004). As the result of the internationalization of higher education, increasing numbers of academics are taking overseas appointments (Altbach, 1996; Eastman & Smith, 1991; Han, 2008; Schermerhorn,1999; Welch, 1997).

When foreign-born faculty continuously increase their presence in American higher education, they also become an important research topic for facilitating internationalized higher education. They enrich students’ learning experiences, intercultural learning opportunities, and add diversity to campus life. In addition, they also contribute to local, state, and national economies significantly (Hser, 2005). McDowell and Singell (2000) concluded that foreign-born faculty are more productive in scholarly activities than their native counterparts. Therefore, foreign-born faculty represent the significant labor force in global academic settings. They bring in diversity, new perspectives, and cutting-edge skills wherever they teach.

Research shows that foreign-born faculty have faced huge cultural adjustments, making their lives tremendously difficult in the host country (Hser, 2005; Manrique & Manrique, 1999; Marvasti, 2005; Ngwainmbi, 2006). Switching from one culture to another means not only changes the familiar language, culture, climate, and living conditions, but also flip daily life and social norms. From fluency in multiple languages to an understanding of the culture, the foreign-born intellects have encountered many challenges just like academic expatriates. Their linguistic difficulties may mislead people to assume their instructional ineffectiveness (Marvasti, 2005; Bodycott & Walker, 2000). They have reported many issues including language, cross-cultural adaptation, legal issues, and other concerns that have challenged foreign-born faculty and scholars as they work in the U.S. (Bonetta, 2007; Foote, Li, Monk, & Theobald, 2008; Herget, 2016, August 18; Ngwainmbi, 2006; No & Walsh, 2010).

Despite their growing presence and significance on U.S. college campuses, foreign-born faculty have been largely ignored and marginalized in higher education literature (Chan, 2005; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2009; Nakanishi, 1993). Cooper (2007) suggested creating universities for the multicultural world and asserted that “the challenges and opportunities in the internationalization of higher education