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The Role of the International Educator in Understanding International Student Identity Development

Kelsey Walsh
SIT Graduate Institute

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**The Role of the International Educator in Understanding International Student Identity
Development**

Kelsey Ann Walsh

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
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Advisor's name: Lynée Connelly

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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Student Name: Kelsey Ann Walsh

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Table of Contents

Abstract..... 3

Introduction..... 4

Literature Review 6

Research / Practitioner Inquiry Design 15

Culture of Inquiry..... 15

Sample Selection..... 16

Data Collection Methods 16

Data Analysis Methods 17

Limitations Inherent in the Research Design 17

Findings..... 18

Using Program Design 19

Confronting Stereotypes..... 19

Self-Reflection 25

Creating the International Student Environment 28

The International Office..... 28

The International Community 31

International Educators as Cultural Interpreters 33

Student Leadership Development 38

Discussion..... 41

Conclusions..... 41

Practical Applicability 43

Recommendations for Further Research..... 43

References 45

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

The Role of the International Educator in Understanding International Student Identity Development will explore international educators' perceptions of their role in assisting international students through identity development. The purpose of this study is to examine international educators' personal understanding of their role, how they use programs to actualize their role, the ways they believe themselves to be equipped to help international students, and how they reflect upon their perceived role. This project also explores understanding of cultural identity development from the international student perspective and asks international students how they understand the role of international educators in that experience. Using grounded theory, participants were allowed to explore their own ideas; the research unfolded and adapted in a way that let participants share their story. Seven private interviews were conducted in total, five with international educators and two with international students. One focus group was conducted with four international students. According to the findings, the role of the international educator in understanding international student identity development involves using conscious programming, creating the physical environment, becoming cultural interpreters and developing student leaders. The conclusions from this study will help current international educators understand the role they play in the lives of international students and will allow international educators to continue to improve the services that they offer to international students. This unique research will hopefully prompt future inquiry into how international educators affect and understand international student identity development.

Keywords: international student, identity development, self-authorship, international educators

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The Foundation for International Understanding Through Students (FIUTS) is a non-profit organization affiliated with and housed at the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle, Washington. FIUTS is contracted through the UW to design and deliver International Student Orientation (ISO) for all new incoming international students to the university. For the 2017-2018 academic year FIUTS implemented a two-week ISO which included daily informational sessions, tours of campus, activities and events. The ISO is annually designed to help international students transition to life in the US and academic life at UW smoothly. While the daily informational sessions provide crucial information about visa requirements, academic integrity, and international student travel regulations, the optional events and activities provide new students the opportunity to meet each other and make new friends. The ISO optional activities for international students included a weekend at a US style camp retreat, free visits to the Seattle Aquarium, a Seattle city scavenger hunt, a boat cruise of the Puget Sound and much more. New international students to the UW are welcomed with ample activities and services.

Beyond International Student Orientation, FIUTS' role on campus is diverse and multifaceted. Like many other colleges and universities throughout the US, the UW has an International Student Services (ISS) office where students go to ask all questions related to their student visa. FIUTS does not deal with issues related to international student immigration concerns. Rather, the organization exists to provide intercultural programs to the UW's international student population, the domestic student population and the local Seattle community.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the academic year FIUTS designs programs and activities with an international focus. Some programs connect international students to each other, other programs connect international students to domestic students, or international students to the local Seattle Community. Throughout many FIUTS programs there is a theme of cultural sharing. Events such as Cultural Fest provide students the opportunity to present about their country in the form of song or dance. Programs such as Global Ambassador Day give international students the opportunity to present in local elementary schools. Throughout the academic year FIUTS exists to celebrate cultural diversity and to support the international student community.

FIUTS is operated by a staff of six full time employees, who design and create programs which support the international student population. These six individuals have a very important role in helping international students not only transition to life in the US, but to feel continually supported throughout their stay.

Research has shown that many college-aged students go through a period of personal identity development (Kim, 2012). Further, international students go through a unique version of identity exploration as their environment has shifted, often dramatically, due to their choice to study in a new culture. During an international students' time overseas, certain opportunities or challenges may encourage the student to examine their cultural identity (Kim, 2012).

Organizations such as FIUTS may provide these opportunities and challenges to international students through their intercultural programs, events and activities.

This study will investigate the relationship between international educators and international student identity development by addressing the following research questions: How do international educators perceive their role in international student identity development? Where do international students see the role of international educators in their identity

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

development journey? In what ways do international educators believe that programs can help international students explore their personal identity? How are international educators equipped to help international students understand personal identity development during their time overseas? How might international educators measure their impact of helping international students understand identity development while overseas? With the overarching research question as: What is the role of the International Educator in Understanding International Student Identity Development?

Literature Review

The following literature review will examine current relevant research in the field related to the topic of international student identity development. First, identity development for college-aged students will be discussed, followed by an analysis of how identity development is unique for international students. Next, an examination of the process of identity development through programs focused on discourse and dialogue will follow. Finally, Baxter Magolda's self-actualization theory (2009) will be introduced as a lens to examine international student identity development and as a conceptual tool for international educators to use to understand how to guide students through issues regarding personal identity development.

When discussing social identity, it is common to look at fragmented components of the self, "... nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, gender, sexuality..." and attempt to understand the interplay of these components to give location to the self within society (Woodward, 1997, p. 1). Exploring identity helps one to understand an essence of who they are and how they relate to the people around them. It helps one understand human commonalities and human difference (Woodward, 1997). As people understand aspects of themselves and group

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

together, often with people like them, people observe how society treats them. They come to understand that their social experience is affected by aspects of their identity. A central component of understanding identity is through exploring power and oppression (Hernandez, 2017). Simply understanding that human difference exists in society says nothing about the experience one feels based on their perceived location in society. Experiencing both marginalization and privilege in social space is part of the human developmental process (Hernandez, 2017). Therefore, people may conceptualize their identity as a response to their own perceived societal power or lack thereof. Intersectionality embraces the idea that “privileged and marginalized identities are experienced simultaneously” (Hernandez, 2017, p. 208).

Experiencing privileged identities allows space for choice in identity performance, while experiencing marginalized identities typically requires individuals to hold back or strategize in order to minimize harm (Hernandez, 2017). In other words, individuals possess and experience multiple identities at all times, in every interaction, with different or similar individuals. The level to which one belongs to an identity of power or to an identity of oppression will affect individual experience and even the way individuals act in societal space. Therefore, societal structures of power, which vary across cultures, also affect the journey of identity development.

The discussion of identity development can be framed in polarizing ways, on the one hand, the essentialist view of identity explains personal identity as biological, fixed and trans-historical (Woodward, 1997). The non-essentialist view frames identity development as socially constructed, fluid and changing (Woodward, 1997). In the non-essentialist view, many factors, such as, age, change of careers, exploration of sexuality and change of geographical location have the ability to affect one’s concept of identity throughout their lives. The discussion of identity development for college-aged students is especially intriguing because profound

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

personal change generally happens at this point in many young peoples' lives. Many college-aged students are moving away from their community and family for the first time and exploring new social groups and often interacting with people who may differ along spectrums of identity definitions. This contact with human difference has the power to prompt exploration of self, as identity is often understood by terms of difference (Woodward, 1997). The term difference, when discussing identity, means understanding the self by identifying what one is not. In other words, perceiving human binaries, such as man and woman, is often how people recognize their own identity (Woodward, 1997). Identities may be understood through this spectrum of seeing what one is not and identifying themselves by this difference, a sense of "inclusion and exclusion" or "us and them" (Woodward, 1997, p. 2). New students may come to large US university campuses and experience a multiplicity of identities, different cultures, religions, ethnicities, races, and genders, maybe for the first time, prompting students to explore exactly how they understand their own position within society.

The experience of contact with difference is no doubt especially acute for the international student, as identity issues such as sexuality, race, or gender, vary in cultural contexts (Kim, 2012). For example, the US may be more racially and ethnically diverse than the home country of some international students. Students who come from countries where issues around race may be less salient may begin to examine their race within the context of the United States. Personal understanding and exploration of race may then happen as a result of the student's sojourn in the United States (Kim, 2012). International students coming to the US may also find themselves in a social minority status for the first time in their lives (Kim, 2012). The change in social status may lead to the personal examination of their ethnicity and an understanding of how ethnicity affects their location within society. Furthermore, the social

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

context may also affect how individuals present or even constrain their identity (Hernandez, 2017). For example, international students may use unique or specific language to describe themselves in their own culture while using different language learned in the US context. For example, an African student may describe themselves regionally or geographically in their home-culture but refer to themselves as Black in the US. One aspect of identity may be privileged in an international students' home-country while marginalized in the US context. Processing cultural identity and difference in the new social context becomes a unique aspect of the international student identity development process.

Many experiences for the college-aged student may influence identity development and are not unique to just the international student, such as exploring personal identity, understanding their independence and autonomy, cultivating interpersonal relationships, and understanding how to handle emotions (Kim, 2012). International students will go through the college student developmental journey at the same time that they are adjusting to a new culture. Adapting to the United States culture therefore becomes part of the developmental journey. In fact, international students go through specific developmental phases as they react to their new cultural environment (Kim, 2012). From a pre-exposure phase when students first plan to study abroad and simply imagine what their new cultural environment might be like, to an integration phase when international students overcome challenges they have faced and continue to face during their time overseas. Ultimately, students have the potential to reach the developmental phase of internationalization (Kim, 2012). At this point, international students “create their own belief system that acknowledges diversity and values individual differences in academic and cultural contexts” (Karkouti, 2014, p. 262).

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

International students at the Internationalization phase are cognizant of both their home-culture and the new culture they are experiencing. This makes international student identity development unique in that international students understand themselves as acting within diverse cultural contexts. In their new US context, international students may confront language barriers, racism, discrimination, and they may struggle to find their place in US society. Many international students find that they have much in common with other international students from all over the world. As international students reexamine their burgeoning identity as a means of adjusting to their new culture, being ‘international’ becomes a central component of their identity (Kim, 2012).

Today colleges and universities throughout the United States staff an international student affairs office in order to assist international students academically, socially and culturally (Coppi, 2007). The host institution and the international student affairs office/department is responsible for making efforts to ensure that their international student population feels “comfortable, safe and welcomed,” in their new community (Coppi, 2007, p. 7). Often, international student affairs offices provide programs and activities designed specifically for the international student. Providing opportunities for international students to share or present about their home-culture is an important aspect of many international student offices.

International students who are able to maintain their personal cultural identity while at the same time exploring a new culture are likely to attain a “bicultural” identity, or an acceptance of both cultures independent to each other (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). International students who are able to maintain affiliation and ties with their home-culture while exploring the new culture experience a more positive cultural adjustment or a smoother transition (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). The importance of maintaining ties with home-culture may be why many international

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

student offices provide programs which allow for international students to discuss their home-culture versus solely learning about the new culture.

As students participate in programs and activities in which they describe their home-culture they also realize themselves as a minority group within themselves, or as international students. Haugh (2008) explains that when international students are asked to discuss their experiences as ‘other’ in the United States, they develop and hone the ‘international’ aspect of their identity through the discussion. The idea of being international becomes more closely a part of their identity through dialogue about the topic (Haugh, 2008). Sfard and Prusak (2005) claim that identity is the stories we tell about ourselves. Further, people use elements of their culture to define themselves or present themselves, such as describing their family, their community or the clothes they wear. Identity and culture are intrinsically tied, people take ownership of important people, social institutions, geographical space or cultural artifacts to describe who they are (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013). When international students join programs or activities that ask them to share their story, their culture, their religion, or their way of being, they are actively shaping their personal identity. Therefore, dialogue about identity becomes a critical moment of identity development for international students.

The discussion above about international student identity development helps to shed light on the unique identity development process that international students go through. Since many international educators are aware of this unique developmental journey, many international student services offices provide programs that may actually prompt identity exploration. But, the current research about identity development lacks a discussion of what the next step might be (Kim, 2012; Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Karkouti, 2014). Or more specifically, how the role of the international educator is actualized during these programs which encourage identity

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

development. There exists a gap about how international educators may actually help students work through cultural identity development, especially during specific programs which prompt international students to discuss or examine their identity. Baxter Magolda's (2009) research into student development has served to partially fill this gap. Although it is not specific to the international student experience, her research about college-aged student development is helpful for educators in understanding how to assist students with personal development.

In Baxter Magolda's (2009) theory of self-authorship, she describes college students' moments of profound self-reflection as the crossroads on their way towards discovering themselves or understanding their identity. Baxter Magolda (2009) explains self-authorship as, "the capacity to internally define one's own beliefs, identities and relationships," (Magolda & Taylor, 2017, p. 158). She explains that all students are working towards self-authorship throughout their college years. According to the self-authorship theory, students move through three major developmental phases, "... following external formulas, crossroads and self-authorship" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 628). When students are in the phase of following external formulas, they are looking outside of themselves for all their decision making, they are seeking advice from parents, peers or friends and accepting outside input as unquestionable fact.

Students at this phase have not learned how to use an internal compass or know how to trust their own decisions. At some point in all young peoples' lives though, they will begin to step out of the external formulas phase and into the crossroads. At the crossroads phase, young people realize that external opinion has not always guided them in the correct direction and they begin to look within themselves to understand how to make choices about their own life (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Entering the crossroads can often be described as a shocking moment, as students' "previously held assumptions" about life begin to "unravel" in the face of adversity or

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

difference (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 629). When students realize that there are multiple ways to understand the world, whether that be peoples' understanding of race, religion or gender, students are prompted to look within to define aspects of identity for themselves. Students confronting stereotypes held against them for the first time realize how limited they feel by others' identity labels (Baxter Magolda, 2009). They then attempt to define themselves along their own terms, cultivating and developing the parts of their identity that they choose to explore. Students in the crossroads phase begin to learn how to tell their own story to the world and begin to listen to their own voice as they move towards self-authorship and independent decision making (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

Baxter Magolda's (2009) self-authorship theory is relevant to international educators because it helps us understand the transition that students are going through as they attempt to define their identity in a new cultural context. The specific challenges that students face in the transition phase or crossroads phase such as, dealing with complex decisions, developing personal authority and collaborating to solve issues, can be difficult (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2017). Students need support to deal with these challenges from educators. Ways in which educators can assist with these challenges include: respecting students' thoughts and feelings, helping students sort through their experiences and collaborating with students to solve problems (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2017).

International educators play an important support role for international students. When international student advisors are actively engaged with students they serve as "validating agents" and help students feel more confident and welcomed in the university community (Hirschy, 2017, p. 257). Students who feel accepted and comfortable in the campus community

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

are actually more capable of learning (Hirschy, 2017). International educators may serve as this connecting bridge for international students to the larger university community.

Intercultural programs which provide international students with spaces to discuss cultural identity and confront stereotypes can push international students through developmental phases towards development and self-authorship. These intercultural programs can also actively promote empowerment for international students as students are provided with the space to share real and personal information about their home-country and confront stereotypes (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). But, participating in activities about personal culture is not always easy. In order to help international students to realize personal identity, international educators have to be especially cognizant of the challenges international students are facing during culturally focused activities. International educators should offer the guidance international students may need to understand their international identity within the United States. Conscious programming within international student offices may provide safe and accepting spaces for international students to explore their developing identities. Yet, it is crucial for international educators to understand their role in helping international students work through identity development.

The Role of the International Educator in Understanding International Student Identity Development will begin to explore topics such as how the international educator helps or hinders international student development, who international students approach when facing identity issues and how the educator perceives their personal role. Furthermore, this research will address current gaps in the literature by connecting knowledge of holistic student development programming specifically to the international student experience. This study will investigate these topics at the Foundation for International Understanding Through Students located at the University of Washington.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Research / Practitioner Inquiry Design

Culture of Inquiry

The culture of inquiry included the international educators who are full time staff at FIUTS and a small group of international student participants in FIUTS programs. In order to better understand the role that international educators play in international student identity development, the participating FIUTS staff was asked how they understood and actualized their role. Because it was also important to investigate the issue of identity development from the perspective of international students themselves, participating FIUTS international students were asked how they understood the role of international educators, namely FIUTS staff, during their developmental journey in the United States. FIUTS, a non-profit affiliate of the University of Washington, currently employs six fulltime staff members, of whom five participated in the study. FIUTS staff participants included: the Executive Director, the Manager of Student Programs, The Manager of Education Programs, the Manager of Community Programs and the Education Programs Coordinator. The FIUTS international student participants were all current students at the University of Washington, including undergraduates and graduate students. Four international students participated in a focus group, two graduate students and two undergraduates. The graduate students were from Turkey and Ukraine and the undergraduate students were from China and Singapore/Brunei (born in Brunei, grew up in Singapore). Two private interviews were conducted with two students who are both heavily involved in FIUTS programming, an undergraduate student who is from Taiwanese/Chinese (born in Taiwan, grew up in China) and a graduate student who is Pakistani. Only UW students who had participated in a significant amount of FIUTS programs were invited to participate in the study. These seven participants had a wide array of experience in FIUTS programs, including International Student

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Orientation (and related activities), Homestay, Education Programs (including Global Ambassador Day, Pen Pals, and Community Visits), Student Board members, Student Committee members, and Cultural Conversation Facilitators. The aspects of the above-mentioned programs will be expanded on in the *Findings* section of this document.

Sample Selection

In order to explore the research questions outlined above, qualitative research was conducted and analyzed based on one-on-one interviews with participating FIUTS staff and a mix of one-on-one interviews and a focus group with FIUTS international student participants. All research participants participated voluntarily. Food and beverage was provided as an incentive and thank you for participation for FIUTS international student participants in both the focus group and the one-on-one interviews.

Data Collection Methods

There was one sole investigator on this project who independently conducted all interviews, the focus group and FIUTS program observations. Private, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participating, current FIUTS staff. One small focus group, consisting of four participants was used to collect data from participating FIUTS international student participants. Semi-structured, private interviews were conducted with two FIUTS international student participants in order to attain information in a more private setting. Two unstructured FIUTS program observations of Cultural Conversation Group also took place, which is a group which meets weekly, lead by two FIUTS student facilitators. On both

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

occasions, no students showed up to the group meeting. Therefore, no data was collected from these program observations.

Data Analysis Methods

Grounded Theory analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data collected from participants. Based on patterns observed in responders' attitudes and behaviors, possible explanations were theorized to the initial inquiries, allowing for understanding of the topic to grow and shift throughout the study. Seven private interviews and one focus group were transcribed and coded for patterns in ideas and attitudes. Then, correlations were discovered which illustrated trends from participant data. Data was then synthesized to present major findings related to the understanding of the initial research questions.

Limitations Inherent in the Research Design

One significant limitation in the research design was the sample size. Due to the modest number of participants, responses from the FIUTS international students were not representative of all international students at UW who participate in FIUTS events; rather, the research represented a depth of meaningful data from a very small, yet involved UW international student sample. Program observations were initially designed to bring in a larger sample size of FIUTS international student participants but due to the fact that both Cultural Conversation Groups were cancelled due to lack of participation, no observations could be used in data collection. The lack of program observations was a significant limitation to the research.

Another significant limitation in the design of this research study was the relationship between the research and the organization itself. FIUTS international student participants may

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

not have wanted to critique the organization where they participate in many events and activities throughout the academic year. Participating FIUTS staff may not have wanted to critique their own organization or their capacity as international educators.

Although a possible language barrier was listed as a potential limitation in the proposal of this study, it did not affect the research. All interviews were conducted in English, while all international student participants speak English as a second language. Interview questions were consciously made as clear as possible and US slang and English-based metaphors/phrases were avoided. The English levels of all of the FIUTS international student participants were very advanced. Interviews were conducted easily with very little clarifying questions on the part of the international students. Interviews were transcribed with little difficulty relating to language issues. Therefore, language barriers were ultimately not a limitation in the research design.

Findings

Four primary themes were discovered from the interviews and focus groups: Using Program Design, Creating the International Student Environment, International Educators as Cultural Interpreters, and Student Leadership. International educators consciously design programs which allow students the opportunity to explore their cultural identity by confronting stereotypes and prompting self-reflection. International student identity development is also encouraged by providing the physical space that is deemed international – the international student office and the international student community. International Educators assist international students through issues related to identity development by becoming cultural interpreters, and helping students navigate issues related to cultural difference. Finally, international educators design student leadership programs which encourage international

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

students to explore their personal identity and then assist other international students through identity discovery as well.

Using Program Design

Confronting Stereotypes

Throughout the current literature on international student identity development a theme exists: exploring cultural identity for the international student means confronting stereotypes. Being in a new geographical and cultural space means understanding yourself and your culture from a new perspective. Unfortunately, international students may begin to feel that they are misunderstood and even mislabeled by the host culture. International students may come to the US and realize that people have previously held assumptions about people from their culture, be them true or false. Baxter Magolda (2009) explained that students who realize these stereotypes are held against them feel confined and limited by these labels. Johnson and Sandu (2007) found that international students can feel empowered by confronting stereotypes that they feel exist about their culture. But where is an appropriate place to tell your story on a college campus? How are students actually able to confront stereotypes?

Throughout the interviews with the international educators who comprise FIUTS staff and with FIUTS international student participants, the opportunity to confront stereotypes was a common theme. When the international students who participate in FIUTS programs were asked why they choose to present about their culture, they all discussed the importance they felt in confronting stereotypes about their home-countries. When the FIUTS staff was asked the question of how they help international students explore their identity, a major response was, through programs. One major way in which international educators understand their role in

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

helping international students through their developmental journey is the use of consciously designed and implemented programs which allow students to confront stereotypes.

FIUTS conducts an annual celebration on UW campus called Cultural Fest. This program was mentioned by all FIUTS staff interviewees and all international student interviewees.

Cultural Fest is comprised of two major events, the Cultural Fest Performance Showcase and the Cultural Fest Expo. At the Performance Showcase students from around the world perform cultural song and dance in Meany Hall, UW's central performance center. Hundreds of UW students and community members attend the Performance Showcase every year. To say the Performance Showcase is a big deal is truly an understatement. The FIUTS Student Board conducts try-outs that take about a month and watch approximately 30 groups and individuals try-out, going through a series of cuts and finally inviting only the most impressive and culturally representative acts to perform. One major aspect of the try-outs is responding to interview questions about how and why this performance represents your culture. This year the Performance Showcase was comprised of ten acts including a Korean drumming group, a Hawaiian dance group, a Chinese martial arts group and much more.

Before the Performance Showcase, another memorable and impactful event takes place, the Expo. The Expo happens on a Thursday on UW campus and occupies the Student Union Building ballroom. Hundreds of UW international students participate in the Expo. During the Expo, students present in cultural booths about their country. UW students and Seattle community members are invited to stop by at any point during the day to stroll through the ballroom and observe the booths. Walking down the ballroom stall by stall, one has the opportunity to see traditional dress from around the world, sample home-made traditional snacks and observe national flags from participating countries. UW international students receive no

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

college credit for participating in the Expo and no compensation for their time, yet year after year students jump at the opportunity to design a cultural booth about their home-country.

The Cultural Fest was not the only program that interviewees mentioned in which international students have the opportunity to present about or discuss their culture. More programs mentioned were, Global Ambassador Day, an event in which UW international students present about their home-culture in a local elementary school, the Pen Pal Program which partners UW students with Seattle elementary schoolers, and the Homestay Program which gives international students who are new to UW the opportunity to do a short-term homestay for 10-days before the official start of UW classes.

When international students were asked why they choose to participate in intercultural FIUTS programs, a major theme reflected the opportunity to confront stereotypes. Participant A, a first-year graduate student from Turkey, explained that she continually joins FIUTS cultural events because she says she knows that people have stereotypes about different countries and cultures but that these events were “an opportunity for me to show what it really is and how we dress up, what we eat, what we believe in generally.” Participant B, a first-year graduate student from Ukraine, expanded by saying, “so I just consider it to be my duty, my international duty, to share things about my culture... just to raise peoples’ awareness about Ukraine.”

In a private interview, Participant C, a first-year graduate student from Pakistan, explained that even before coming to the US he had an idea of the stereotypes that people in the US might have about his country, “... in Pakistan we do know what kind of image we have in Europe even though I’ve never been to Europe, I’ve never been the US either, but I know what kind of image US people and European people had about Pakistan.” He continued by saying that although his friends and family had encouraged him to bring traditional items from Pakistan to

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

show his new friends in the US he figured people would not be interested and he would never actually have the opportunity to share those items. But, upon joining FIUTS he discovered, “FIUTS give me like really good platform to express myself, my culture, and stuff like that,” and he was able to showcase his cultural objects during the Expo.

It was clear through the interviews that international students felt as if they needed this “platform,” or this opportunity to discuss their culture. Participant D, a second-year undergrad who grew up in both Singapore and Brunei, explained that he was very intrigued by the elementary schoolers’ curiosity about his culture when he participated in Global Ambassador Day, saying, “they’re just so eager to learn, they’re so curious, they ask way more questions than like any one of these college lecturers.” Participant C, the Pakistani student, also explained that although he had many US friends, they would not just ask about his country or his culture in daily interactions with them; he felt that he needed the formal platform and that FIUTS provided that for him.

International students may want the opportunity to confront stereotypes but not be able to do it day in and day out on a college campus. In another private interview, Participant E, a student who grew up in both Taiwan and China, explained that she often felt left out in her college lectures when a professor would only discuss issues from a Western or US centric lens. She explained that she would notice the other international students in the class and approach them afterwards, asking if they had understood concepts that she had not, and realized that they were experiencing the same sensation of feeling left out. Throughout the interviews with UW international students they expressed the desire to have the opportunity to shatter stereotypes and the need for a place or program that invited them to do so.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The FIUTS staff also discussed the importance of using programs to allow students to share about their culture. In a private interview, the FIUTS staff Participant 1 shared that she thinks students feel "...a sense of accomplishment and a sense that they have kind of done something good for the world by educating somebody." She explained that many of the students she works with seem shocked or frustrated that people in the US cannot even find their home-country on a map or know how to pronounce it correctly. She believes that students, especially students from underrepresented counties on UW campus, "feel a very special responsibility to share about their country." As mentioned above, the international student interviewees confirmed that sentiment. Participant 1 went on to say that UW international students are often realizing implicit assumptions that people hold about their country during these programmatic presentations and discussions. She gave an example of the kinds of questions she hears people ask FIUTS participants:

"...I often hear people ask questions that have a lot of implicit assumptions in them, like they'll say like, oh I had a friend who went to go volunteer in Africa, she was doing something with water, so do you have bad water in your country?"

She shared that she observes the students she works with seeming "taken aback" when they realize that people often think they know something about their home-country but are in fact coming from a place of what she describes as, "significant ignorance." She explained that students may all have different reactions to that, but one common reaction is realizing how vital it is to confront those stereotypes. Students truly seem to want the opportunity to explain how their country really is, from their own lived experience.

While providing programs that give international students the opportunity to confront stereotypes is one way that international educators understand their role, the FIUTS staff went on

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

to explain that providing the platform alone is not enough. Helping students understand how to navigate these programs in a positive and healthy way is the crucial next step. One thing that the FIUTS staff said over and over again was how much they emphasized that international student participants do not have to be a sole representation of their whole country. Nor did they believe that students should act as political diplomats of their country. They all said that they always try to say, tell your own story. One international educator said that sometimes before a culturally focused event a student will mention that they had researched and studied their country in order to present about it and that she tries to push back a little and encourage them to drop the script and just talk about their own life. She explained that she wanted her student participants to not just see these sharing platforms as an opportunity to speak about their country, but as an opportunity to share about their own life and their own personal experience.

FIUTS staff encourages the idea of telling a personal story as a method for confronting stereotypes. But challenging stereotypes is not necessarily easy. In a private interview, FIUTS staff Participant 2 explained how challenging this concept can be for international students, saying, "...they often have a hard time removing themselves from iconographic difference in culture." All of the FIUTS staff interviewees seemed to share the idea that helping students understand that they are not required to know everything about their home-culture or subscribe to every aspect of their home-culture was extremely important. It seemed that this method certainly helped students to feel comfortable participating in FIUTS programs. During the focus groups the students explained that they did not want to feel pressured to discuss the politics of their home-country. Participant A, from Turkey, expressed this sentiment by saying ... "remember that we're all students, we're not political figures, we're just students." As diverse people, we all connect to our culture in different and varying ways, when we are encouraged to just tell our

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

story we actively confront cultural stereotypes. If part of human identity is comprised of the stories we tell about ourselves (Sfard and Prusak, 2005), then FIUTS is certainly encouraging the exploration of that component. As Participant D, from Singapore/Brunei, puts it:

“I feel like a lot of the time when you want to learn about a country you just Google it, or Wikipedia you know, but it’s just so much easier to learn from like another student, someone who’s like close to your age, who has lived in that country, and I just feel like it’s a lot more personal as well, asking them questions and knowing the answer is based on their experience which is so much more authentic than Wikipedia”

Furthermore, telling a personal story and seeing a connection to home-culture or maybe noticing aspects of the story that are vastly different from the home-culture is a crucial step in self-reflection and in cultural identity development. Not only do international educators use programs to allow international students to confront stereotypes, but also to prompt cultural self-reflection.

Self-Reflection

In order to understand how intercultural programs may prompt students to explore their personal cultural identity, international educators were asked if they consciously designed their programs with identity exploration and cultural identity development in mind. FIUTS international student interviewees were asked if participating in FIUTS events in which they were asked to share about culture prompted self-reflection about their culture and almost all participants responded with a yes. Participant F, a second-year undergraduate student from China, explained that before participating in FIUTS programs she did not realize that her culture

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

had an impact on her identity. She explained that before coming to UW and joining the international student community of FIUTS she did not have personal perspective of her culture:

“... living in your own culture, living your own narrative, it’s really hard to detach what kind of things, like what kinds of histories have an impact on you, what kind of heritage have you taken on from your ancestries, and after hearing people with their stories and watching them it kind of makes you just reflect on yourself.”

This insight is important because it suggests the idea that just as important as telling your own story is for exploring identity, so is listening to the story of others. For example, during Cultural Fest Expo students are tasked to design a booth that represents their country, and no doubt the process of doing this may prompt cultural reflection. But, what the student from China tells us is that maybe it is just as important to see the booth next to you, which may be from a country across the world, and then to reflect upon what you have in common or what differences you notice. Participant D from Singapore/Brunei further illustrated this idea:

“I think what’s really cool is that you could share stories with someone who is like on the opposite side of the planet from you and you realize that you had like similar childhoods ...like maybe you guys watched the same TV shows, or like you have the same customs, or the same kind of food but you just call it different names...”

Talking about your own country in contrast with other countries can possibly add another layer of cultural self-reflection. Student D also explained that having to answer questions about his own customs, about why they existed or where they originated made him think about those customs in a new way. He said that during a particular FIUTS program a fellow FIUTS

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

participant asked him why a certain tradition in Singapore existed and he explained how he felt by this question: “So it definitely challenges me to sort of think more about my own culture... why we celebrate these kinds of things, that’s never been something I asked myself as a child.” The FIUTS international student participants definitely saw FIUTS programs as a way to personally think about their culture in a way they had not done in the past.

FIUTS staff also shared that they tried to encourage self-reflection throughout their intercultural programs. FIUTS staff Participant 3 said that she is often asking herself and her colleagues, “how do we have them explore culture and identity in a way that’s meaningful?” Many of the international educators shared the same idea, that if you allow students the space to share about the visible aspects of culture – such as food, clothing, and language – you can often start the crucial first conversation that leads to more profound discussions about cultural difference and moves away from the visible to the invisible aspects of culture. FIUTS staff Participant 2 illustrated this idea by explaining:

“You can’t get deeper without that initial stuff, plus people aren’t really that interested in sitting around and having a really deep conversation about the implications of marriage traditions in your home community unless you’ve shown them like a wedding dress and then they ask the question, you know?”

In a private interview Participant C, the Pakistani student, illustrated the idea of visible and invisible aspects of culture by explaining that in his opinion everything about culture was connected, that traditional clothing and weddings spoke deeply to religious traditions. He explained that as soon as he started talking about his daily life to somebody unfamiliar, he realized that he was talking about culture. The international educators all expressed that they

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

believed part of their role was simply starting the conversation for international students. FIUTS staff Participant 2 went on to say:

“...I think the purpose of so many programs is really just to get people talking about *anything* and often times getting people to talk about food and culture and language is a really powerful way to get people talking a little bit deeper.”

International educators design programs in which students are given a platform to confront stereotypes and in which they are prompted to self-reflect. The interviews have shown that international educators consciously design their programs with these objectives in mind. Baxter Magolda and Taylor (2017) claim that one of the ways in which educators assist their students through personal development is by providing challenges and helping students to confront those challenges. When students face the challenge of figuring out how to describe their culture and how to confront stereotypes they are taking crucial steps towards self-authorship and defining for themselves exactly who they are. Using programs is one way in which international educators understand their role in helping international students explore their identity.

Creating the International Student Environment

The International Office

When international educators were asked what they thought their role was in international student identity development they often mentioned the physical space. They deflected their actual role and expressed that they were simply providers of the physical environment that international students need to comfortably and safely discuss culture. Coppi (2007) explained that the international student affairs office is an important space where international students need to be able to come together. Kim's (2012) research of the international student experience illustrates that international students often realize that they have a lot in common with other

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

international students, and that the international student community can be a vital support network. This support network can exist in the international student services office which may serve as a place to convene.

The FIUTS office was mentioned in nearly all of the interviews with both international educators and international students. In one interview, FIUTS staff Participant 3 shared that she often overhears casual conversations about cultural traditions and customs from students who are sitting around the office table eating lunch. She told a story about eating a casserole one day in the FIUTS office and that a bunch of students from all different countries started talking about what their cultural version of the casserole was – what it was called, what it was composed of, how they cooked it, how it was similar or different – and this conversation represented the nature of the FIUTS office and how students are allowed to behave in the space. She explained that FIUTS is, “... the space where cultural norms or language norms are not assumed ... it’s a really good space for students to be able to ask questions that they might not feel comfortable asking in a space where it’s assumed you already know.” Such as, what is a casserole? This may be funny example but it illustrates a very important point, that a space without assumptions is important for the international student community.

In a private interview with Participant E, second-year student from China/Taiwan, she explained that she would not feel comfortable asking a domestic student about aspects of their culture that she found odd or confusing, she said she would not want to seem rude. Instead, she said she would go to the international student community to ask those questions.

During the interviews with international students, they also mentioned the “FIUTS community,” the international and domestic students and staff who are involved with FIUTS. Participant F from China explained, “I think at FIUTS I’ve really grown a sense of community

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

here, like I know if I got trouble there's a place I can go, like people I can count on, and it really feels like home at FIUTS." The international educators at FIUTS explained that they do try and always keep their space open to the international student community, as a place that's safe to come to ask questions. As the one FIUTS staff interviewee put it, "...we say during orientation if you have a question about something, even if it's not something that we do, come to our office and we will try and answer it." She laughed when she was explaining how shocked she was by how many international students take her up on that offer and show up every day with questions about all kinds of things, not even specifically related to culture, but just life.

On a campus of over 40,000 students, it may be hard for students to know which office or department will be there for them. International students hear from day one that FIUTS is the space for them. All of the international students who participated in the focus group agreed that if they were facing an issue related to culture, or language, or even prejudice that they would come to the FIUTS office. As Participant A from Turkey put it, "I feel like they know everything already. I mean it feels like they have been asked those questions already before so they've got the answer."

The international educators expanded on the idea of physical space by saying that how they use the physical space is deliberate. FIUTS staff Participant 2 explained how important she believed it was for international students to share space together. She explained that the space can be important for conversations about cultural identity because all of the international students have aspects of their experience in common. She also shared the sentiment that organic conversation in environments like the FIUTS office can lead to moments of deep cultural identity discovery. She said that she will encourage conversation around difficult issues as a way for students to express themselves. She explained,

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

“We talk a lot about modeling and how we model behavior and conversations that are productive and helpful, and sometimes because we are a small office, and most offices that serve international students tend to be relatively small, we do have big ears, we always say this, we are kind of constantly listening...”

Often the FIUTS staff will hear international students discussing an issue relevant to the international student community and as a response to this, the staff will consciously try and frame a casual conversation in the office around the issue, just to get students talking. FIUTS staff Participant 2 explained, “when there’s an issue that is cultural and challenging we tend to talk about it *a lot*, and in the public space.” This sentiment seemed very important. When there is so much happening in the news and media and international students might be affected by the news differently than their domestic student counterpart, where can they go to discuss? As FIUTS staff Participant 2 explained, if the FIUTS staff is talking about the issue, the international students will know it is ok to talk about the issue too. When it comes to difficult cultural or political issues, the student from Singapore/Brunei said, “FIUTS is a very safe space.”

The International Community

The “FIUTS community” also extends beyond the physical office and the international education staff. The interviews shed light on a trickle-down system of support as well. There are many students who are less connected to the staff at FIUTS but have connected with someone else in the FIUTS community through intercultural programs. For example, the first-year graduate student from Pakistan had participated in the Homestay Program when he first arrived in the US. FIUTS offers short-term homestay options for international students during International Welcome Weeks, which is FIUTS’ two-week International Student Orientation, which they are contracted to implement at the University of Washington.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The Homestay Program is an option for students who would like to stay with a local Seattle family for two-weeks when they first arrive to Washington. Participant C, the Pakistani student, shared that the homestay he participated in upon his arrival to Seattle had been the most memorable experience for him in the US thus far. He bonded deeply with his homestay mother. He explained that they would talk about culture, customs, and traditions for hours every day. They still get together often for dinner or coffee. When asked who he would go to if he were facing a challenging issue related to culture, language or prejudice, Participant C said he would still continue to go to his host mother, even six months after the Homestay Program. Not only did she advise him about US punctuality and common US phrases but he said that she was always asking about his culture too. She told him that now when she watches the news and hears something about Pakistan that she thinks of him and will save up questions to ask him about his country or culture. In the words of Participant C:

“...she always has like new questions about Pakistan. Like she once mentioned that, I never bothered the word Pakistan in the newspapers, whenever it came by, but now as I know you, I’ll always put more attention to Pakistan. Like she mentioned lots of times about Donald Trump talking about Pakistan... she notices and she sees issues as well now, like she asks me lots of questions about conflicts in Pakistan, about minority issues in Pakistan and other stuff you know.”

This example illustrates just how far reaching the “FIUTS community” really can be. One student electing to participate in the FIUTS homestay program prompted a local Seattle woman to connect a human reality to the news she was hearing every day. The connections students make to each other and even beyond campus illustrates the deep impact of cultural exchange.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Another example of this extended international community environment was mentioned by Participant E, the undergraduate student from China/Taiwan. She had just joined the Student Board for the 2017-2018 academic year and said it had been a very impactful experience. When Participant E was asked where she would go with cultural issues, she said she would probably talk to the student leaders from the FIUTS Student Board. She explained that she felt more comfortable talking with people who are closer to her age rather than the FIUTS staff.

Whether it be conversations about casserole in the office or a new student from Pakistan calling up his homestay mom with questions about American culture, the FIUTS environment is clearly very important to the international student community. One FIUTS staff interviewee shared that she believed that one of her most important roles on campus was continuing to advocate for international spaces, “we play a special role on campus... we are always trying to advocate for more space and more time and more protection, especially for brand new students around supporting their development as internationals, alongside supporting their development as UW students...”

When asking about cultural identity development, the *where*, became just as important as the *how*. Students clearly need the physical space and the international community to explore ideas about culture, to have discussions and to ask vital questions. International educators believed that an important part of their role was providing the developmental discovery space.

International Educators as Cultural Interpreters

Much of the research about international student identity development focuses on theories and ideas of international students reaching a point of cultural realization. Kim (2012) presents the idea that as international students adjust to their new culture they have the potential

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

to reach a stage of Internationalization, in which students are aware of and at peace with different aspects of their cultural identity which are directly related to their home-culture and their new culture. Johnson and Sandu (2007) also theorize that international students can ultimately reach a Bicultural identity where they are cognizant of both cultures. In order to understand how international educators may assist students on this journey towards cultural realization, FIUTS staff participants were asked how they understand their personal role beyond programs and physical international space.

In one interview, FIUTS staff Participant 1 coined international educators as “cultural interpreters.” Throughout the interviews with FIUTS staff a theme emerged that one way in which international educators understand their role is by being the professionals on campus who notice culture. All FIUTS staff interviewees claimed that a huge part of their role was helping students understand which issues were based in cultural difference, and then helping them work through that. As FIUTS staff Participant 1 explained it, “... I see my role as trying to pick out those broader themes...to frame it in terms of larger cultural issues, because these are things that students are not necessarily trained to notice.” As international educators, we are trained to notice the cultural miscommunications or cultural issues where others might not see them. She gave an example from one specific FIUTS program, the Pen Pal Program. The program pairs up UW international students with local elementary schoolers to be pen pals. They write back and forth to each other for the duration of a college quarter. At the end of the program, FIUTS invites the elementary school classes up to UW campus to meet their pen pals. FIUTS rents a room in the student union building and the college students and elementary school students can spend the afternoon together as a big group playing games, eating snacks or drawing pictures. At the end of

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

the meet-up day she said that international students were surprised by the behavior of the children,

“...some (international) students were kind of miffed at the sort of wild fifth grader behavior...they were like, kids from my country don't act that way; so having a conversation about why kids in the US might behave in a way that is different than the kids in your home-country and that our education system, and like our culture in general, really prizes individuality and free expression and you see that in how teachers allow the kids to behave in schools, that teachers are relatively not as strict as they are in some of the countries where our students come from.”

She explained that rather than simply allowing an international student to walk away from the program with negative ideas about US schools or thinking the children were being rude, she takes those moments as opportunities to discuss cultural difference. Respect for adults certainly looks different culture to culture, but it may be the international educator's job to point that out. If not, she says, “... we end up doing more harm than good.” It is not easy for people to notice culture who have not been trained to do so. Thus, it must be the international educator's job to bring culture to the forefront of the conversation. The same FIUTS staff member explained,

“A student who's here to do their Master's degree in Chemistry or something probably doesn't have a ton of training in cross cultural communication or understanding things through the lens of cultural difference, and so that's really my job is to help them make those connections.”

International educators are here to help students connect the cultural dots.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Another way in which international educators help students to work through cultural discovery and identity development is through modeling it themselves. Working with international students might prompt international educators to also be working through their own cultural identity. FIUTS staff Participant 3 said that coming to work at FIUTS from the field of student development made her think much more about her own culture. She explained,

“...something I am personally wrestling with, my own personal identity, in that I’m multiracial so I have both Caucasian and Asian heritage... like in the US I’m seen as Asian but by a lot of our students from Asia I’m not necessarily seen as Asian.”

She went on to tell a story in which one day in the FIUTS office she mentioned that she was Japanese which shocked the UW Japanese student who was in the office at the time. FIUTS staff Participant 3 went on to say that moments like this make her think about her own cultural identity. She explained that she purposefully talks about those cultural aspects of herself with the international student community and that she believes it helps them to hear her processing cultural identity for herself too, even as an American. She said that she always participates in FIUTS icebreakers and activities when she is asked to talk about culture and that there is value in modeling cultural self-reflection for students.

FIUTS staff Participant 1 shared the idea of modeling identity reflection by saying, “I see it as kind of important to share my own story.” She said that she tells her own story as an example but also to help international students understand that people are all unique and that we do not all fit inside perfect cultural boxes. She said, “I want to be able to sort of use myself as an example but also use myself as an example of how I’m not the perfect example and that there are lots of other examples too.” As international educators, it is important to be able to recognize our

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

own cultural story and to be able to model speaking from personal experience in order to help our students reach their own version of cultural self-discovery. One way to help students make steps towards identity discovery is for international educators to also do the difficult identity work themselves.

Another trend in responses from international educators was an idea of pushing or encouraging students to think a bit deeper, to go a step further in their self-reflection. Baxter Magolda and Taylor (2017) explain that for students to reach self-authorship, to understand their own identity, educators must provide appropriate challenges for them to do so. Many of the international educators said they actively try and challenge students to think about culture. FIUTS staff Participant 2 explained that she will always try and ask students to think through where certain value systems come from by asking them,

“is that your value as an individual, or is it a cultural value from your home-country? Is this a cultural value of the US? And where is that link between yourself and your own identity, your own values, versus what you bring with you because of your culture, what your culture is sort of expecting you?”

She said that she believes an important role of the international educator is to help students repetitively think through questions about culture. She explained that doing so, will help international students discover a “core self,” or a personal identity. The “core self” she mentioned seems similar to Baxter Magolda’s (2009) theory of self-authorship and students must be challenged to step into the crossroads phase of development where they actively reexamine personal and cultural value systems.

In the interviews with international students they did not describe international educators as “cultural interpreters” such as the international educators described themselves, but Participant

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

C from Pakistan said, “everyone who is attached with FIUTS they are really open, they’re not being conservative or narrow-minded...” The focus group students also described the international educators as “responsive” and “friendly.” But, even if students do not realize that international educators are there to personally help them discover or realize their own cultural identity they do see the organization as a supportive place. Participant B from Ukraine expressed, “whatever you do, whatever you’re interested in, whatever your drive, you’ll always have someone to like ask for support for whatever issue you have.” In the theory of self-authorship, supporting students through their challenges is crucial in order for students to be able to discover their identity (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2017). In that case, it does seem as though the international student population knows that they can receive that support from FIUTS.

Student Leadership Development

When researching international student identity development and exploring student affairs practices the term “student leadership” did not surface much. Surprisingly, student leadership development came up in all interviews with international educators, when asked what they thought their role was in helping students work through cultural identity issues. Part of the reason that FIUTS programs are so successful is directly due to the involvement of student leaders.

FIUTS serves a massive student population, nearly 8,000 of whom are international. The FIUTS full time professional staff is comprised of only six individuals. So, FIUTS recruits and trains hundreds of student facilitators to assist in delivery of events and activities. They also have an active Student Board which runs multiple committees including event planning, marketing and outreach. A crucial step in the training process for both the Student Board members and the

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

FIUTS student facilitators is identity development. As one FIUTS staff interviewee put it, “identity is a really big part of our student leadership competencies.” She explained that since so much of FIUTS programming has to do with culture, it is crucial for the student leaders to be able to recognize their own personal cultural identity in order to lead other students, saying, “I think that in order to understand other peoples’ culture ... part of the process of getting to know other people is that you are learning about your own culture.” If international students are going to help other international students work through issues or transition to life in a new cultural context, then they ought to have thought deeply and worked through aspects of their own cultural transition.

Another international educator interviewee expanded on the idea saying that identity exploration is tied directly to student leadership,

“identity development is kind of implicit in that, you know it’s not really developing their ideas about leadership in general, although that is part of it, but it’s developing their perceptions of themselves as a leader and identifying their own leadership strengths and areas where they need improvement, so identity development is part of that.”

FIUTS staff Participant 2 spoke about student leadership by saying, “a really important element of that is sort of the who are you and what do you care about piece, the formation-of-self piece, and you can’t really divide that conversation from your home culture and your home community.” She went on to explain that in all student leadership training it is important for students to explore who they are and what they care about, but for FIUTS, who works specifically with international students, cultural identity comes naturally to the forefront of that

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

conversation. As an international student, the question of ‘who are you,’ always starts with culture. FIUTS staff Participant 2 explained,

“...it’s hard for students to think about their own identity without thinking about their home-culture until they’re a little bit further along in their leadership journey and then they’re able to sort of reflect a little bit more on what’s different about them now and their sense of self and their formation of values than it was before they left their home-culture.”

While other departments may reach cultural aspects of leadership development later in the process, FIUTS chooses to start with that discussion. Culture is discussed first and then aspects of the whole person are able to come up. Thus, cultural identity development is inherent to FIUTS leadership development. FIUTS student leaders have all been prompted to reflect upon their cultural self in order to lead intercultural programs.

The theme of student leadership also surfaced in the interviews with the international student participants. Participant E, the Chinese undergraduate, is heavily involved in both the Student Board and facilitates many FIUTS events. She explained that as she continued to participate in FIUTS events and explore her own culture alongside cultures of other international students she was able to expand her horizons and understanding of human difference. She said,

“...I’ve met a lot of people at FIUTS and I think that before I got into college I had this mindset of like how you can be happy, but actually getting to FIUTS, getting to know so many people and hear their life story, there’s like multiple various ways you can live your life and there’s no certain way to do that, and I really feel like, like I freed myself basically.”

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Just like Baxter Magolda and Taylor's (2017) theory of self-authorship or Kim's (2012) theory of internationalization, this student was reaching an understanding of self that honors both herself and acknowledges human difference. Becoming a student leader and being asked to consciously self-reflect may very well push students towards personal growth and discovering aspects of their identity they had yet to examine.

Discussion

Conclusions

International educators understand their role in international student identity development in various ways. As the research above illustrates, international educators see themselves as advocates for international space, as the campus individuals who start cultural conversations, as the people who prompt international students to reflect, as the educators who help students see cultural difference where they might not have seen it before, and much more.

International students may see international educators in a different light than international educators see themselves, but they do see them as a support system. Even when international students do not seek out individual international educators for tough issues related to cultural development, they do reach out within the international community. The research also illustrates that international students appreciate the platform provided by intercultural programs as a place to explore their cultural identity and confront stereotypes. International students realize that the international space is safe for them to ask questions while the university lecture halls or other campus spaces might not allow them to feel comfortable enough to do so.

The Role of the International Educator in Understanding International Student Identity Development illustrates how international educators are equipped to help international students understand their personal identity. International educators are able to assist international students

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

through identity development by shedding light on culture first and foremost when other campus professionals may not initially address culture. International educators are trained in cross cultural communication and therefore are the right individuals to start these difficult conversations with international students.

An initial research question left unanswered by the study was regarding how international educators measure their impact in assisting students through identify development; this may be an area for further study. When international educators were asked how they reflect upon their role, most of them explained that they did not do any form of formal self-evaluation. But, all international educators interviewed did claim to at least attempt to keep self-reflection active. This example is illustrated in the *Findings* section above in the discussion of international educators continuing to examine their own cultural identity.

The Role of the International Educator in Understanding International Student Identity Development helps to illustrate exactly how international educators can help the international student population discover their own cultural identity. Baxter Magolda and Taylor (2017) urged educators to create systems of challenges and supports in order to help their students grow into self-authoring adults. International educators can consciously create programs that challenge students to make developmental steps by asking them to self-reflect, tell their own story, and confront stereotypes. International educators can also provide the safe and healthy support international students need to succeed in the journey of self-discovery by providing safe environments, working with them to understand cultural difference, and truly listening to them.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Practical Applicability

International educators who work with international students at the program level will find this research helpful in program design. This research shows the importance of asking international students what they want from intercultural programs. According to the research findings from this study, international students want a platform to talk about their culture and a safe and comfortable place and community to discuss cultural issues. Program developers should keep the needs and desires of international students in mind when developing programs which focus on identity exploration.

This research is also relevant for other campus departments, such as student life or residence services, as a way to understand which moments international students may need to be connected to international educators when facing cultural issues. It is crucial for educators to understand how to help students work through identity development and to be ready and able to help them. Personal growth and identity development is undoubtedly difficult, especially for students in a new culture. But, development happens whether or not educators are watching. Instead of responding when difficult issues have already surfaced, it may be wiser to help students along the way through consciously designed programs and safe spaces for discovery.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research was possibly one of the first to ask international educators how they understand their role in international student identity development. More research should be conducted in order to gain broader ideas of how international educators understand their role in assisting international students through identity development. Further research should also attempt to include a larger participant population. While this research focused on collecting

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

qualitative data from a small population, future research should include quantitative data from larger international student populations. More research from larger data pools would deepen the validity of the research findings. Further research should also attempt to compare data across different universities varied in size and location within the US.

More research of this kind should be conducted in the field of International Education. If international educators continue to ask themselves within the field, what are we doing and how can we do it better? Then international education services for international students will certainly continue to improve.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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