Supporting the Cross-cultural Adaptation of Adolescent International Students in Canada — A Hermeneutic Multiple Case Study

Despite the rapidly increasing number of adolescent international students in Canadian secondary schools, there has been a dearth of research studies on their cross-cultural adaptation in Canada. My study aims to develop a multilateral support model that suggests situated supports to facilitate effective cross-cultural adaptation in adolescent international students.

What inspired you to do your research?
I am a Chinese Canadian immigrant teacher who worked as an international student coordinator in a local high school for three years. Witnessing first-hand the multifaceted challenges the adolescent international students struggled with has instilled in me a strong passion to conduct empirical research to advance the current understanding of these students’ adaptation process and to enhance their transnational learning quality.

What is your research about?
My qualitative case study research aims to investigate adolescent international students’ cross-cultural adaptation experiences and the supports they receive in and outside of school. The central thrust of this study is to develop a multilateral support model that outlines a set of suggestions for educators, parents, host families and agents to provide situated supports to adolescent international students that facilitate effective cross-cultural adaptation. This heuristic support model will be designed to inform decision-making without making any deterministic claims to prescribe what should happen in specific circumstances. My research process will be informed by the following research question: How might parents, host families, agents, and teachers and administrators effectively support the adolescent international students in their cross-cultural adaptation in Alberta high schools? It will also be guided by Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation.

How do you do your research?
I will employ a qualitative multiple case study methodology with a hermeneutics interpretive approach. The primary focus of my research praxis is not to portrait a holistic view of each single case but to understand the phenomenon through them. My data analysis will be guided by Ricoeur’s (1976, 1981) notion of hermeneutic interpretation as the dialectic integration of explanation and understanding and by his conception of “hermeneutic arc” that moves from understanding to explanation and from explanation to understanding. I will start with within-case analysis, then move into cross-case analysis, and then return to individual cases with new understandings, or fusion of horizons. This hermeneutic circle of data analysis continues until harmony is achieved between the details and the whole.

What is the implication of your research?
Scholarly, this study will address the research gap and expand our understanding of adolescent international students’ adaptation experiences in Canadian high schools. Practically, this study will generate a heuristic support model which will be of instrumental value to educators, agents, parents, and host families of adolescent international students in supporting the students’ cross-cultural adaption. It may also enhance the competitiveness of Canada’s K-12 international student program in the global education market, which will bring more social and economic benefits to Canada.