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PERCEPTIONS VERSUS PREFERENCES: ADULT INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENTS' TEACHING-LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN  
AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

presented by

Sandro Pinheiro de Oliveira

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Ph.D. degree in Adult and Continuing  
Education

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**PERCEPTIONS VERSUS PREFERENCES: ADULT INTERNATIONAL**  
**STUDENTS' TEACHING-LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN**  
**AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

By

Sandro Pinheiro de Oliveira

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **PERCEPTIONS VERSUS PREFERENCES: ADULT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' TEACHING-LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

**By**

**Sandro Pinheiro de Oliveira**

**This study assessed international students' perceptions of and preferences for the teaching-learning process in an American university. The study addressed five major questions: (1) How do international students perceive their teaching-learning experiences in an American university? (2) What would international students ideally prefer their teaching-learning experiences to be like? (3) What are the differences between international students' perceived experiences and their preferred conditions of learning? (4) To what extent do international students' perceived experiences reflect what Knowles (1980) advocates as effective adult learning principles? (5) To what extent do international students' preferred experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?**

**Nine Ph.D. international students participated in the study. They represented three regions of the world: Asia, Africa and Latin America. Participants were interviewed individually and were asked to reflect on their teaching-learning experiences in an introductory and advanced Ph.D. course.**

They were also asked to describe what their preferred conditions of learning were. Qualitative methods were used to collect data. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide students' reflections about their teaching-learning experiences and preferred conditions of learning. Knowles' model of andragogy was used to develop both the interview protocol for the study and a theoretical framework to understand the perceived experiences and preferred conditions of learning of these adult learners in an American university.

Data from interviews were analyzed using the qualitative software program NUD\*IST (Richards and Richards, 1994). Three domains were identified as major areas addressed by the students as they spoke about their experiences: role of participation; role of learner's prior experiences; and role of the teacher. Students perceived their experiences with the teaching-learning process to be both positive and negative. Positive and preferred experiences were characterized by the themes of engagement and connectedness, while negative experiences were characterized by disengagement and disconnectedness. International students' positive and preferred experiences with the teaching-learning process were congruent with the andragogical model; the negative experiences were not.

The study provides key recommendations for faculty on how to address the needs of Education Ph.D. international students and how to improve the quality of education for this multicultural population on American University campuses.

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**Sandro Pinheiro de Oliveira**

**1999**

Dedicated to my loving family who endured  
the dissertation journey with me:

Joy, my wife, my love, and best friend,  
and our children who are our gifts from God

Kyle, Elise and Isabel (who went to be with the Lord).

Also dedicated to my parents, Raimundo Queiroz de Oliveira  
and Maria Alice Pinheiro de Oliveira, and my sisters Sueli, Sonia, Selma, Silvia,  
Salete and Samira.

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I also wish to thank the nine international students who were willing to share their experiences with me. I wish them success in their educational endeavors.

I especially want to thank my family for their support, patience and great sacrifice during the writing of the dissertation. I love you all, and I promise to be home for dinner on time.

I want to thank my parents for teaching me the importance of pursuing knowledge through education and for their work and sacrifice in supporting many of my educational endeavors.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study is about nine adult international students' stories of the teaching-learning experiences they have encountered in an American university and the conditions in which they prefer to learn. These students are Ph.D. candidates in the college of education in a major Midwest university, and they represent three regions of the world: Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The study addressed five major questions: (1) How do international students perceive their teaching-learning experiences in an American university? (2) What would international students ideally prefer their teaching-learning experiences to be like? (3) What are the differences between international students' perceived experiences and their preferred conditions of learning? (4) To what extent do international students' perceived experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles? (5) To what extent do international students' preferred experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?

### Background

For the last eleven years I have been an international student in the United States. Like many international students I have experienced culture

shock, language barriers, home sickness, social identity crisis, financial and several other kinds of stresses, difficulty in reading and writing, and finally struggles in adjusting to the United States culture and its university educational system. However, after eleven years I have grown accustomed to school and social life in the U.S.

Being an international student and having had the experience of working with international students for several years at Michigan State University, I am very interested in issues that concern this student population. My work with international students started in 1988 when I began to work as an advisor to international students at Owen Graduate Center - an international residence hall at Michigan State University. My involvement with students grew as I became the Chairperson of the International Student Association of the College of Education (1989, 1990) and as I started attending a Fellowship of Christian Internationals and Friends.

My first attempt to study international students' issues happened in 1991. I decided for a practicum study to look at the factors that influence international students' participation in a university classroom. My goal in the study was to explore how international students interact in the classroom and how their participation is fostered. I learned that some of the barriers for international students' participation were the lack of English language proficiency, the lack of knowledge about the norms of participation, and intimidation by the American students' assertiveness to talk and "jump in" during discussions in class. International students were motivated to talk

when the issues discussed allowed for a comparison with their own country's experiences and when they were invited to speak about their country. This course was an international oriented course and, therefore, there were a lot of opportunities for international students to share about their countries.

Recently, having returned from two and a half years of work abroad, and hearing international students express the problems they are facing at the university, I have again gotten close to the issues that affect the education of international students in American universities. These issues (which seem to include culture, curriculum and instruction, and policies) and my own commitment to international students and the education of adult learners have led me to revisit the topic of graduate international students' education.

My original research interest went beyond the four walls of a classroom. I wanted to explore international students' teaching-learning experiences in an American university, inside and outside of the classroom. By outside of the classroom I meant to explore the role in international students' academic experiences. However, as I will explain in more detail later, this report will only focus on the classroom component of the study, from the perspective of the international students.

### Statement of the Problem

International students' academic needs as learners may have been overlooked by American universities. This has become cause for dissatisfaction and has impacted the academic experience of many

international students. Some universities have recognized or have been advised about their lack of purposeful participation in the education of international students and are now working to improve their efforts to better serve the needs of this multicultural population.

American universities have for many decades opened their doors to receive international students on their campuses. In the school year of 1990/91, the Institute of International Education (IIE) indicated in its "Open Doors 1990/91" annual report (Zikopoulos, 1991) that the number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities had reached an all-time high of 407,529. International students accounted in that year for over 20 percent of all graduate enrollment in the United States (Wan, Chapman, and Biggs, 1992). The total number of international students in higher education has now increased to 453,787 of which 190,092 are graduate students (Davis, 1996).

The presence of international students on American campuses is a financial investment as well as evidence of an effort by universities to internationalize their curriculum, the faculty, and the student body. American universities have acknowledged the importance of giving their American students an education with a global perspective so that they will be prepared to be citizens of the world and will be marketable in the international job market. Wan, Chapman, and Biggs (1992) state that "for the most part, international students are eagerly courted by American institutions because they offer an important diversity of viewpoint to the student body, help offset a declining

American applicant pool, and often come with full funding" (p. 607). Goodwin and Nacht (1983), exploring with faculty and administrators the importance of international students on campus, were told that "interaction with other cultures can change the nature of a student's relations with other people and that Americans must fight their natural geographic and political isolation by the device such as foreign students on their campuses" (p. 1).

By opening their doors to international students, American universities are profiting but are also committing themselves to provide a high quality education for this multicultural population. The question, however, is: How are American universities providing for the educational needs of international students?

Research has shown that American universities have not given enough attention to the needs of international students. Stephen C. Dunnett, of the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs says that "Not only have U.S. institutions of higher education been indifferent to the adjustment problems of international students, they have also given little attention to such problems as the relevancy of American educational programs for the developing world" (Lee, 1981, p. xi). Fasheh (1984) states that the treatment of foreign students by American colleges and universities is in a state of chaos because of ignorance, prejudice, and the absence of planning. Many universities are not ready to receive international students. Goodwin and Nacht (1983) found in their study that several institutions saw themselves inadequately prepared to receive international students: "For them the United States' acceptance of

these foreign students was like inviting guests to your home when you have no guestroom" (p. 2). A report entitled Foreign Students and Institutional Policy:

Toward an Agenda for Action states that

policies in U.S. universities and colleges concerning the admission, education, and social accommodation of foreign students vary from the comprehensive to the nonexistent, and programs, from the carefully designed and well administered to the ad hoc and expedient (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983, p. iii).

It is evident that American universities have a difficult task in trying to accommodate the needs of international students. These students come from diverse cultural, social, political, and educational backgrounds. However, if universities are willing to open their doors for these students and receive benefits from this, they have an ethical responsibility to provide for these students' needs. As Allemeh (1989) states, "This hosting relationship demands responsible services" (p. 15).

#### Purpose of the Study

In order to respond to the academic needs of this multicultural population, American universities need to assess critically the academic experiences of international students on their campuses so that they can understand the challenges, successes, and failures these adult students face during their academic journey in the U.S. This assessment, however, needs to be done from the perspective of the international students.

There has been a fair amount of research on the problems and needs of international students in American colleges and universities campus. Moore

(1965) delineated the following problems faced by foreign students, according to the literature: 1) problems related to proficiency in English; 2) problems caused by differences in the educational system; 3) problems of adjustment to the American culture; 4) problems related to the complexity of the situation in terms of the numbers of adjustments required and the time allowed for making them; 5) problems of legal impediments to study abroad; 6) problems of academic performance; 7) problems of inadequate resources; and 8) problems of social adjustment.

Lee (1981), after extensively reviewing the literature, categorized the needs of international students as follows: 1) academic needs; 2) linguistic needs; 3) other cultural-related needs; 4) interpersonal needs; 5) financial needs; 6) daily-living materialistic needs; 7) post-returning needs.

Though a fair amount of literature has been written on the topic of international students, an in-depth study of the nature of these students' academic experiences, from their point of view, has yet to be explored. In particular, research is needed on international students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process they encounter in American universities. Konyu-Fogel (1993), says that "although international students come to the U. S. primarily for educational purposes, there seems to be a scarcity of research on areas of academic preparation, achievement, studying habits, and learning needs of international students" (p. 14). According to Dunnett (1977), "of the limited number of studies on foreign student academic achievement, there are



none which consider instructional methodologies which might increase foreign students' academic success" (p. 94).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the academic experiences of a selected group of graduate international students in an American university, particularly their experiences with the teaching-learning process. These experiences were interpreted from my theoretical knowledge of adult learners' preferred conditions of learning. My hope was that, through this study, new knowledge about the nature of international students' academic experiences and their preferred conditions of learning would emerge, and with this knowledge, American universities will be able to respond better to the academic needs of international students and consequently demonstrate their commitment to provide quality education for this multicultural population.

This study is not an effort to make statements about how all international students perceive the teaching-learning experience and prefer to learn. It is rather a collection of assertions about how one group of international students perceive the teaching-learning process in an American university and indicate preferences to certain conditions of learning. These assertions emerged from answers students provided about their perceived and ideal teaching-learning experiences to interview questions following from research questions number one and two stated below. The study may also provide important information about the applicability of the andragogical model to international adult learners.

For the purpose of this study, the "Teaching-Learning Process" reflects concepts of the teaching-learning transaction presented in the andragogical

model (Knowles, 1980). It is characterized by all classroom interactions of teacher and students, both formally and informally, both personally or through the means of other types of communication (e.g., the course syllabus, e-mail, feedback on papers and exams, etc.), pertaining to the students' fulfillment of their academic responsibilities for a course and degree program. It includes but is not be limited to the following elements: course organizational structure; classroom climate; instruction; curriculum content; the nature of course assignments; evaluation; and the nature of teacher-student interactions.

### Research Questions

This study addressed the following major and sub questions:

1. How do international students perceive their teaching-learning experiences in an American university? More specifically, what are their perceptions of each of the following aspects of the teaching-learning process:
  - a. the learning climate;
  - b. the roles of the teacher and the learner;
  - c. teacher-learner interaction;
  - d. the instructional approaches;
  - e. the roles of the teacher and learners in the decision-making process of course content and course requirements;
  - f. relationship of course content to educational goals;
  - g. role of learners' prior experiences; and
  - h. evaluation process?

- 2. What do international students ideally prefer their teaching-learning experiences to be like? More specifically, what are their preferences concerning each of the following aspects of the teaching-learning process:**
- a. the learning climate;**
  - b. the roles of the teacher and the learner;**
  - c. teacher-learner interaction;**
  - d. the instructional approaches;**
  - e. the roles of the teacher and learners in the decision-making process of course content and course requirements;**
  - f. relationship of course content to educational goals;**
  - g. role of learners' prior experiences; and**
  - h. evaluation process?**
- 3. What are the differences between international students' perceived experiences (Q.1) and their preferred conditions of learning (Q.2)?**
- 4. To what extent do international students' perceived experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?**
- 5. To what extent do international students' preferred experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?**

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to give the reader an overview of the literature on international students, especially as it relates to their academic problems and needs in American universities, and also to present the adult learning theory (andragogy) which will serve as framework for this study. This will provide a base from which to start an exploration of international students' teaching-learning experiences and from which to understand what has already been studied about international students and their academic needs.

#### International Students in American Universities

International students constitute an important element of the American higher education equation. It has been estimated that over one million students pursue all or part of their education outside of the border of their home countries, and that one-third of these students pursue it in the United States (Haigh, 1994).

The increasing number of international students pursuing higher education in the United States dates back from after World War II. In 1954/55 there were 34,232 international students in the United States. By 1990/91 the number had reached 407,529, according to the Institute of International

Education's Open Doors annual report (Zikopoulos, 1991). According to the last census done by IIE, in the 1995/96 academic year, the population of international students on American colleges and universities was reported to have increased to 453,787 (Davis, 1996). From this total, 190,590 international students were enrolled in graduate studies. This represents 10.1% of the total graduate enrollment in the United States. (Davis, 1996).

The IIE (Davis, 1996) has reported that International students in the United States today represent all seven world regions and they originate from over 186 countries. The leading region from which international students come is Asia with 259,893. The leading countries are Japan (45,531), China (39,613), Korea (36,231), Taiwan (32,702), and India (31,743). The American states with the highest population of international students are California (55,799), New York (47,987), Texas (27,883), Massachusetts (25,739), and Illinois (19,408).

The institutions with the most international students are Boston University (4,532), New York University (4,242), University of Southern California (4,048), University of Wisconsin-Madison (3,935), and Ohio State University (3,818).

The major fields of study in which international students were enrolled in 1995/96 were Business & Management (92,632), which represented 20.4% of the total international students enrollment; and Engineering (72,410), which represented 16.0%. Education was ranked 10th in enrollment of international

students (13,200). This represented 3.0% of the total international students' enrollment.

As it has been presented above, the number of international students pursuing higher education in the United States has increased significantly in the last decades. Their number reached close to half a million in 1994. American colleges and universities are eager to receive and serve these students because their presence on campus is both a resource for internationalizing the campuses as well as a source of funds for these institutions. International students on campuses provide American students with the opportunity to be exposed to different cultural values, which will be helpful for them to understand if they want to be competitive beyond the U.S. borders. In regard to the financial aspect, Haigh (1994) states that in 1993, international students contributed \$6.8 billion to the U.S. economy (a 10% increase over 1992). This has an even greater significance to the U.S. economy because almost three-quarters (73%) of international students receive their funding from sources outside the United States. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of all foreign students receive their funding from personal or family funds (Davis, 1994).

With the international students' presence on campus, however, there is an ethical responsibility on the part of the host institution to provide quality education for this multicultural population. It is, therefore, important to explore the nature of these students' academic (teaching-learning) experiences to understand their academic challenges, successes, and failures so that

colleges and universities can adequately respond to the needs of these adult learners.

### Adjustment Problems Faced by International Students

Two major themes emerge in the literature on international students' experiences in American universities: adjustment, and needs and problems (Lee, 1981). When international students come to this country for higher education, they enter both a new academic culture as well as the culture of the hosting society. In the process of accomplishing their educational objectives, they are expected to adjust to the customs, ideology, and educational practices of the host country that are often quite different from what they were used to in their home country (Konyu-Fogel, 1993). This forces them to go through a process of adaptation or adjustment to their new living environment and this adjustment or the lack thereof has a great impact in their education.

Henderson, Milhouse & Cao (1993), say that this adjustment phenomenon, or culture shock, occurs because individuals lack adequate points of reference or familiar social norms and rules to guide their actions. This causes them to act as though they are normless and powerless in a new cultural environment.

Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) state that although many international students complete their studies without apparent difficulty, many others experience significant problems in adjusting to life in the United States. These problems include difficulty with English language proficiency, insufficient financial resources, social integration, problems in daily life tasks,

homesickness, and role conflicts. Oberg (1960) suggests that it is very common for individuals traveling to a culture that is not their own to experience what he calls "culture shock." He says that, in the process of adjustment, individuals go through four stages of adaptation: (1) the "honeymoon" stage of fascination with novelty, (2) a hostile and aggressive reaction, (3) the beginning of adjustment, and (4) acceptance of the customs of the host country. These stages of adjustment are also true in the process of international students' adjustment. Having been an international students in two countries (U.S. and Costa Rica), I can remember well going through these phases of adjustment. One goes through both a social adjustment as well as an academic adjustment.

Henderson, Milhouse & Cao (1993) analyzed Chinese students' culture shock and learned that the honeymoon stage was the shortest for the students in their study; it varied from one week to a month. They stated that "as soon as the students found themselves confronted with practical problems such as finding a suitable apartment, arranging for transportation, and most of all, coping with the university's academic demands, their elation and optimism subsided" (1993, p. 382). The second stage they found was the longest and most painful for the students. It lasted from two to three months. The students in this stage exhibited varying degrees of the following symptoms: anxiety, irritability, excessive concern with health, distrust and hostility toward members of the new culture, heightened positive evaluation of home culture, feeling of loneliness, hopelessness, frustration, depression, fear, withdrawal from the



host culture, rigidity, lowered work performance, and a longing to return home. After familiarizing themselves with the new environment, the students arrived at the third and fourth stages. They did so by making efforts to increase their language skills, making new friends, getting accustomed to the education system, and becoming familiar with the different costumes (Henderson, Milhouse & Cao, 1993).

International students' adjustment to the United States has been looked at a predictor for successful academic performance, academic program completion, and satisfaction with the American experience. According to DuBois (1959), when international students are able to make a successful adaptation to life and study in the United States, their chances for attaining their academic goals are maximized. She also says that when international students are able to obtain the degree and the academic training they come for, their attitudes toward the host country tend to be much more favorable. Some research also reports that the greater the differences between the educational system of the subjects' home country relative to the U. S., the more academic adjustment difficulties are experienced by international students (DuBois, 1959; Hull, 1978). Other researchers report that length of time enrolled at the university has an effect on the academic adjustment difficulties of international students (Spaulding & Flack, 1976).

## Adult Learning Theory - Andragogy

In order to understand the academic (teaching-learning) experiences of adult international students in an American university, I chose to look at these experiences through the lens of adult learning theory, particularly the andragogical model developed by Knowles (1980).

The andragogical model is based in four assumptions about the adult learner: (1) self-concept of the learner; (2) role of learner's experience; (3) readiness to learn; and (4) orientation to learning. Knowles (1980) explains that

as individuals mature 1) their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being; 2) they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning; 3) their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and 4) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness. (p. 45)

Knowles (1980) says that these assumptions have direct implications for practice. They have an influence on the learning climate; the planning process; the implementation of the learning activities; and the evaluation of learning.

The learning climate needs to be characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, cooperation, freedom of expression, and acceptance of diverse point of views. Knowles (1980) states that creating a conducive climate for learning is an essential concept to take into consideration when planning and implementing learning activities for adults. The teacher has the

responsibility to set the tone for the learning environment. He/she needs to provide a stage in the classroom where learners feel free to dialogue and create knowledge. This happens by the teacher being open and clear about expectations and objectives for learning and also making sure that the room where the activity is taking place has enough space for the learners, has good ventilation and lighting, and allows the learners to sit in an arrangement that is conducive to interaction (preferably, no person sitting behind another person). Likewise, by setting a psychological climate where adults are respected and their experiences are valued, they cooperate in the learning journey instead of competing, and they can express their feelings and ideas without feeling intimidated and rejected.

Knowles (1980) emphasizes that the learner should not be just a passive receiver of directions or information but that he/she should have an active role in the whole teaching-learning process. He/she should be involved in the planning and implementation as well as the evaluation of their own progress. Learners should be actively involved with the teacher in assessing their own needs as well as in creating objectives for their learning. They should also be able to plan with the teacher what they would like to learn as well as how they would like to learn it. The learning activities should be developed in a way that the learners take an active role in the learning process, and the evaluation process should allow for the learners to assess their own progress toward their goals. For these things to happen, it is essential that the

teacher creates an organizational structure and makes use of instructional approaches that encourage such active participation on the part of the learner.

Based on the four assumptions presented above, Knowles (1980) has asserted that certain conditions are more conducive for adults to learn, and that these conditions are established when the teacher applies a set of learning principles to the teaching-learning process (transaction). The following are the conditions of learning and principles of teaching presented in the andragogical model (Knowles, 1980, p. 57):

### **Conditions of Learning**

The learners feel a need to learn.

The learning environment is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences.

### **Principles of Teaching**

1. The teacher exposes the learners to new possibilities for self-fulfillment.
2. The teacher helps the learners clarify their own aspirations for improved behavior.
3. The teacher helps the learners diagnose the gap between their aspirations and their present level of performance.
4. The teacher helps the learners identify the life problems they experience because of the gaps in their personal equipment.
5. The teacher provides physical conditions that are comfortable and conducive to interaction (preferably, no person sitting behind another person).
6. The teacher accepts the learners as persons of worth and respects their feelings and ideas.
7. The teacher seeks to build relationships of mutual trust and helpfulness among the learners by encouraging cooperative activities and refraining from inducing competitiveness and judgmentalness.
8. The teacher exposes his/her own feelings and contributes resources as a co-learner in the spirit of mutual inquiry

## **Conditions of Learning**

The learners perceive the goals of a learning experience to be their goals.

The learners accept a share of the responsibility for planning and operating a learning experience, and therefore have a feeling of commitment toward it.

The learners participate actively in the learning process.

The learning process is related to and makes use of the experience of the learners.

The learners have a sense of progress toward their goals.

## **Principles of Teaching**

9. The teacher involves the learners in a mutual process of formulating learning objectives in which the needs of the learners of the institution, of the teacher, of the subject matter, and of the society are taken into account

10. The teacher shares his/her thinking about options available in the designing of learning experiences and the selection of materials and methods and involves the learners in deciding among these options jointly

11. The teacher helps the learners to organize themselves (projects groups, learning-teaching teams, independent study, etc.) to share responsibility in the process of mutual inquiry.

12. The teacher helps the learners exploit their own experiences as resources for learning through the use of such techniques as discussion, role playing, case methods, etc.

13. The teacher gears the presentation of his or her own resources to the levels of experience of particular learners.

14. The teacher helps the learners to apply new learnings to their experience, and thus to make the learning more meaningful and integrated.

15. The teacher involves the learners in developing mutually acceptable criteria and methods for measuring progress toward the learning objectives.

16. The teacher helps the learners develop and apply procedures for self-evaluation according to these criteria

Taking into consideration the assumptions of andragogy and the practical implications suggested by Knowles (1980), this research focused on the following aspects of the teaching-learning process: 1) learning climate; 2) the roles of the teacher and the learner; 3) teacher-learner interactions; 4) instructional approaches used by the teacher; 5) the planning of the learning activity; 6) the relevancy of the content chosen for the learning activities as related to learners' educational goals; 7) the role of learner's experience in the teaching-learning process; and 8) evaluation.

How does Knowles perceive these aspects in the andragogical model? Knowles (1980) does not discuss each one of these aspects in detail in his model. However, by reading Knowles, one is able to see the essentials of his views on each one of them.

### Learning Climate

The learning climate has been addressed above. Knowles (1980) believes that the learning climate needs to be such that learners feel a sense of trust and respect, and freedom to express their feelings and ideas.

### Roles of Teacher and Learner

The roles of the teacher and the learner are not difficult to identify, because Knowles (1980) is very explicit about his beliefs concerning the roles of teacher and the learner in the teaching-learning transaction. The teacher is seen as a facilitator of learning, a motivator, a resource person, and a guide for

learners in their process of becoming more self-directed. He/she also provides leadership in creating an organizational structure that allows for learners' participation in the planning process, as well as creating a positive and supportive climate for learning. The learner is called to be active, instead of passive, and to be willing to take responsibilities in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the learning process.

### The Nature of Teacher-Learner Interactions

The teacher-learner interaction is one characterized by mutual trust and respect. The teacher respects the views, the aspirations, and the goals of the learners and attempts to guide them toward the achievement of their goals. The teacher is also a co-learner in the process of inquiry. Though he is the expert in the room, he/she also sees himself/herself as a lifelong learner.

### Instructional Approaches

The instructional approaches should encourage the active participation of the learners in the process of mutual inquiry. They should also provide for cooperation among learners so that knowledge and resources can be shared among the learners and between learners and teacher (project groups, learning-teaching teams, independent studies, etc.).

### Planning/Decision-Making

In regard to the planning/decision-making process, the learner should play an active role together with the teacher in developing the objectives for learning as well as selecting materials and methods for the learning activities. The teacher still provides leadership for the group but allows for shared decision-making.

### Role of Learner's Experiences

The role of the learner's experiences and the relevancy of the content chosen for a learning activity go hand-in-hand. Knowles (1980) notes that the adult learner comes to the learning activity with a growing reservoir of experiences. These experiences should be used as resources for learning. They need to be tackled in a way that the learner is able to exploit past and present experiences and connect them with new knowledge. The content for learning should be oriented to meet the learning needs of the participants. It should also relate to learners' past and present experiences, and future goals.

### Evaluation

Finally, Knowles (1980) supports the notion of learner self-evaluation. He says that the teacher should help the learner to develop and apply mutually acceptable criteria and methods for measuring progress toward the learning objectives. The learners should be able to have a sense of how they are progressing toward their goals.



### Summary of Literature Review

An increasingly number of international students is pursuing higher education degrees in the United States. The presence of these students on American campuses is an effort of universities to internationalize their curriculum, the faculty, and the student body. By opening their doors to international students American universities are profiting but are also committing themselves to provide quality education for this multicultural population. Research has shown that many universities lack planning and preparation to receive these students. Assessment of international students' academic experiences is essential in order for American universities to understand these students' challenges and plan for educational activities that will help them to meet their educational goals. A fair amount of research has been done on the problem and needs international students encounter in American university campus. However, an in-depth study of the academic experiences, particularly the teaching-learning experiences, of these students, from their perspective is yet to be explored. Thus, this study was designed to explore the academic experiences of a selected group of international students, more specifically, their experiences with the teaching-learning process. Since international students are adult learners, the andragogical model seemed fitting, and was chosen as a framework to guide the assessment of these students' teaching-learning experiences in an American university.

## Chapter 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Conceptual Perspectives

To develop the conceptual perspectives for this study I drew from Adult Learning Theory, specifically from Knowles' Andragogical Model (Knowles, 1980). The andragogical model served as a guide for identifying specific aspects of the teaching-learning process explored in this research under question numbers one and two.

Before I start to explain the framework for this study, it is necessary that some terms be defined. First of all, central to this study is my concern with the quality of the education international students receive in American universities. This has led me to seek to understand the nature of these students' academic experiences in American universities. In this study, I particularly would like to explore their teaching-learning experiences.

#### Academic Experiences

What is an "academic experience?" Tinto (1987) says that colleges are made up of both academic and social systems and that during the students' experiences in the institution they interact with both of these systems. The academic system (academic performance and faculty/staff interactions)

concerns itself with the academic affairs of the college, that is, with the formal education of students. "Its activities center about the classroom and laboratories of the institution and involve various faculty and staff whose primary responsibility is to attend to the training of students" (Tinto, 1987, p. 106). The social system (extracurricular activities and peer-group interactions) concerns itself with the daily life and personal needs of students, faculty, and staff.

For the purpose of this study, "academic experiences" should be understood as pertaining to what Tinto (1987) refers to as the Academic System -- that is, those issues of an academic nature in the whole university/institutional experience. Moreover, academic experiences should be understood as the set of activities graduate students are engaged in during their academic journey which are directly related to the achievement of their degree (e.g., taking courses, planning the course program with an advisor, selecting an advisor and a guiding committee, attending classes, accomplishing course requirements, discussing course work and assignments with faculty, participating in the classroom, writing papers, taking exams, studying alone and/or with a study group, using the library for research purposes, using computers for research and for course assignment, taking comprehensive exams, writing the dissertation, etc.).

## Teaching-Learning Process

An important subset of the academic experience is the “Teaching-Learning Process.” As has been explained above, a student's academic experience is composed of several elements that form the university academic system. The teaching-learning process is one of the centerpieces of this academic system. Students come to a university to learn; and teachers are at the university to guide and to help students in the process of acquiring desired knowledge.

The teaching-learning process is an element that is intrinsically related to the formal education of students. Knowles (1980) regards the teaching-learning process (or transaction) as both the planning and implementation of learning activities. He says that the teacher needs to establish, through the application of teaching principles, conditions that are conducive for adult learning. That includes a number of elements one needs to take into consideration when planning learning activities for adult learners:

1. The establishment of a climate conducive to adult learning;
2. The creation of an organizational structure for participative planning;
3. The diagnosis of needs for learning;
4. The formulation of directions of learning (objectives);
5. The development of design of activities;
6. The operation of the activities;
7. The rediagnosis of needs for learning (evaluation).

(Knowles, 1980, p. 59)

For the purpose of this study, the “teaching-learning process” reflects Knowles' (1980) concepts of the teaching-learning transaction. It is defined as classroom and non-classroom interactions of teacher and students, both formally and informally, both personally or through the means of other types of

communication (e.g., the course syllabus, e-mail, feedback on papers and exams, etc.), pertaining to the students' fulfillment of their academic responsibilities for a course and degree program. It should include but not be limited to the following aspects: learning climate; roles of teacher and learner; nature of teacher-learner interactions; instructional approaches; course organizational structure (planning/decision-making); content relevancy; role of learners' prior experiences; and evaluation.

The overall framework from which I conducted this exploration of international students' teaching-learning experiences is portrayed in the grid in Table 1. The grid highlights, on the top, the eight aspects of the teaching-learning process embedded in Knowles' (1980) model. These aspects were explored in three settings (introductory class, advanced class, and advising) where international students experience teaching-learning transactions. Although the study began by including advising (as shown in Table 1), as the study progressed, I focused specifically on the classroom component of the teaching-learning process and not on advising, since it occurs outside of the classroom environment. Therefore, results about advising setting will not be included in this dissertation.

Table 1

Aspects of the Teaching-Learning Process

<b>Settings</b>	<b>Learning Climate</b>	<b>Roles of Teacher &amp; Learner</b>	<b>Teacher &amp; Learner Interactions</b>	<b>Instructional Approaches</b>
Introductory Course	X	X	X	X
Advanced Course	X	X	X	X
Advising	X	X	X	X

<b>Settings</b>	<b>Planning/ Decision Making</b>	<b>Content Relevancy</b>	<b>Role of Learner's Experiences</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Introductory Course	X	X	X	X
Advanced Course	X	X	X	X
Advising	X	X	X	

In order to understand international students' teaching-learning experiences, three settings were selected for the study (introductory class, advanced class, and advising). These settings provided a context from which international students were able to reflect on their perceived and preferred teaching-learning experiences. These settings were chosen for the following reasons; first, because they are an intrinsic part of students' academic experience. All graduate students take introductory classes, advanced classes, and all have an advisor. They cannot graduate without being involved in these settings and activities. Secondly, by having international students reflect on an introductory class, advanced class, and advising, I was able to gather data about these students' first encounters with the American university culture, acquire knowledge about the relevancy of their major courses to their educational goals, and finally, I was able to learn about the relationship between adviser and advisee. As the study concluded, however I chose not to report on this aspect of their experience.

### Research Site and Sample

#### The Setting and Participants

This study was designed to provide a description of international students' academic experiences in an American university. More specifically it focused on international students' teaching-learning experiences in the American classroom. The sample for the study was composed of nine education Ph.D. international students. These students were at least in the

second year of their Ph.D. program. They represented three regions of the world: Africa, Latin America, and Asia. They were adult students who had held professional jobs and who were planning to return to their home country after completion of their Ph.D. studies. They all had professional backgrounds in the field of education; three were professors, one was an assistant professor, two were teachers, one worked for the government in the department of education, one was an educational coordinator for a NGO, and one was an education district supervisor. Table 2 provides an overview of the background information on the participants. The setting of the study was the College of Education at Midwest University (pseudonym). All participants were pursuing a Ph.D. in the Department of Teacher Education.

In order to select the nine participants for the study, I first contacted all international students in the college via e-mail. The majority of international students in this college are subscribed to an electronic list and this seemed to be an appropriate avenue to reach them. The message which was sent to the students advertised the study and asked for volunteers to participate or not in the study.



**Table 2**

**Background Information on Participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Year in Ph.D.</b>
Student 1	Africa	Female	4th
Student 2	Africa	Male	3rd
Student 3	Africa	Male	2nd
Student 4	Asia	Female	2nd
Student 5	Asia	Female	4th
Student 6	Asia	Male	2nd
Student 7	Latin America	Female	4th
Student 8	Latin America	Female	4th
Student 9	Latin America	Male	2nd

In this message, I also asked demographic and criteria-based questions (i.e., information based on some of the criteria described below) about the students so that I would be able to screen the group and select the sample for the study. The message was sent to the list three times in a period of three months to insure that students who may not check their e-mail regularly would have a chance to read and reply to it. Recruitment was also done via personal phone calls to international students who were recommended by other participants. Nine international students (three from Asia, three from Africa, and three from Latin America) were selected and agreed to participate in the study.

## Selection Criteria

In order to select the sample for this study, I developed several attributes and criteria. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) suggest that “criteria-based selection requires that the researcher establish in advance a set of criteria or a list of attributes that the units for study must possess” (p. 69). These attributes or criteria which later will characterize the group or setting for the study should emerge from the researcher’s problem and questions and from relevant empirical and theoretical influences (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993).

Following the above suggestion for purposefully selecting the participants for the study, I established the following attributes and criteria: international students from three regions of the world (Africa, Asia, and Latin America); international Ph.D. students in the second year of their program or beyond; adults who have had professional roles in their home country; international students who plan to return to their home country.

One of the reasons for selecting students from three different regions of the world was to provide for some diverse representation of international students in the population to be studied. Also, another reason was to provide for the possibility for a variety of perspectives about the teaching-learning process to emerge from the data reported by students from different cultures. Though it was not my goal to compare students’ views by their region of origin, especially because the majority of them (7) were from different countries, I was attentive to possible emerging differences. To further diversify the sample and to provide for the opportunity of diverse perspectives in this study, I was able to

**select two males and one female or two females and one male from each of these three regions of the world.**

**The choice of the 3 regions (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) emerged in part from my knowledge of the site and the population being considered for the study. Asian students are the largest population of international students in American universities (Davis, 1996) and also at the college considered in this study. This made this group a significant population to include in the study.**

**African students also were represented in large number in this college. They constituted the second largest population of international students in the college and for this reason were selected for the study. And finally, Latin American students, though not largely represented in the college, constitute a group that is of great interest to me because I myself am from Latin America and was curious to find out how students from my side of the world perceive their experience with the teaching-learning process in an American university.**

**The reason for choosing international students from a College of Education was based in my assumption that these students would be able to assess the teaching-learning process with a much more critical perspective than would, for instance, students from such colleges as business, medicine, or engineering, because the teaching-learning process is, in fact, a main subject in these students' studies. Therefore, one would expect more reflective insight about their teaching-learning experiences in the university.**

**The reason for selecting Ph.D. students was based on my assumption that these students are mature adults. They are engaged in an educational**

process with clear as goals in mind, and thus they would be probably more critical of and thoughtful about the education they receive at the university. By being in a Ph.D. program in the second year or beyond, international students would have had at least one year of experience with the academic system and therefore would be able to provide insightful stories about their experiences with the teaching-learning process in the university.

I also included in the population international students who had had adult professional roles in their home country. This population represented responsible and independent adults who had taken major responsibilities in their home country and now were back in the classroom as students. The importance of having this characteristic in the population was to ensure that the students studied were indeed "adults," not only because they had attained the legal and chronological status of adulthood but also because of the adult roles they exercised in life.

In order further to screen the sample, I chose from the population adult international students who were exercising professional roles in the field of education in their home country prior to coming to the university to pursue their Ph.D. degree. By professional roles in education, I mean those who had worked as teacher, professor or educational administrator in a school, university, or government department of education. Four of the participants had university positions ranking from instructor to professor. Two others worked for government educational organizations where they had training, administration, and supervision responsibilities. Two worked as teachers and one worked for

a non-profit organization as a educational training coordinator. This attribute provided for a sample of international students who were more in tune with educational issues and therefore more aware and more critical of the educational process they were experiencing in the United States.

The reason for selecting international students who had plans to return to their home country was because I assumed that these students would be more sensitive to the educational process and its relevancy to the work with which they would be involved when they return to their country. Therefore, I expected them to be more reflective of the teaching-learning process as it relates to the needs of their country and working context.

Thus the sample consisted of nine education Ph.D. international students from three regions of the world (Africa, Asia, and Latin America). Three students from Africa (2 males and 1 female); three from Asia (2 females and 1 male); and three from Latin America (2 females and 1 male). They were adult students who had held professional jobs and who were planning to return to their home country after completion of their Ph.D. studies. They all had professional backgrounds in the field of education; three were professors, one was an assistant professor, two were teachers, one worked for the government in the department of education, one was an educational coordinator for a NGO, and one was an education district supervisor.

### Data Collection

In order to elicit international students' perceptions and sharing of their teaching-learning experiences and preferred conditions of learning as adult learners, I used qualitative methods of inquiry to collect and analyze the data. Creswell (1994) states that one of the main reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory: not much has been written about the topic or population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to informants and to build a picture based on their ideas. Merriam (1988) also says that the use of these methods is essential for studies that focus on insight, discovery, and interpretation. Therefore, these methods were very fitting to the exploratory nature of this study.

In order to gain a more in-depth perspective of international students' teaching-learning experiences, data for this study were gathered through the method of semi-structured interviews. According to Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), interviews are intended to gather descriptive data in the participant's own words. Through this method I hoped to give these students an opportunity to reflect on and articulate their perceptions and beliefs about their academic experiences.

The nine international students selected to participate in the study were asked to reflect on their academic experience in an American university, particularly as it relates to the teaching-learning process. The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol developed by the researcher which focused on eight aspects of the teaching-learning process: (1) the learning

climate; (2) the role of the teacher and the learner; (3) teacher and learner interactions; (4) the instructional approaches; (5) the decision making process; (6) the relevancy of content to students educational goals; (7) the role of learner's experiences; and (8) evaluation. The interviews also concentrated on three different sites: introductory course, advanced course, and advising.

Three individual, one and a half hour interviews were conducted with each participant to make sure that sufficient and relevant data were collected. Some interviews took place in the participants' homes, others in classrooms at the university, and others in my office. All interviews (27) were tape recorded (with the consent of the participants) and transcribed. I personally transcribed 10 of the 27 tapes and the rest were transcribed by an experienced transcriber who had done substantial transcription for international medical residents. This was an important characteristic for the transcriber for this study because all participants in the study spoke English as a second language. After the transcriptions were done, I listened to the 27 tapes individually to make corrections on transcripts in which I found errors. These procedures are some of the steps I took to establish credibility to the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

During my first interview with each participant, I asked them to reflect on an introductory course they took when they first arrived at the university. I asked participants that if they had taken the course called proseminar, which is an introductory course in their Ph.D. program, to please reflect on that course; however if they would like to talk about other introductory courses, they were welcome to do so.

Since the nine participants had taken a proseminar course in their first term in the program, they all discussed their experience in that course. Participants did not all take the course at the same time or with the same professors; however, from some of their discussions about the course, two or three may have taken the course at the same time and with the same professors. Three participants (Student 8, Student 4, and Student 7) out of the nine decided to talk about another course they took at the beginning of their program, as well as the proseminar. The general experience of the majority of the participants (6) with the proseminar was negative. Three participants were partially satisfied with their proseminar experiences. Student 8, though reporting that the course was a positive experience, also shared lots of difficulties and dislikes about the course. Student 3 liked the seminar approach but also identified limitations of the course. Student 4 enjoyed the course because it provided a comparison between her home country and the U.S. educational system.

For the advanced course, I suggested that participants choose a course that was part of their degree program and a mandatory course. Though the selection of the courses varied among the participants, one theme was common in their selection; the nine students decided to talk about a course they were proud of (because the quality and effectiveness of the course) and in which they had a good to excellent experience with the teaching-learning process. One of the students (4) chose to talk about a course that she found to



be difficult but at the same time one in which she liked the teacher's approach to teaching.

For the advising setting, students were asked to reflect on their experiences with their advisor. Some decided to talk about both their formal (official) and informal (more like a mentor) advisor.

### Interview Protocol

In order to understand the academic experiences of international students, all participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with the teaching-learning process in the university. They responded to protocol questions that addressed eight aspects of the teaching-learning process. Though the protocol served as a guide to the interviews, I often followed the questions with probing remarks which allowed me to get more in-depth information on the experiences the students were sharing. I also encouraged participants to tell their stories about their academic experiences.

The questions below in set #1 were asked to the participants in regard to the teaching-learning process they had encountered in an introductory course and advanced course. For the introductory course, participants were asked to focus on their experiences with the pro-seminar course offered in the college in their respective department. If participants had not taken this course in the first semester of their program, they were asked to focus on another course they had taken in their first semester at the university. For the advanced

course, participants were asked to focus on a course they had taken in their major. The course had to be a mandatory course in their program.

**Questions: Set #1 (Perceived teaching-learning experiences)**

1. What did the classroom learning climate look like? Informal? Formal? Interactive? Motivating? Inclusive?
1. What were the roles of the teacher and the learner? What were their tasks and functions?
3. How did the teacher and learners interact?
4. What kinds of instructional approaches were used? Were they effective in helping you to learn?
5. What were the roles of the teacher and learners in the decision making process of course content and course requirements?
6. How relevant were course content and course requirements in helping you to achieve your educational goals?
7. What role did your personal, professional, and previous educational experiences play in the teaching-learning process? Were they included in the teaching-learning process?
8. What kind of evaluation approaches were used to assess your progress toward the achievement of your educational goals? Who evaluated you?

In the questions under set #2, students were asked to reflect on their ideal teaching-learning experiences in both the introductory and advanced course.

**Questions: Set #2 (Preferred teaching-learning experiences)**

1. What would you prefer the classroom learning climate to be like?
2. What roles should teacher and learners have in the teaching-learning process?
3. How should teacher and learners interact?

4. What kinds of instructional approaches would be more effective for your learning?
5. What do you believe should be the role of the teacher and the learner in the decision making process of course content and course requirements?
6. What should course content and course requirements look like? What would make course content and course requirements relevant to your educational goals?
7. What role should your experiences play in the teaching-learning process?
8. How should learners be evaluated?

Similar questions on the teaching-learning process were also asked in the advising setting. Participants were asked about their perceived and preferred experiences with academic advisors.

### Data Analysis

The data collected from the 27 taped interviews were transcribed into Word documents and later imported into a data analysis software program called QSR NUD\*IST (Richards & Richards, 1994). NUD\*IST was created to assist researchers with the recording, management, and analysis of the large amount of descriptive data produced in a qualitative study. Reports from the transcribed interviews were printed and each interview was read in its entirety. I first read all the interviews regarding the introductory course, then the advanced course, and finally the advising. A short memo was written for each interview. As I read the data, I began to make annotations about what the students said about their perceived and preferred experiences with the teaching-learning

process. I also began to highlight significant statements students were making and to designate an initial code for them. As I went through this process, I soon began to realize that the students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process could be labeled as positive, negative, or preferred. So it became apparent that it would be of value to start coding students' statements under these headings. For instance, I coded statements about the "learning climate" under positive learning climate, negative learning climate, and preferred learning climate. I repeated the same task for the other eight elements of the teaching-learning transaction.

Using NUD\*IST, I was able to code the data electronically by creating nodes (spaces/files where one can place coded text/data) and filing significant statements (text) and memos under these nodes. The initial nodes were created based on the study's conceptual framework (that is, the eight aspects of the teaching-learning transaction) and the headings described above which emerged from the first round of data analysis. Other "free nodes," or free categories, were created both as I read the data for the first time and after I began to read the reports on the positive, negative and preferred nodes. Thus the free nodes were the products of two rounds of data analysis. These nodes were unique ideas and categories emerging from the data which I anticipated becoming important as I tried to describe the participants' teaching-learning experiences. Examples of free nodes are: reading, background-guidance, culture differences, grades, silent teacher, constructivism, participation, role of learner's prior experiences, quality of discussion, etc.

Once all the above steps had been taken, further analysis was conducted with the data about classroom experience. This resulted in identifying the three domains (role of participation, role of learners' prior experiences, and role of teacher, that are the basis for this study's findings as referred in chapter 4. Similar analysis was done with the advising data, which will be reported in another study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS**

**This chapter focuses on aspects of the teaching-learning process encountered by international students as they journeyed through their Ph.D. program. In particular, I explored their perceptions of the teaching-learning process in the university, as well as their preferred conditions of learning.**

**International students' accounts of their perceived experiences fell distinctly under two categories, which I have labeled as positive (or effective) and negative (or ineffective) experiences with the teaching-learning process. Students made clear distinctions about what was effective and what was negative about their experiences. Overall, they were very open about expressing their dislikes of certain experiences and very enthusiastic about sharing those experiences that made them feel good about being a student/learner in the Ph.D. program. What you will read in the following pages is my attempt to put into writing the voices of these nine international students, in a collective but also individual voice, about their struggles and successes with the teaching-learning process in an American university.**

**In order to emphasis some of the points I intend to illustrate about these international students' experiences, I have provided excerpts from the interviews with the participants. In some of these excerpts I have put part of the**

text in bold to call the readers' attention to the important statements made by the students which further emphasize these points. I would like to alert the readers that in order to preserve participants' voices, I have chosen to present the excerpts from the interviews as they were spoken by the international students. Since these students do not speak English as a first language the readers may encounter variances of the English dialect in the excerpts.

### **How do international students perceive their teaching-learning experiences?**

Three major categories emerged as the overarching domains related to these students' teaching-learning experiences in an American university classroom. They are the following: 1) the role of participation; 2) the role of learners' prior experiences; 3) and the role of the teacher. These domains were identified from interview #1 (introductory course) and interview #3 (advanced course), both of which focused on the in-classroom teaching-learning transaction. As students spoke about their teaching-learning experiences, in one way or the other they addressed these domains.

As I read and analyzed the data, I began to see that these international students' description of their teaching-learning experiences seemed to be falling under these three domains. The domain "role of participation," for instance, emerged from students' responses to questions about the learning climate, the nature of interaction between teacher and learners, the learners' role in the classroom, the role of the teacher and the learners in the decision making process, and the use of teaching strategies. The domain "role of

learners' prior experiences" emerged from students' responses to the questions: "What role did your personal, professional, and previous educational experiences play in the teaching-learning process?" and "How relevant were course content and course requirements in helping you to achieve your educational goals?" Students also made mention of the role of the learners' prior experiences when they discussed their perceptions of the learning climate in their courses. Finally, the domain "role of the teacher" emerged mostly from the students' description of what they perceived to have been the role of the teacher in various courses in their program.

However, students also discussed the behaviors of the teachers in the classroom as they responded to various questions from the interview protocol. The role of the teacher was probably one of the most significant aspects influencing the attitude of these international students toward their teaching-learning experiences. Positive experiences were usually related to teachers taking a more active leadership role in the classroom and negative experiences were related to a passive, non-engaged teacher. The role of teacher also emerged from a variety of examples provided by the students which described their perceptions of teachers' teaching conception and application of their views on constructivism in their teaching practice.

Each of these three domains was perceived by the students to have positive and negative aspects. The positive experiences were characterized by such themes as connectedness and engagement, and negative experiences by disconnectedness and disengagement.



Below I discuss each of these three domains identified in the study. First, I discuss the role of participation which is divided into two sections: (1) engaging participation, and (2) disengaging participation. Secondly, I discuss the role of learner's prior experiences, which is also divided into two sections: (1) connected experiences, and (2) disconnected experiences. Thirdly, I discuss the role of the teacher, also divided into two sections: (1) teacher as co-learner, and (2) silent teacher. Finally, after these three sections, I provide a summary of international students' perceived experiences with the teaching-learning process.

### The Role of Participation

The nature of classroom participation played an important role in how international students perceived their teaching-learning experiences. Participation was viewed here not only as the interactions that went on in the classroom but also as the classroom life (Jackson, 1968) or aspects of the classroom behavior (Karp and Yoels, 1976). It included norms of discussion, the nature of interaction among teacher and learners, the course and classroom structure, the creation and maintenance of the learning environment, the decision-making process, and an element of the grade.

As will be described below, participation was seen positively when it was engaging as far as the relevancy of what was discussed and the involvement of all members of the learning community. But it was seen as negative when discussions were disengaging, disconnected, and only a few

members of the learning community were involved in the classroom discourse. Students reported having positive and negative experiences with participation in both their introductory and advanced courses. Most of the negative experiences were reported to have taken place in the proseminar course but some students also reported positive aspects of this course. Most of the positive experience remarks came from the advanced courses.

Below I present international students' perceptions of the role of participation in the teaching-learning process. First, I discuss those experiences which were positive and engaging; secondly, I discuss those that were negative and disengaging; and finally, at the end I provide a summary of the role of participation in the teaching-learning process.

### Engaging Participation

Positive participation was described as experiences where learners and teachers were actively engaged as co-learners and co-decision makers in the teaching-learning process. In situations of positive participation, the readings and the discussions in the classroom were relevant to the needs and interests of the learners and took into consideration the learners' previous knowledge and professional experiences. Teachers provided frameworks and/or provided some structure for the discussions in the classroom. Students were encouraged to bring in their previous experiences both during discussion in the classroom and in their writings. Finally, teachers and learners constructed knowledge together. The following are some of the examples shared by the

students which describe their positive experiences with participation in the classroom setting.

### *Framework for discussion*

Student 9 (a male; from Latin America) spoke of a course where he perceived the participation to be rich. He explained that what made participation richer in this classroom was that the teacher provided theories and structures to guide the discussions.

S: What made that rich? ...You mentioned that the courses were similar to other TE courses but it seems like in this one the participation was better, so what made that happen?

Student 9: **I guess it is the fact that he provided theories, so the discussion is guided.** They say direction of the discussion because you have a general theory for explaining something. Let's take an example. We are talking about education and so he can provide a general framework about the role of education. The economic, political, or socio-mobility of education. He had this structure and then we can talk about the different meanings of the different purposes of education, but **because in the beginning he provided structure, we can have a conversation using these tools.** (Interview #3)

He continued by describing what took place in the classroom to contribute to a rich discussion. He explained that the teacher was engaged in the discussion by providing an introduction to and a summary of the reading, sharing his own conception, stressing the importance of theories for making sense of the reading, and providing feedback to students. In this course, students were also invited to talk rather than forced to talk in order to get a grade.

Student 9: The class has a specific structure, **the teacher always present a summary of the reading of the day**. A short summary and then we have a discussion about this reading and it was useful. **He stressed the important role of theories for making sense of your readings**. So, it was not the kind of free discussion or free content discussion. It was a discussion which you had to use your conceptual tools like theory. In many ways he provides these theories and you don't have to buy them. You use them for some time, and then the purpose of the class seemed to me is that the students have to build, to construct their own theories. So there was this, **he presented his own conception, and also he provided tools, conceptual tools like theory**. We can engage in a conversation, in a discussion, literally. We react, we talk, we as students. **Sometimes he is listening in a way in which he provides feedback** given in the classes is very interesting. He is strong, but **he also respects your position**. **I feel free and nobody forces us to talk**. **There is no grade for talking**. No grade, different from my other classes. Generally they have a section, 20% for participation. (Interview #3)

Student 9 further explained why this course was different from others in his program. He said that the physical arrangement and the teaching strategy used (i.e., large group discussion) was similar to other courses but the difference in this course was that the teacher provided structure and theoretical tools to guide the discussion. Thus this structure fostered focused and richer conversations.

Student 9: ...It is very different when you jump into a conversation without tools or without theories because you can talk about any and everything and this is the kind of, and **when you see this classroom, this classroom, when you see other classrooms, you would not see any difference**. **There are tables and people are talking**. **But when you go into our classroom, the one which I am talking about, you can see the structure, he provides structure**. It does not mean that he forces us to believe in this structure. The structures are the general guiding lights that we had for our discussions. (Interview #3)

### *Focusing on students' interest*

Student 5 (a female; from Asia) felt that participation went well in one of her classes because the teacher, contrary to what happened in the proseminar, facilitated discussions which were focused on students' ideas and issues instead of being centered on the teachers' point of view. This approach showed that the students' ideas were valued by the teacher.

S: But, what is the difference then? It seems like in the other course people were asked to participate. In fact, if I remember, you said that having to participate is not a good thing. But in this group there was also participation...

**Student 5: The different thing is yes, in those two courses the professors kind of facilitated the discussion. But there [in the proseminar] was professor focused. He led the discussion. It is not what we share the point of view there, it was his point or her point of view. We always had to focus on his idea. And then the other group is, there are both ideas there. It doesn't have to be from the professor. If I or any student have an idea there, we will focus on that. So this gives us a kind of every one's idea are valued. (Interview #3)**

Student 6 (a male; from Asia) spoke about a course where students had the opportunity to select the content of studies and design their project in accordance to their interest. He said that the teacher was open to negotiation.

**Student 6: The general guidelines differ from group to group. Again, within the group, it was different from individual to individual. I was doing work on high order thinking, somebody else was doing on what you call religious studies, religious teaching. Somebody else was doing work on adult learning. How is literacy perceived in community colleges? So, here we had this opportunity to select content and do our program according to our own interest. And he was open to negotiate. Even in individual level there was opportunity to negotiate. (Interview #3)**

Student 6 also pointed out that this course was very productive, and an ideal situation for a doctoral level class. The teacher created a learning

environment where students were able to participate in the planning and implementation of the course curriculum.

S: The climate seemed to be very productive.

Student 6: Very productive. I wished, if you would ask me for a kind of ideal situations for a doctorate level class, it would come very close to that, in my opinion.

S: Why is that?

Student 6: **It was from the planning and implementation, how it went through, almost everything was what I think of as a doctorate level class. For the planning itself, he said that he gave a very loose kind of schedule. He didn't come to the class saying this is what we were going to do. We will change along the way to fit in the progress, the pace of the class, the pace of the group. Again he told us the three groups had different pace the way that we are going. He would say that this is a general guideline, but it will be different from the three groups. That is one thing. (Interview #3)**

He said that there were other aspects of the course that made it ideal.

The reading and what was discussed in class were negotiable. The reading was less than in other courses and it was focused on specific areas that students were addressing in their research. Students were also able to negotiate in this course how they were going to develop and present their project.

Student 6: **The other thing is, in terms of what to be read, what to be discussed in class, again was negotiated. Who was the presenters, who wanted to take the initiative first and second, again, that was negotiable. The other thing, is that we did not have much to read, that was one of the good things. ...Nevertheless, this professor provided some pertinent topics to read. For example, somebody talked about how do I use qualitative software, so, we all wanted to know, then he brought something for us to read. That kind of thing. (Interview #3)**

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) explained that one of her courses was very relevant to her because it dealt with issues that were pertinent to problems

she was dealing with in her home country. Also, the teacher encouraged and provided the opportunity for her to address these issues now, in the classroom and in her writings, rather than postpone the application of her new knowledge for when she returned home.

**Student 1: ...The course content was very relevant to me because it dealt with issues that were mostly concerned with back at home. I am always confronted with the issues that we dealt with in this course and he made the course more relevant to me by drawing in my own experiences and in fact I can talk more about this course than other courses because it just came at the right time. I had these problems. I brought these problems to MSU, and here is a professor who is teaching this class and is allowing me to look to see my problems through this course. This was very relevant to me. It was a very relevant class to me and this I could relate what I was learning here to the problems that I have at home. It was just an immediate thing all together. I like the fact that I didn't have to go home to think about relating the course to my experiences. I related the experiences to that course in class in front of people. So, it was very relevant if we still had classes like that which will make us feel good about ourselves, about our education. I would be very excited to take them now. (Interview #3)**

Student 9 found participation in one of his course to be meaningful because he was given the freedom to develop his own agenda. That is, he was able to focus his readings and writing reactions toward specific areas of his interest. And he said that what was really important is that the teacher allowed him to make those choices.

**Student 9: ... From the very beginning, from my first writing reaction, I tried to approach the class with an agenda. I had the agenda of understanding one education reform in science education and so from the very beginning I tried to focus my reaction in this reform. And tried to put the reading in this direction, was very helpful. And what is important is the teacher allowed it and helped me without forcing me to just focus on the reading. He gave me the freedom for developing my own agenda so I think it was very, very important. ...He didn't forced me to; "you have to focus on the reading." (Interview #3)**

### *Setting the environment for learning*

Student 5 (a female; from Asia) said that participation in one of her classes was positive because the teacher encouraged students to develop creative thinking. She said that in this course, instead of being too critical about students' ideas, the teacher encouraged learners to be creative and to further develop their ideas.

**Student 5: ...When you have the own original idea, something come out from your own mind, she really encouraged.** This is a kind of new idea. Not like other people, professors who say; "I never heard of that. No one in our profession talks about that. No paper written about that." I heard that from people. "I never heard of that. I never read about that." So when you get that kind of answer, what do you feel in your mind? No one had this kind of idea, only me. **This professor really encouraged, original ideas, she would say; go deeper about your ideas.** And try to find some other people, evidence to support your idea. **She really encouraged our own creative thinking. It is not just kind of "I never heard of it."** (Interview #3)

Participation was also positive in this course, she said, because the teacher created a safe environment for learning. She encouraged students to respect each other's ideas and to have genuine dialogue.

**Student 5: Another think I think from the beginning of the class is that the professor encouraged genuine dialogue. Like respect everyone's ideas, opinion is valuable. So she encouraged everyone to respect other peoples' ideas and appreciate.** Then kind of create, you should have your own original thinking, thoughts about some kind of idea or theory. The professor encouraged it. (Interview #3)

### *Teacher's engagement with the community of learners*

Student 8 (a female; from Latin America) experienced positive participation in a situation where the teacher took an engaging role in the teaching-learning process. Please see page 91 for more detail on the



description of this teacher's behavior. She said that in this situation the teacher would bring closure to the discussion and try to connect what students were saying. She concluded that quality of participation depended on the role teachers took in the classroom.

Student 8: ...I think I learned in that class. I think I was treated as an adult, I think we constructed in that class, you see.

S: So, there were all participants constructing, not only the learners but also the teacher contributed to the construction of knowledge?

Student 8: **Everything didn't stay in the air, there was some closure, we were able to see how your idea looks in light of what the other person said, and she was very good at doing that. So, it depends a lot on who was at the head of the class. (Interview #1)**

In another interview, student 8 expanded her explanation of the importance of teachers' participation in the learning community. She said that in one of her courses the teacher provided input in the conversations that went on in the classroom. He provided the zone of proximal development (Vigotsky, 1978) for the students in order to help them to further develop their understanding of what was being discussed. More importantly, he also acknowledged and made explicit to the students when they were providing that zone of proximal development for him. Thus, she said, in this class she really felt like students and teacher were learning from each other.

Student 8: ...We had input from the professor who is more knowledgeable and in that sense the zone of proximal development which is all discussed in constructivist learning was a real issue because **he provided that zone of proximal development to further our understanding of what we were discussing. And in many cases, he made it evident to the students when we were providing a zone of proximal development for him because there were times when he said; "I never thought of it that way. I never taught a second language, that is interesting."** So, we felt that we were really learning

**from each other** because any time there was something new, something different that he didn't think about, didn't see that way, or didn't come upon, he would make it known, wow. (Interview #3)

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) provided another example of the role of the teacher in making participation engaging for all participants. She looked forward to going to this class to discuss her impressions of the reading. She said that she felt challenged by the teacher. The teacher provided guidance to students in their learning process. He also gave his opinion on the issues discussed in class, and he summarized the discussions.

Student 1: ...He would sit there and say "I am wondering what you got out of this book. How did you make sense out of this book. He was telling that from the cover of the book. **He would be saying, look at the cover itself the ecology in adult learning**, I am just looking at something here [she was using a book on the table and using it as an example] and he would say **did you get anything from the author selections or you know, from the title itself, did you get anything? What is this book written for? Who do you think is the audience here? You start enjoying the course from the book, the cover itself so I felt that every time I would be so challenged to go to class and to go and give my own impression of what I read.** I would wait for that class to come because I would have something to say every week. ...I would wait for that class because **I would love to hear his take on it because he would always summarize at the end of it all.** After we had participated, saying something, he would try to show us how to approach the question and of course tie in whatever things all of us would have said. So, to me, he was very active. (Interview #3)

She said that what was also different about this course was that the group discussed things in more depth. There was less reading to be done and the reading followed some kind of a structure. The teacher provided direction and background for the reading assignments and thus the students would read about a specific theme and come to class focused and with direction to engage in the discussion.

**Student 1: The difference here was that we had issues that we were looking into in-depth and that is something that was lacking in prosem. We had few, very few materials to go through for the week. Actually, a book would be enough for the week although, a book can be, you know, can take the place of seven readings, but that book would have direction. You would know what you are talking about. He would make it simpler for you by telling you what the book is all about and he would even tell you some of the challenges. "So and so is talking about this and that and there are so many different ideas about this issue. Now, I want you to go ahead and read, this is the book for next week" and you would have a theme for that week. Something that we had [in prosem] but it was very confusing because you would read seven articles which were so different from the theme. So, here in this class, we had few readings, even if it was a book, there would be directions and in class you would come with sub headings of the main heading and we would be discussing that in class. (Interview #3)**

Finally she said that what was also interesting in that class is that the teacher was able to engage international students in the classroom discussion. He did so by challenging them to explore and share their own experiences as part of the teaching-learning process.

**Student 1: ...He knew that he had international students in this class and that is what he went after. He was like, I am so curious to know what is taking place in other cultures here? You are reading an American book about an American education, is this similar? Everybody would be so active, would come alive, so that was quite interesting to me. (Interview #3)**

Student 3 (a male; from Africa), contrary to several of the students who expressed dissatisfaction with the participation process, found that his proseminar experience was very engaging and overall very positive as far as the dynamic of participation is concerned. He liked the way the seminar course was structured. He said that students were able to reflect not only on the reading but on their own experiences.

**Student 3: Actually, the course was structured in a way that they call it proseminar and it is more of discussion. For example, it involved**

**everyone I guess, because part of the course requirement is contributions of students in class. I mean participation. So, since it was around like seminar course, we did the reading in advance and then each student was required to effectively contribute. Not only through the readings or the material that was given in the books in class, but also to reflect on one's own experience and professional development from the country they originate from. So, in that way I should say that it was helpful because it was engaging... everyone had to at least have their input in the whole process. So, I think it was very engaging in that sense. (Interview #1)**

It was hard for me to discern if in fact what Student 3 described above really happened in the classroom or if this was what he perceived to be the goal of a seminar course. Since his views were different from most of the other students, that is, he saw the learning environment inclusive, I decided to pursue more explanation about his experience with this course. I asked him to elaborate more on what the participation looked like and how he participated. As he elaborated on it, he affirmed that he was very satisfied with the dynamic of participation in the course. He explained that in the beginning, it was not as easy to participate because he was not familiar with the norms. However, later, as he became familiar with the process, he felt that he was not only able to participate but, in fact, contribute to the learning of others. Thus, his perspectives of the dynamics of the proseminar were very positive and different from several of the other participants in this study.

S: So, in the participation, what happened? Did you participate a lot?

Student 3: Well, I think I was quite comfortable with expounding some of my views and experiences. At first, maybe I was a bit unfamiliar with the situation so I did not quite understand why everyone has to speak or something, maybe because, you see, it is a different culture altogether. Where I come from, for example, you are actually taught. The teacher speaks most of the time or the lecturer, and I think this is a

seminar course and you are required to participate. And also, with a lot of help from the other students because the other students being in their culture, the American students, especially. It seems to me that this culture being that of being outspoken. Well, **I picked up in a few weeks or so, that one needs to talk, to participate. It took me some time to get used to it, I must say. But eventually I got used to it and I started participating effectively not only on the reading as well as I said, but also from my international experience and I think some of my colleagues appreciated that** because most of the American students or non-American do not know much of what is going outside of America. (Interview #1)

### Disengaging Participation

Negative experiences with participation were described as situations where international students were disengaged from the classroom discourse apparently because their experiences and their background were ignored and disconnected from the teaching-learning process. Discussions focused on readings which were many times irrelevant to these learners' educational goals, their previous experiences, and their future endeavors in education in their own countries. In situations of negative participation, teachers were silent and did not engage in the discussion process in the classroom, there were few to no negotiations on the content to be learned and requirements to be fulfilled, and finally, participation was perceived by the students to be merely a matter of students reading articles and saying disconnected things in class. The following are some of the examples shared by the students which describe their negative experiences with participation in the classroom setting.

## *Competition*

Participation was viewed as negative by some of the students because of the competition they perceived to have happened in some of their classrooms and because they felt pressured to talk. Student 1 (a female; from Africa) said that students would compete to give the answer even if what they had to say was irrelevant. She said that since participation was part of students' grade, it was essential that they try to put their words into the discussion. And it was important to say things in the beginning of the class because, as the discussion progressed, questions got more complicated and more difficult to answer. She believed that this, and the fact that teachers expected students to talk may have caused the competition.

S: ... You said something like I understand a little better the teaching/learning behavior. What is the teaching/learning behavior that you saw?

Student 1: Well, **the students themselves would be competing. Right at the beginning you had to compete.** If the professor says I am just curious to understand, to know what you think about this and that. Oh my goodness, **there would be students competing to give the answer, even if it was irrelevant.** You have to know the question at the beginning, very simple so you have to participate at the beginning. You have to participate in the beginning because as time goes on you might not be able to participate and then it is not very good when the professor gives grades for participation and of course, the professors themselves are there to look at who is participating a lot here. You know, of course **when I think of the behavior of the professors themselves, one, I felt, I should characterize they were teaching a learning behavior. Because you are supposed to participate, you are supposed to tell the professors everything.** (Interview #1)

Student 9 (a male; from Latin America) also perceived the competition among the students. He said that students competed to say something smart or important in order to get the attention from the teachers.

Student 9: ...we had three books and several papers for one week which we would have a lot of reading, and we picked any of these readings. And we talk about them very superficially. **And there was a kind of competition among students in order to get attention from teachers, so you had to say something smart or something important so they would put attention on you, this was the feeling I got from this. I have good classmates and nice people there but in general there was an implicit competition, who is going to say the smart comment right here.** (Interview #1)

Participation was also viewed as a part of the grade and some students realized that if they did not talk they would be penalized on their grade. Student 2 (a male; from Africa) said that he was self-conscious about not participating; he knew that others were aware that he was not talking in class. However, he chose deliberately not to participate. He said he knew that this would affect his grade but he chose to listen and not force participation because he was not ready to jump in.

Student 2: I was self-conscious about it. I knew that when I read the course syllabus and the requirement, **I knew that I would have to participate. It was almost twenty percent of our grade, so that was one thing. The other thing was that I knew that most people were participating. When you are not participating, people will notice it. I had that in mind and I was self-conscious. Yet, I felt like I shouldn't push myself that way. I didn't want to force participation when I was not ready to do so, so I chose not to participate deliberately.** (Interview #1)

He continued by stating that he considers himself a very good listener and that listening is a learning strategy. He also said that some people would rather listen and process information later, and that is the approach he chose to use instead of talking in class.

Student 2: ...Also, I consider myself a very good listener and I also believe that listening quality is a learning strategy. **Not everyone speaks, some people would rather listen and process it later on, so that was my approach.** I knew I would be penalized for not participating. But I knew that by listening, I would be getting something out of it. From that point-of-view, I did not feel bad. (Interview #1)

### *Nature of interaction*

Student 8 (a female; from Latin America) pointed out that participation should be more than just having people talking in class. She said that the quality of participation and discussion in the classroom depended a lot on who was leading the class and what they did. She stressed that learning does not take place when people just talk and then the discussion is done and students go home without any closure or summary of what they discussed. This type of activity, she said, is not productive and adult learner-centered. She argued that teachers need to provide some kind of intervention during the discussions to probe students to further consider their thoughts and ideas. Without that, she concluded, learning cannot take place.

Student 8: ... **So, it depended a lot on who was at the head of the class. I don't believe that I am treating someone as an adult if I say OK, let's have a discussion and we sit around the table and we all talk and we are saying things that just don't sound logical.** And I might be thinking, because, and you might see my expression, I might be thinking, where does Sandro get these ideas from. But when we are finished, I said great, see you tomorrow. Did you learn anything? If I say, Sandro, why do you say that? How do you think this impacts that? I will give you the opportunity to say: Hum! Right, you know something, [and we would give an explanation to each other where we are coming from]. I would tell you why there is an impact and you would convince me and I would say yes, you have a point. There is learning there! **But there is no learning when everybody talks and everybody gives their ideas and then we say OK see you tomorrow, class is finished.** So, that's where I had that frustration. (Interview #1)



Student 2 (a male; from Africa) described his views of positive classroom interaction, and he concluded that he is not sure that this happened in his proseminar course. He emphasized that in order for positive interaction to take place among teachers and learners, there has to be a learning community where learners and teachers have common goals and where the teacher acts as a guide and facilitator. Like Student 8, he also believes that just having people talk in the classroom is not enough. There has to be some intervention from the teacher and more focus on the discussions in order for learners to have more meaningful interactions.

**Student 2: ...I think this notion of interaction can only take place in a classroom where there is a learning community whereby kids [learners] know each other and also value what everyone has to offer. Where we have a learning community of people with common goals and a teacher who is a guide, facilitator, knows the agenda, and tries to help the students to make it.**

S: Do you think this course was pretty much what you described here?

**Student 2: Maybe it was, but I'm not sure, because I think the learning community takes into account every member of the community in terms of interests, cultural background. ... I am not sure that that seminar took all this into account. Maybe it did, but I didn't feel it. So the interactive piece was there, but not only interaction is positive. People can talk just for the sake of talking and people can also talk to extract meaning with some specific goals in mind. I'm not convinced. Maybe there was some aspect of what I was talking about but not all of it. (Interview #1)**

### *Lack of background*

A couple of students talked about problems that they experienced with participation because of the lack of background in the content discussed in class which was not explained to them. Student 4 (a female; from Asia) stated

that she viewed the role of the learners as one of active participation in classroom discussion. Her role, however, in an introductory course [methodology course] was passive because she did not understand and had never heard of the content students were discussing in class.

S: What about the learners, what were their roles in the class?

Student 4: the students, learners, I think maybe some ways really active but for me I am passive. **I think it is hard for me to understand what people are talking so, I just sit there try to understand what people were talking and feel really sad because lots of things they were talking I never heard before and I didn't understand.** (Interview #1)

Student 4 seemed to have needed guidance and background to actively participate in the discussions that took place in the classroom. She explained that it would have been helpful if the teacher had provided more background on the content. This would have helped her to be able to have a better understanding of it and consequently be able to participate in the discussions.

Student 4: I think in my own education in my home country when a professor goes to a class, he first will give an overview in the first class, what is the class about, and what we are going to talk about, maybe in every class he will give you the theme of the class and explain what is happening in the history or what has been talked about, the philosophy of the person, and then maybe we can discuss, we can understand more. But now I went to a class, I know it is a methodology class. Maybe for me I don't feel... I am not prepared so, I don't understand. (Interview #1)

Student 6 (a male; from Asia) agreed with Student 4 that background information needs to be provided to international students, especially when that information is related to American culture. When students read about a historical author, they should be provided with some kind of background on the author so that they can situate themselves and really understand the text.

Student 6: ...**More importantly for people who are coming from other countries, when somebody talks about Horace Mann. There is reading material from that, I don't know anything about Horace Mann.** And it is a very American concept. We have never heard, international students that come here, you know, they have never heard about Horace Mann. **And you come to this class you have to read about Horace Mann and there is no introduction at all about this Horace Mann. And you're supposed to read and supposed to have the background information to understand the text.** And this is only one reading and you might have 8-10 pieces to read every week. And how do you actually go into it? (Interview #1)

Student 6 stated that the lack of this background information may have affected some international students' participation. He said that they did not participate because they were not confident about their knowledge, they did not have the background for the discussion, and it was not made explicit to them. Thus, he concluded that international students were not participating because they did not have the background and therefore did not want to be seen as saying nonsense. He also stated that, unless there is an explicit effort to provide opportunities for international students to participate, they will be unwilling to do so.

Student 6: ...People were not confident. People were not coming out of here with whatever fear they had, the initial fear, **they were not really benefiting from it.** Again going back to my earlier figures, **they didn't have the background.** It took us, six international students in the classroom. At least for the six, I can say that **it took a while for us to understand the background, to understand this kind of things - "What do you mean by common school reform?"** Like they say, **the common school reforms were based on Protestant, Republican-Protestant ideology. First of all what do you mean by Republican? I don't have Republicans in my country!** What do you mean by Protestant? I understand Protestant because my country has Christian religion too. Protestant is OK too. But what do they stand for? What are the principles behind it? **You see, Americans they know, but international students, we don't know.**

S: They may not.

Student 6: They may not also, but what I'm saying - American Protestant ideology- what does that stand for? **So when you are caught by that kind of stuff you don't participate because you don't want to be seen as talking nonsense.** So that was it. In terms of learners I see people benefiting on the whole, especially the local students, but **unless there is explicit opportunity provided to international students, at least in the beginning, many will not be willing to participate.** (Interview #1)

### *Disconnected discussions*

Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) described the nature of participation in her introductory class as one where the learners' role was to show off what they knew and how much they knew to get a grade. She said that there was no attempt to connect one's thoughts and ideas with what others were saying. This was true in part because of the nature of what participation was, that is, students talking about the reading from different points of views and from a variety of perspectives that did not necessarily connect to each other. The discussions were completely open and people would just say things, which made it appear that students were saying things just to show off. She concluded that in a classroom contexts such is this one, the questions about what and if the learners learn do not seem to be important as long as they are talking – participating.

S: What was the role of the learners?

Student 7: **Just show off what they knew and how much they knew to get a grade. Nothing better than that could happen in such a classroom where you have a group of people who speak such things unconnected to whatever the colleagues are speaking.** Supposedly everything is to be connected to a reading, but there are hundreds of aspects and hundreds of connections you can make even if you consider one paragraph in a reading. Because people are diverse and they have a variety of personal experiences and views. Now imagine

when you read ten papers and you're just supposed to sit there and say things. It's completely open right? **Say things about what you read so people will say different things and no connection is being made. So why are they saying those things, just to show off they read.** ...That's what it looks like to me. Students read things and write papers to get grades. **If they learn and what they learn is not very important in that kind of context.** (Interview #1)

Later, in another interview, Student 7 again expressed her dissatisfaction with the type of discussions that went on in the classrooms. She stated that the classrooms here are dispersed and segmented and that students and teachers are not pursuing issues together. There was nothing she saw that reminded her of collective construction of knowledge.

**Student 7: The classroom here is an experience of segmented and dispersed discourse. People are not pursuing an issue together. Each one is contributing his own different perspective. There is no concern in connecting what different people are saying. If a student speaks, a student will say something like "I feel this is kind of...." and the next student will just change the subject. It does not refer to what the other student said, and so there is nothing that could remind one of collective construction going on. Its always about different people saying whatever they feel like saying with no obligation to connect their understanding to the understanding of the others which are present in the classroom. Where I come from this focus on collective construction is practiced and that's what I like.** (Interview #3)

When discussing type of classroom structure would be more beneficial to her learning, Student 7 stated that she believes that teacher and learners need to identify a common language to explore problems and issues. However, she said that the pedagogy used in many of her classes is not conducive to that or to advancing students' learning.

**Student 7: ...Of course, I believe that we can find a common language, that we can identify common problems and we can translate particular ways of seeing a problem into other ways of seeing that common problem, right? But, in this kind of context in which we read bits of things and we listen to bits of discourse in which like a professor**

**doesn't elaborate a picture for the student, doesn't present a picture to the student. We read at home and we get to the class and we have just to say things. I, you know, I don't think that it is good pedagogy, I don't think that helps a learner to advance his learning his own view of things. (Interview #3)**

### *Norms of participation*

Student 6 (a male; from Asia) said that participation was difficult for international students because several of them were not familiar with the norms of participation here. He said that it was a difficult task for him to find the opportunity to talk because there was a group of people who dominated the discussion. Being unaware of the norms of participation, international students did not always know how to participate just like domestic students, that is, they did not "jump in" in the discussions. He explained that people that come from different countries have different norms of participation and the procedures of getting involved in a discussion follow some kind of order which is moderated by someone coordinating the discussion.

**Student 6: ...But in terms of teaching it was like talking from one to another because there were so many things to cover. It was 3 hours. There were 28 adults in the class with lots of things to cover, so it was like hopping from one thing to the other. In topics. Of course there were people who might have been dominating the discussions who spoke for a long time. They really got the chance. And again that's another thing which **we international students, I at least, found it difficult task, the opportunity to talk. Whoever was really dominating, whoever was very willing and very outgoing they were the ones talking.** And people who come from countries like mine, we used to be like [using] procedure of involving in a discussion. Usually we show some indication as to the order, we want to talk, we want to contribute and then there is somebody coordinating, moderating the discussion. (Interview #1)**

Student 6 continued by explaining that it took him a while to understand the norms of discussion. For several weeks he was trying to use the procedures from his country and finally he realized that it was not working for him. He needed to join the group's norm and just "jump in", which he said was not easy for him.

**Student 6: ...So for at least 3 or 4 weeks I was trying to do that. Then I found this is not working. And only then I realize this is not the way, here everything is different. If you have something, you just wait for a time for someone to just finish talking and then you jump in. Even to talk to counter argue something while someone is talking it's like fine, it's accepted, the norm here. It is not the norm in my country. I have seen people while they're talking and suddenly somebody jumps in even before that person finishes. Then it's fine, it's accepted. Which I found difficult to do for a long time. (Interview #1)**

Student 6 had other comments about his view of the participation process in the classroom. He explained that the classroom climate was formal. The reason he saw the climate to be formal is because there were rules and regulations in the discourse of the class and only those that knew the rules could participate. And since the rules were not common knowledge for all the students and they were not made explicit to all, it was intimidating to participate when one did not know when to talk or when to jump in.

**Student 6: Formal in the sense that it was like there were rules and regulations in the classroom, in the discourse of the class. Where it's like you, [if you know the rules, then you can participate]. And the rules were not the same for the different types of people who are there. You know? So, and it was truly, I can say, intimidating for people whose rules were different from the rules which were practiced in that particular classroom. When do you talk, you know, is it OK to jump in? and all that kind of things which was never explained. (Interview #1)**

Besides not knowing the norms and being intimidated to talk, student 6 said that non-participating students were not motivated or encouraged by other students and the teachers to join the discussion. As far as motivation for participation, he gave the course a score of 3 out of 10 points. However, he said that later on the teachers seemed to have realized that this type of participation -- the "jump in" -- was not working for international students and they began to try to include them in the discussion process.

Student 6: ...And motivating I would say again, I would consider that in a 3 point out of 10 point. **There was no kind of motivation, explicit motivation even from the colleagues, the students to others who were not participating much, even from the professors.** But I should say that the later part I think the professors realized that this was not really working for international students. And they actually attempted to help the students. **At least in the middle I think they realized the rules and the regulations were different for people who are from a different culture. And they tried a little bit to include them all.** (Interview #1)

### *Hopping from topics to topics*

Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) used an interesting analogy to describe what she felt about one of her courses. She said that each class meeting was like a train trip, because every week they covered different topics which had no connection with the previous week's topic. They were completely disconnected. How one integrates these "rides" among themselves and with one's own experiences was a challenge, she said, especially because one's background and experiences are never part of the conversation.

Student 7: ... I used to say about this particular course that **I felt that I was in a train station and I take different trains that go to different places and I come back always to the same train station, you see.** This week I took a train north and I take a 200 mile ride and come back



to the same station next week and you know, I go somewhere else but I am always back at the same station and you see, **I don't know what I do with all those rides. How do I integrate them among themselves and with my own experience.** (Interview #3)

She went on to explain that the problem in integrating these “rides” is caused in part by the teaching approach used here, that is, the “potpourri approach,” with its diverse and disconnected number of topics covered in the courses. Secondly, it is the fact that she came from a different cultural context, and since her background and the teacher’s were never included in the discussion process, it became difficult to engage in an illuminating dialogue.

Student 7: ...**The problem of integrating among themselves is this potpourri approach.** [The problem of integrating] with my own experience has to do with the fact that I come from a different cultural context. **And if my background is never made explicit, if it never becomes, how can I say, if it never becomes part of the conversation and the professor’s background never becomes part of the conversation, how can we really engage in an illuminating type of dialogue?** (Interview #3)

She concluded that what ended up happening in the classroom, because of the lack of true dialogue, were two to three hours of meaningless discussions. Students had the opportunity to talk but collective construction of knowledge did not really happen.

Student 7: ...So, everybody talks in the classes, right? Everyone says a different thing. Okay, **everybody has voice, but what is constructed with this type of blah, blah, blah that happens in the classroom.** For me, **I never saw any construction, collective construction in knowing the sense of social constructivism going on in the classes.** I never heard interesting things being said. **I don't think I learned from sitting with people for two hours, three hours, right, in a class.** Of course, some of the opportunities that I had to engage with people and learn, they just happened outside of the classroom, in a special context, but I

think those things should happen in the classroom. Otherwise, why should we sit there for three hours? (Interview #3)

Finally, Student 7 said that, overall, the courses here were not relevant to helping her achieving her educational goals. She argued that the curriculum was a potpourri of courses which had a potpourri of themes in them. They were disconnected and going in all different directions. Therefore, the issues discussed in many of the courses were irrelevant to her because they did not address her experiences and needs which, in fact, she said were never assessed.

**Student 7: Most of the courses here are not really relevant in meeting my educational goals. There is here what I call, the curriculum is a potpourri of courses** (laugh), each course going in a different direction. **And each course is a potpourri of themes** (laugh), you know. **And nobody ever asked me what are my needs, what would be relevant to me.** You know, it doesn't matter what is relevant to me, this is like a jungle, an academic jungle, and I have to be able to hunt something to feed me if I can survive (laugh) and if I am skilled enough. Nobody is interested in what is relevant to me and I have to find my way to find something relevant, that is the truth, I think. (Interview #2)

### Summary of the Role of Participation

Several aspects of the participation process influenced how international students perceived their teaching-learning experiences. Participation was described as positive when it was engaging, that is, when learners and teachers were actively engaged in the classroom discourse. Students perceived positive participation as one where teachers provided frameworks and theoretical tools for the discussions; where classroom discussions and assignments were focused on students' interest; where students were

provided with the opportunity to participate in the planning and implementation of the course curriculum; where teachers created a safe and respectful environment for learning by encouraging and modeling respect to others' ideas; and finally, where teachers and learners learned from each other and together constructed knowledge.

Participation was described as negative when it was disengaging. That is, teachers were not engaged in discussions with learners and learners were withdrawing from participation because they perceived the topics and content discussed as irrelevant to them. Students also perceived negative participation as situations where learners seemed to be competing in the classroom to talk; where participation seemed to only have meant that students had to talk without having to make any attempt to connect one's argument to what others' had stated; where teachers provided no framework or background for classroom discussions; where there was no elaboration, by the teachers, of the problem to be discussed; where norms of participation were not made explicit; where the content for the course was dispersed, segmented and disconnected; and, finally, where learners needs and interest were not assessed nor discussed in the planning and implementation of the participation process.

### Role of Learner's Prior Experiences

The role learners' prior experiences played in the teaching-learning process had a great influence on how students perceived their academic

experience. Students perceived their experience to be positive when their personal and professional experiences were connected to the teaching-learning process. That is, the readings, the writing requirements and the discussions in the classroom took into consideration the learners' knowledge and their previous professional experiences. When these conditions were present in the teaching-learning process, students also felt like they were being treated as professionals, as adults, as someone who had something to offer to others.

On the other hand, their negative experiences were described as situations where their experiences and their background were ignored and disconnected from the teaching-learning process. Discussions in these classrooms focused on the readings and the teachers' agenda which were many times irrelevant or unconnected to these learners' educational goals, previous experiences, and future endeavors in education on their countries. The writing assignments were centered on specific subjects rather than on the students' interests and experiences. Finally, students felt under these situations that their history had been rejected, that they were not being treated as adults and professionals, and that their experiences were not valued.

### Connected Experiences

The following are some of the examples shared by the students which describe events where their experiences were connected or included in the teaching-learning process.

Student 8 (a female; from Latin America) found her experience to be very positive when she was able to bring in her personal experiences into the classroom discussions. She said that she felt like she was addressed as someone who is knowledgeable.

Student 8: ...In courses where I brought my experience because of all my years of working, my personal experience in that class was very positive because I was addressed like someone who is knowledgeable that brought good ideas and good experience or experiences. (Interview #1)

Student 8's experiences with proseminar were good because the teachers valued what she had to offer and they commented on her experiences and used them in the classroom discussion. This was a unique experience that she said not all students experienced in proseminar.

Student 8: **My third prosem, my 3 prosem were very good experiences because again as an educator I had things to offer and the professors saw that and they made use of it and commented on it, and used to develop what was happening in the classroom.** Not every student has that experience in prosem because I know people that had horrible experience during the prosem. I was lucky, that the professors I had were different. (Interview #1)

Student 4 (a female; from Asia) said that she enjoyed her proseminar course because she was able to speak about her experiences back home. The teachers in her class approached the course from a comparative perspective. They presented two educational systems from two countries, U. S. and her home country. So, being from one of the countries studied, she was able actively to contribute to the discussions, and she said that she was able more clearly to understand her experiences as a teacher.

Student 4: Yeah, I feel in one course that's right in the prosem because they presented two pictures, so my previous experience was included. And I think in one session I speak a lot about what is my experience in my country. **I feel my role, my experience, was included and also helped me to see my previous experience in the field.** And my previous role of the teacher and the learner clearer, it helped me to rethink what teaching and learning is. (Interview #1)

Student 4 acknowledged that she was privileged in having the course address issues from her home country. She enjoyed it and learned from it tremendously, but she did state that the course was not positive for all international students because it only addressed her country and the U.S.

S: How relevant were course content and course requirements in helping you to achieve your educational goals?

Student 4: Yeah, **I feel the prosem really helped me a lot. Especially the content, they gave us two pictures of common schooling of United States and my home country.** So, it really helped me to see the big issues from the comparative perspective. So, I think it was very good. But some other international students complained, they say, "Why give us that foreign country picture? we don't know anything about that." The teacher said, "We did just on purpose" because they study that, because they are very difficult the Asian, Eastern and Western, two different systems. So, they wanted us to have comparative perspective. So, comparative perspective I think was very helpful for me to see these not from one angle but comparative perspective, so it is very good. (Interview #1)

Student 5 (a female; from Asia) said that in one of her courses the teacher valued students' prior knowledge and experiences by including them into the teaching-learning process. She drew examples from students' experiences as she tried to teach or explain new ideas.

Student 5: **The teacher really valued our prior knowledge, our prior experience and she always took examples from our own experience to explain certain ideas.**

S: What was that again? She valued the prior experiences.

Student 5: Yeah. Then she also sometimes, during her teaching, **she drew some of the examples of our own prior experience in understanding some kind of phenomenon in education.** (Interview #3)

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) also experienced the inclusion of her experiences in the teaching-learning process because one of her teachers explicitly encouraged international students to apply the reading and what they were studying to their experiences and problems or issues they were facing in their home country.

Student 1: ...he would go through each one of them 17 [papers] every week. Writing notes at the end and inviting you to discuss with him. So, I found that to be very useful because I would read about something and I **would choose one thing that I wanted to talk about and I would go shopping about it, bringing in my own experience, and that's what he liked. You talk about the American education system without talking about your experiences, he would [quiz you there], what about your own experiences? How do you relate what you are learning here with your own experiences or what is happening in your own culture? He would always do that.** I remember writing something about, I was reacting to a book, "Savage Inequalities." I talked about inequalities in the U.S. and he reacted sharply. (laugh) "[Student 1], you could have done better." He gave me a 3.7, I was so angry. (laugh) "You could have done better if you had included your own experiences of inequalities in [student's country]. That's what this book is all about. You have to talk. I wanted you to relate what has been written here to your own situation, as a black person in [the student's country]."

Student 1 explained that this type of encouragement from the teacher was a great challenge for her. She was able to see that the teacher was not ignoring or making her forget her experiences from back home but rather he was motivating her and other international students to address the issues that were real to them back home, in their countries. She said that this type of

climate allowed and motivated her to be herself and to deal with what was important to her.

Student 1: It was so challenging to me. In fact, **when I wrote my reaction papers, I made it a point that I brought in my [home country] experiences. I realized that is what he wanted. He didn't want us to say okay I am in the States right now, forget about your country, forget about your experiences. He wanted that to appear everywhere because he said I know you are a professional, if not, you are somewhere in your education practice that you have a lot of experiences and I cannot take your experiences for granted here. They are very important. So, he was forcing us to do that and I enjoyed it because I became myself. I really became myself. There was someone who appreciated who I was and in the long run it paid me a lot because up to now I feel that I have tried to relate what I am learning here with what is going on at home. (Interview #3)**

Student 3 (a male; from Africa) found that overall there was a lack of inclusion of different educational systems in the teaching-learning process in the program. But in a specific course he said that international students had the opportunity to discuss their own experiences as well as their educational background and educational system. He believes that this added to the content discussed and it was also of great benefit to all students because they were able to hear about diverse experiences from students from different parts of the world.

S: We have been talking about the concept of including the different global systems, learning more about these other countries and so on, and to some extent you find that this is lacking. **But you believe that in this course the students and international students had a chance to discuss about their own experiences and their own educational background and educational systems in their countries...**

Student 3: **Yes. That happened a lot.** Luckily there were a number of international students in this class. Some from New Zealand, China, Africa, some from Europe. That diversity played a role in one explaining about their country, for example. In that way it helped a lot because we could hear first hand experience from a person who lived or worked in



that situation. And going back to one of your initial questions as to how we contributed to the content, **I think that this was one way that the students contributed to the content of this course, because international students were given an opportunity to talk about their experiences or their countries, in that way at least...** (Interview #1)

### Disconnected Experiences

The following are some of the examples shared by the students, which describe events where they felt like their experiences were ignored or disconnected from the teaching-learning process. These experiences were described as being negative experiences with the teaching-learning process.

The lack of inclusion of learners' experiences and previous background in the teaching-learning process was a common experience for many of the students. Over and over again students shared stories of how their previous background and experiences in several courses were ignored and how they sensed that no effort seemed to have been made by the teachers to include them in the teaching-learning transaction.

Student 9 (a male; from Latin America) said that his teachers in proseminar did not take into consideration that students brought experiences, knowledge and skills in education to the teaching-learning process. Judging by what they required from the students, he asserted that the teachers had an agenda in which what students knew did not count or was not important.

S: You said something about respecting our history and that it seemed like they believe that we need to start at zero. What do you mean by that?

**Student 9: They give you this very general reading about the schooling and education without taking into consideration that many of their**

**students have a lot of experience in education and teaching and learning, and you are forced to start without this experience. They have an agenda in which what you knew doesn't count.** The syllabus of the first proseminar says in this course you are going to learn how to write in an academic way, which means that you don't know, which is not true, which I don't accept, which wasted all my time during this proseminar. (Interview #1)

Student 5 (a female; from Asia) said that in proseminar her experience was not included in the teaching-learning process. She explained that the teachers did not know her and did not ask her about her experiences. She concluded that they did not care about students' previous experiences; they only wanted students to learn what they were teaching, that is, the readings.

S: The question is what role did your personal, professional, and previous educational experience play in the teaching/learning process?

Student 5: That is what I am thinking. **It is not included too much in their teaching.**

S: Why is that and what would be the evidence of that?

Student 5: Why? **They didn't know me. They didn't ask me about that, my previous experience. I don't think they really care about it. What they want us to know is what they teach us, the readings.** Those are the things they want us to know. To shape our understanding of teaching and learning. (Interview #1)

Student 5 explained that yes, in the classroom, students did have the opportunity to talk and voice their ideas. This was part of the classroom behavior; however, the discussion was not necessarily focused on one's experiences or how one's experiences helped one understand the reading but it was rather about the readings alone.

S: You know, for me it is very interesting. I see the dichotomy and to some extent, which maybe you can explain it to me, to some extent I see that the professors provides a seminar where everybody talks about their ideas and so on, but then at the same time you say that they don't care, they don't know you.

Student 5: The previous knowledge no, the previous experience we are talking about. **They don't know much about my own previous knowledge. I don't think they really care about that.**

S: But at the same time, they want students to talk.

Student 5: **Talk about the readings. It is a reading discussion. It is about the readings.**

S: So, they are two different things.

Student 5: Yeah, **it is discussion about the reading. What I think about the reading. It is not about bring out my own experience and how my experience helps me to understand the reading, it is different. They are talking about the reading, what do you think about the reading, and then that is a different thing.** Right? I don't know... (Interview #1)

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) also said that her experience was not taken into consideration in her proseminar course. She felt like the teachers thought that she, as an international student, had nothing to offer to the class, that she was an empty headed person who was here to be filled with information. She explained that she would not even write about her experiences in her country because teachers would raise questions. The reason for that was that they were not familiar with the literature from her country. She said that teachers here do not seem to read about other countries.

Student 1: **I don't think my experiences as a learner, especially an international student, were taken into consideration.** I was in that class, prosem 1, taking that class as a student, an empty headed lad which would be filled with a lot of information. **If you are from another country, they think that you don't have anything to offer and that is**

**what I felt in that class. I didn't have anything to offer even when I wrote my papers. In prosem 1, you wouldn't bring in your own experiences because there were questions, you know. Somehow I don't think people around here do read things from other countries except China, perhaps Europe. Things from Africa, South America, I don't think they bother themselves to read them. ...So, my experiences were not taken into consideration and that is one thing that really frustrated me. You couldn't talk about any other writer or author from Africa or any other country, they don't know that peasant, they don't know him, they will question you about it. It was tough. (Interview #1)**

Finally, Student 1 made a statement that summarizes her feelings about the teaching-learning process in her introductory course. By not including her personal experiences, and by over emphasizing U.S. education, the teachers made her feel like they wanted her to forget all about her previous experiences.

**Student 1: With the prosem, I thought we were here to be indoctrinated into the U.S. education. You know, they were teaching us to forget everything about our country. (Interview #3)**

Student 2 (a male; from Africa) explained that in his proseminar course his experiences were also not taken into consideration, and this affected how he perceived the course. He said that the teachers did ask at the beginning of the course about students' interests and background, and they took note of that. However, they did not use that information to modify the syllabus or include those interests in the teaching-learning process.

**S: What role did your personal, professional, and previous educational experiences play in the teaching-learning process in this classroom?**

**Student 2: There was nothing. This is why it affected me negatively. I have some background, learning foreign languages and special education. Although they did address special education a little bit. But I still felt like it was not focused enough. I think they focused more on broader without taking into account special interests and background which is interesting because at the beginning of the class, they asked to list those interests and they were taking notes. We talked about background and everything but I don't think they took it into account.**

That was a good exercise that we did. **They were taking notes but it was not reflected in the syllabus because the syllabus was already polished.** (Interview #1)

Student 6 (a male; from Asia) concurred with several other students about the role of learner's prior experiences in the teaching-learning process in his proseminar course. He said that there was absolutely no chance for students, especially international students, to bring in their experiences and diverse perspectives on education. He stated that having international students share their perspectives would have been of great value for other students in the classroom, especially American students.

Student 6: In terms of the professors using individuals' experiences in their own countries' educational systems it was, I would say, 2 in a 10 point scale. Or maybe 3. **There was absolutely no chance for people to bring in their own experience. More specifically more importantly experience of people from different countries.** Who have different models of education, different experiences, which would have been a very, very valuable learning experience for people in the classroom, especially for American students. It was not done. (Interview #1)

He acknowledged that the teachers did provide one chance for international students to share their experiences. This happened at the second last class of the semester, when the six international students in the class were asked to give a 10-15 minute presentation about their educational system. He wished that this approach would have been used throughout the semester, providing more opportunity for learning for all learners.

Student 6: ...And, except the second last class, I think again the professors realized that this was a very big mistake, I think in my opinion. **They deliberately allocated 10-15 minutes each for all the international students to talk about the educational system in their country. There was one opportunity which was given at the end of the course for the six of us from different countries was to talk about the educational system in our countries.** That was not done, encouraged in all the other

classes, which would have been wonderful learning experience both for us and also for the Americans. Not to learn, I am not saying that they should have used my experience or the international students' experiences. What I am saying is every time you talk about an issue, for example, School reform was done in 1840 by Horace Mann, OK what was he trying to do? It would have been wonderful in my opinion, if they had asked: were similar things like this done in your country, maybe later or maybe before, which was along that line? (Interview #1)

Student 3 (a male; from Africa) took the lack of inclusion of international students' experiences in the classroom a little differently then the other students. He said that he would have liked to see more of his experiences being considered in the classroom; however, he said that he understood that he was in the U.S. and that he could not be expecting the teachers to focus on his international background and experiences. He accepted that being in the U.S. the teachers would want to study what was relevant for the U.S. So he seemed to be comfortable with how things were done.

**Student 3: The thing is that I cannot change things the way they are run in the United States being a foreign student. It will go according to what people of America want and I am insignificant when it comes to that. So, most of the time, the whole point is linked to whether my experience and background is contributed to the class or is considered, yes, consider but not as much as I would liked it to. But then, I can not be unrealistic and say that they should include much of my background and experience because this is the U.S.A. and they want to study what is relevant and good for the U.S.A. (Interview #3)**

The exclusion of international students' prior experiences and background from the teaching-learning process made Student 9 (a male; from Latin America) feel like he was not being treated as a professional. He said that the teachers talk about professionalism in education but were unwilling to treat students as professionals. He also said that this was a shock to him that the teachers would treat students that way.

S: What role did you personal, professional and previous education experiences play in the teaching-learning process? Were they included in the teaching-learning process?

Student 9: I think you already have information there. My feeling is that they didn't include that. They didn't seem like professionals. It's just crazy. **They are making this big rhetoric about professional in education, but they don't believe that we are professionals. Can you believe the shock that I got here when I came to a doctoral program and I was working in my home university dealing with problems of administration and being director of a section of the big part of the college and I come here and they didn't see that.** I don't deny that they don't have to see that, but they have a lot of professionals there but they don't believe that, they just sit like high school or and I don't mean that in high school you have to treat people like that. **For them you are not a professional in any sense.** (Interview #1)

The following statement made by Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) reflects what she believes needs to happen in the classroom in order for it to be inclusive of all learners. Unfortunately she said that this did not happen in her proseminar class, and that was frustrating for international students because, although their experiences are not part of the discourse, they still have to join the conversation – i.e., participate.

Student 7: I think if you have foreign students in your class, and if you have people from different cultures even if they are from the same ethnic groups, different social classes, etc., you really have to practice that old story about taking in consideration the students' previous backgrounds and this really didn't happen here. Being a foreigner here is very difficult because of that. **My previous background is not interesting for them, but they expect us to join their conversation.** (Interview #1)

### Summary of Role of Learners' Prior Experiences

Inclusion and/or exclusion of learners' prior experiences in the teaching-learning process influenced how international students perceived their academic experiences. Students perceived their experiences to be positive when their prior educational and professional experiences were connected to the teaching-learning process. That is, their prior experiences were valued and used by the teachers as a resource for the students' learning and the learning of others. Students were given the opportunity to share with other students about their experiences back home. They were encouraged not only to speak about their experiences but also to write about them and to connect and apply the reading assignments to them. Teachers also used students' experiences to illustrate ideas and to teach new concepts. Finally, teacher and students addressed issues and problems that were relevant to the learners because those were issues and problems that they faced back home.

On the other hand, students perceived their teaching-learning experiences to be negative when their prior professional and educational experiences were excluded or ignored from the classroom discourse. Students felt like the teachers did not know them, and may not have cared about their history, their needs and interests, and what they had to offer to the group. Teachers seemed to have ignored the resources that students brought with them. They failed to take into account the students' needs and interest in formulating the course, the requirements and the classroom discussions. Finally, under these circumstances, students perceived that their history was



being rejected and because of that they felt like they were not treated as adults and professionals.

### The Role of the Teacher

The roles teachers played in the classroom had a great influence on how students perceived their teaching-learning experience. Students perceived their experience to be positive when they had a teacher who was engaged, connected, and active in the learning environment. On the other hand, their negative experiences were described as situations where the teacher was disengaged, inactive, and silent. This should not be surprising to us as we know from the adult learning literature that the teacher is a key element in the teaching-learning equation. His/her leadership is essential to the creation of a conducive learning environment (Knowles, 1990).

Students had strong views about what worked and what didn't work as far as the roles teachers played in the classroom and in their educational program. They described the teacher as *co-learner* or *co-participant* when he/she was engaged and active in the classroom learning community, and as *silent teacher* when he/she was disengaged and inactive in the teaching-learning process. Under these two major categories students also referred to teachers as: 1) "bureaucrat" (the teacher is in the classroom just to assess who talks and who doesn't, and to read students' papers and at the end give them a grade – this was a characteristic of the silent teacher); 2) "moderator" (one who directs and keep the class discussion focused -this was seen as a

positive characteristic of the teacher because sometimes the classroom discussions were all over the place); and 3) “facilitator” (one who initiates and maintains the discussion by asking students to “say more” - this term was used in a negative way because it was used to characterize the silent teacher, who comes to class and just initiates the discussion and keeps probing the learners to “say more” without giving any input. However, some students also spoke of the concept of facilitator in a positive manner).

### Teacher as Co-Learner

As students talked about positive experiences with the teaching-learning process, they also referred to the role of the teacher as an active and engaged member of the learning community. Mostly all students described one or more positive experiences they had with teachers in the program. Even those that encountered difficulty and overall dissatisfaction with the role of the teacher shared a number of positive experiences. In some situations they talked about the positive role of the teacher by comparing it with those which they perceived to not be as effective. In effect they saw these teachers as co-learners.

Students spoke of positive experiences with the teaching-learning process when they had teachers who were engaged and were participants in the learning community. These teachers not only facilitated discussion but they shared their experiences and expert knowledge with the students so that they could benefit from it and thus together be able to construct new knowledge as a learning community. They shared their point of view on the readings, they

brought closure and summary to discussions, they were sensitive to the learners' needs. They also motivated students to share and include their experiences, both in the classroom discussions and in their writings; they provided constructive feedback to students both in the classroom discussions and on their writings; and finally they admitted to being co-learners with the students.

The following are several examples shared by the students which describe their experiences and feelings about what they perceived to be positive roles that teachers enacted in their program. Students usually spoke positively about their teaching-learning experiences when their teachers openly shared their knowledge with the learners and attempted to connect, summarize, or make sense of what students were saying during discussions.

Student 8 (a female; from Latin America) stated that she appreciated one of her teachers because of his honesty in the classroom. Contrary to other teachers, she said, this teacher was explicit about his knowledge. He did not have any hidden agenda; he did not act as if he did not know the content that was being discussed. Students knew that the teacher was the authority in the classroom as far as being the expert among the participants, and he spoke with authority. This did not mean, she explained, that students could not talk and contribute. The teacher encouraged them to do just that but he did not leave things in the air. Besides sharing his point of view on the reading he would bring closure and summary to the discussions. This was something

that she stated, throughout her interviews, did not happen in many of her classes.

**Student 8: ...I always liked [professor A's] classes also because he doesn't fool anyone. He doesn't fool any one in the sense that "I don't know anything, everything is up in the air." He is the authority in the class. He talks that way and he exposes and he expands and he lectures, then we discuss. But we always get information from him. Information that you can give students. With [professor A] is like that, he tells you what he thinks about the readings, how he sees it, and he ties things together.... (Interview #3)**

Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) stated that she appreciated her experience in one course because she said that in this particular course the teachers took a stand on the topic discussed in class. Also similar to student 8, she felt like the teachers contributed in the teaching-learning process. They shared their knowledge with the group, and attempted to connect the dialogues that were going on in the classroom.

**Student 7: ...The other course was much better because it was a small group and those professors really positioned themselves, they offered what they knew and they tried to connect different views and arguments that students would present. It was a better experience... (Interview #1)**

Student 6 (a male; from Asia) further emphasized the importance and responsibility of the teacher in sharing his/her knowledge and experiences with the learners. He stated that one of his teachers would bring in his own knowledge and experiences to help students to reflect on their statements and arguments. This teacher assumed this role in the course and that is what student 6 expected teachers would do.

**Student 6: ...He is a person who also brings in whenever necessary from his own experiences, from books; so and so says this. This research, you know, they found out this thing which is either in line with**

what you saying or contradictory with what you are saying. So, **he also brings in his research experiences, knowledge and training for the benefit of the group, which I think this is what professors, must have time to do too...** (Interview #3)

He continued by saying that the many years of experiences of teachers in their fields of study should be used to benefit the learners. However, if teachers do not share their knowledge with the learners, how will they benefit from it? In this specific experience, he stated that the teacher showed a good balance in his engagement with the teaching-learning process; he did not over speak but instead he brought in the "right stuff at the right time," which was beneficial to the learners.

Student 6: ...You have got 20 years of experience behind you as researcher and as a professor. How can you use it to benefit the group? Do you see what I mean? **If you have 20 years of experience in this particular field, behind you, but if you don't provide that, don't share that with the group, how will the group benefit?** The group is going to benefit from the group members who are students who are doing research right now or who are trying to understand research. But a professor who was sitting there who might have done graduate work 20 years ago and after that in his post as a professor has been doing this so much as a research and have lots of experience. And if he doesn't share with us, how would it benefit the group? **Here I found this person never over speaking but the same time bringing the right stuff at the right time.** (Interview #3)

Student 8 shared another positive experience with another teacher. She said that this particular teacher was actively engaged in the teaching-learning process. She participated in the discussions in class and she also took upon herself the responsibility to pull together the students' remarks and ideas in order to bring the discussions to a closure and to make sense of them.

Student 8 concluded that in this class she was treated as an adult and that

learning and construction of knowledge indeed took place in this setting with this professor.

**Student 8: ...there is another professor who everyone talk, we are adults, we all have ideas but before the end of the class she says as far as I understood, Mary said so and so and so, but Maureen didn't agree with her, Sandro had a very good opinion. Now I think that what Sandro said makes sense but again... and then she pulls together, that's her role, she pulls together what people said, she didn't necessary say that, I think this is so and that's how it is. She is referring to what we said, and she said, and I think that, you know, I always thought this but what you say make sense. And she said what she thinks, and then we said well but you said so, but, and we discuss with her about what she thinks. And we can say she is right, probably she made more sense, but sometimes she would say, "You know something, you [students] have a point there." I think I learned in that class. I think I was treated as an adult, I think we constructed in that class, you see. (Interview #1)**

A couple of students spoke positively about their teaching-learning experiences when they perceived their teachers acting as a co-learner, there is, when they affirmed to be learning with the students, and when they treated learners as colleagues and valued what they had to say.

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) pointed out that in one occasion with one professor she felt like she was being treated on equal terms with the teacher. She found that experience to be very interesting, to say the least. She was impressed that the teacher would admit that he was learning with the students, and most importantly that he accepted them as they were, which meant he accepted and valued the students' views.

**Student 1: I felt we were, although we were not equal with the professor, he was treating us in equality and that was quite interesting to me. Because he would say "oh I am getting something here from you" and you would feel very impressed about that. Not only did he try to get the information from you, but he tried to say I also accept you as you are. You have something that you can share with the whole class and he**

**would make us share.** He would sit there and say; “I am wondering what you got out of this book. How did you make sense out of this book? He was telling that from the cover of the book. (Interview #3)

Student 5 (a female; from Asia) described her teacher in an advance course as a facilitator and partner. She called her a partner because the teacher respected her as a learner and valued her ideas.

S: What were the roles of the teacher and the learner in this course?

Student 5: The role of the teacher I think is **facilitator** of the dialogue, the conversation and also discussion. **Facilitator, a partner because she valued our idea.** I mean the partner is to kind of respect each other. The student same thing, a partner and also listener and contributor of ideas. (Interview #3)

Student 8 spoke of a wonderful learning climate in one class where the professor admitted to be learning with the student and where he motivated students to share their valued ideas.

S: What about the climate of learning?

Student 8: Oh, **It was wonderful. I mean the climate was great because in a class where the professor says “wow I didn’t think of it” or “I am learning”** or his comments on your..., we had to write journals for class, his comments in your journal were comments to make you think further about something and comments telling you “wow! I didn’t think about this” and “why didn’t you mention this in class.” It made me feel more comfortable about sharing. (Interview #3)

Several students also expressed their appreciation of the intervention of the teachers in providing an overview of the content to be discussed as well as in some cases providing theoretical tools for students to approach the reading and the discussions in class. Student 1 said that her teacher not only interacted with the learners but he also provided guidance and direction for learning as well as motivated students to focus on their areas of interest. He

would take time to give an overview of the reading that students were assigned to read and would try to direct students to specific areas of the readings depending on their specific interests.

Student 1: ...**The professor, you know, interacted with us, all of us, you know, because he would explain what the course was all about and from there he would tell us the readings from the following week and still he would go into detail. He would try to give us a summary of the books that we were going to read. You know he would try to make us focus our interest in certain things.** “For those who are interested in teacher preparation you must not miss this. For those who are interested in mentoring, you must not miss this.” (Interview #3)

Student 4 (a female; from Asia) compared the behavior of two teachers and explained why one approach was more effective to her than the other. The first teacher did not guide the discussion with specific questions; he/she had the students come up with their questions. This was not always easy for Student 4 because, being new in the program, she did not know what to ask. The effective approach had to do with the teacher providing some background, elaborating the general problem and asking students specific questions. The teacher was able that way to help students to connect their previous background and experiences to the reading and to the issues addressed in the classroom.

Student 4: I think the pedagogy of one is that without asking me some questions just ask you to give some questions. If you don't have you don't know what you ask and you don't know what he's talking. But **the other one, she would say something the background, the general problem and ask you specific questions, try to lead you to think in that field and of course, they are very familiar with this and then they give you some big thing and ask you, “Oh, what is your question or problem in this big topic, in this big problem? What's your solution?” Then they really help you to use your previous background to use the reading and then to answer, to think. I think it's really good.** This is really a



way to connect your reading materials, your previous background and also experiences. So, I like that course. (Interview #1)

Student 3 (a male; from Africa) shared an experience where his two teachers also provided an overview of the content before opening the class for discussion. He said that he liked the approach of the teacher because, after they would introduce the topic, they would raise some questions and the whole group including the teacher would discuss the issues as colleagues. The teacher also facilitated the sessions in a way that maintained the focus of the discussions, which was well appreciated by students.

S: Okay. What about the roles of the teacher and the learners in this course. What were their functions and tasks?

Student 3: Their roles?

S: Yeah.

Student 3: From the teacher's point of view, they were required to give guidelines. At least for the readings, as to what to be read next and also having coming to class having read whatever had to be read, introduce the theme of the week. Sort of a guide, the first few minutes of the course, like the class [is to give direction] and of course because of this way too, professors would alternate. **One would talk about one aspect and the other professor also joined in and for a couple of minutes the professors really give an overview kind of thing to the class and then start asking questions about, for example, the rhetoric or what we think about the section [of reading] and things like that. So, we take it all from there and basically the professors saw themselves as colleagues in this course, I must say.** Because their task was only to introduce and then after that we discussed all kinds of equal basis. Though of course being professors they had to bring back focus on the issue that is being discussed if some people go astray, for example. Because the discussion would go on and sometimes become out of the context of what was supposed to be discussed. (Interview # 1)

Student 9 (a male; from Latin America) said that in a specific course students and professor were able to engage in a true dialogue and discussion.

This was possible because the teacher set the tone for the learning climate. Discussions he said, were not the free content kind, they were guided by specific theories provided by the teacher. The teacher stressed the important role of theories in making sense of the readings. He also presented his own views on the reading, provided feedback to the learners, and finally, respected students' positions.

S: Let me ask you again, if you look at the classroom learning climate, what was it like?

Student 9: The class has a specific structure, **the teacher always presents a summary of the reading of the day**. A short summary and then we have a discussion about this reading and it was useful. He stressed the important role of theories for making sense of your readings. So, it was not the kind of free discussion or free content discussion. It was a discussion, which you had to use your conceptual tools like theory. In many ways he provides these theories and you don't have to buy them. You use them for some time, and then the purpose of the class seemed to me is that the students have to build, to construct their own theories. So there was this, **he presented his own conception, and also he provided tools, conceptual tools like theory. We can engage in a conversation, in a discussion, literally.** We react, we talk, we as students. Some times he is listening in a way in which he provides feedback given in the classes is very interesting. He is strong, but he also respects your position. (Interview #3)

### *Summary*

Students spoke highly of teachers whom they perceived to be co-learners and co-participants in the teaching-learning process. These teachers assumed a role in the classroom that satisfied or met the expectations of the students and made their experiences positive. Students described these teachers as those who were honest about their agenda and their knowledge with the students; who openly shared their knowledge and expertise with the

students; who took a stand on issues discussed; who treated students as colleagues and valued their opinion and point of views, who were contributors to the discussions in the classroom and helped the learning community to collective construct knowledge; who elaborated and offered overview of the content discussed in the classroom; who provided frameworks for making sense of the readings and to guide the discussions in the classroom; who demonstrated leadership in the classroom by guiding the students to focus on specific issues at hand rather than just having people talk in class and go on in tangents; who attempted to bring closure and summary to the discussions rather than leaving things on the air; and finally, who affirmed to be co-learners with the students by admitting to be learning with them and by valuing and encouraging students' contribution to the learning community.

### The Silent Teacher

When students spoke about their perceptions of the role of the teacher in the classroom, several (5) referred to the teacher as one who listens and does not talk. They saw the silent teacher as one who does not teach, does not share his/her expertise and knowledge, does not contribute to the discussion in the classroom, one who just asks questions and probes. For some students this behavior was unusual and different from their previous experiences as teachers and as learners. These students came from educational traditions where the teacher talks and leads the learners. It is clear from these students' accounts that they expected the teachers to have a

more active teaching role. Students were not necessarily against the teacher's role as a facilitator or moderator of discussions, but they were unhappy and at times frustrated with the teacher's silence and lack of contribution and participation in the learning process. The following are some of the examples shared by the students which describe their experiences and feelings about the silent teachers.

Student 9 pointed out that the teachers in his introductory course had a specific way of teaching that consisted of giving assignments for the students to read and expecting them to come to class to discuss the readings. The teachers did not talk much. Their role was to be quiet, listen and take notes.

Student 9: ...Professors they had a specific way of teaching the class, assigning the reading for the next week and when the next week comes, they pick one or two of these readings without any criteria, at least for me, and we discuss, **they don't talk too much, they listen and take notes**. They say this kind of question, "Could you elaborate?" or "What do you mean?" (Interview #1)

Another student (8) (a female; from Latin America) found herself frustrated with courses where the teacher was silent. She felt like she was not learning much in the class because the teacher was not contributing to the discussions. He/she was there just to ask questions.

Student 8: ...**the role that I saw where I felt frustrated and I said I was not learning anything, I could stay home and talk with my [husband] about what I read, is the teachers who were silent, who were hands-off. Who everybody said what they thought and they kept asking questions not necessary for you to think more, or to see where the thinking was going but just "say more, say more, why do you say that?"** (Interview #1)

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) also found her introductory course to be very stressful because of the lack of participation on the part of her teacher.

She explained that she was expecting discussion in the classroom but she was not expecting teachers being quiet and not teaching at all. She stated that in her home country there is also discussion in the classroom but the teachers also get engaged and teach. As a teacher, she said that she has her students discuss in class; however, she also teaches, but here teachers do not share any of their expertise with the students.

Student 1: ...That class was very stressful, I am telling you, very stressful. **I expected discussions in the classroom, like we usually have at home but I didn't expect professors to sit there and ask for opinions without trying to explain anything, trying to teach.** Back at home we discussed and they taught. Professors do teach. I am a professor and I do teach other students to discuss, but here is something else. They don't teach, most of them, they don't teach, in that class in particular. Let me talk about the introductory class. I felt that I was not taught. People, the two professors, I guess, have their expertise, but they never let us share their expertise in class. They are renowned professors. They have been published. They have been publishing, but they never shared with us their expertise. They were just there to drain our knowledge. (Interview #1)

Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) provided a label to these teachers who she also described as being disengaged and unwilling to share their experiences and knowledge with the students. She called them "the silent professors."

Student 7: ...They would never tell what they had studied or learned. They wouldn't share their experiences or their insight. They would offer nothing and of course there was an ideological framework to justify this position of the professors [constructivism]. **I call them the silent professors....**  
(Interview #1)

Besides frustrating some students, teachers' silence also left students in the dark as far as understanding their teacher's thoughts, interests, and knowledge. Students felt that they did not know exactly where teachers stood

on any of the issues discussed, since they did not share their views with the class. Students also felt at a loss in not being able to share the teacher's expertise and knowledge.

In response to a question about how should learners and teachers interact, Student 9 explained that he would like more interactions with the teachers. He stated that he is still curious about what his teachers know about their field of study. He believes that they know what he thinks because he participated in the discussion and they heard him. However, since the teachers do not talk, he does not know them or what they know.

S: How should teachers and learners interact?

Student 9: They have to respect more in what the other people already have, what they want with the doctoral program and what they think about their work. I would prefer less reading and more interactions with my teacher. **I am still curious about what they think about this field. I don't know. I think they know what I think but I don't know what they think. I don't know what are the conceptual tools that they are using for making sense of these readings. I wish I can know more about them...** (Interview #1)

Student 7 pointed out that as a student she wants to hear what the views of her teachers are; and, in fact, it is the teacher's obligation to share his/her knowledge with students. And if students are sharing their knowledge with teachers through papers or discussion, they should have the right to know the teacher's knowledge too.

S: You agree that it is a good way of teaching, having people interact and share and so on?

Student 7: Of course, but **as a student, I want a teacher to tell me what he has learned, what he views or she views.** I think that is the obligation of the teacher and they are paid to do that. I am paying as a student, in my country we don't pay but it's the same. **It's his/her**

**obligation to share his/her knowledge. Of course, I am sharing mine in the exams and everything. They are grading me so I have the right to know their knowledge too. (Interview #1)**

Student 1 also expressed her desire of having her teacher share his/her knowledge with the class. She said that this did not happen.

**Student 1: ...I should think that something was wrong in that class because I always wanted to hear their take in everything they were teaching us. It didn't come out; they didn't give it to us. (Interview #1)**

She went on to explain that she understands that in this country professors do not want to spoon feed the students, but that she was still expecting the teachers or scholars to be more engaged and more involved in the discussion, instead of just asking people to talk about the reading.

**Student 1: ...I know that in this country they say that they don't want to spoon feed us, but when you read some of this prospective for sure, they will be telling you about how experienced our professors are here, how they are well known. When you sit in front of the person, the scholar, you expect that scholar to lead you into a discussion. Just because they are brilliant they will come up with ways in leading you into a discussion, but what would happen then was they would come to class and say what do you think the readings for this week are about? You start to blah, blah and from there it would be like, is that all? They will keep on saying that, "is that all?" I don't think that is the way discussions should be lead... (Interview #1)**

Teachers' silence also led students to have misconceptions about what teachers do here. Students at times sounded sarcastic with their description of how they perceived the teacher's role, but they also made serious remarks which expressed their dissatisfaction with how teachers behave in the classroom. Students thought that the teachers come to class unprepared to teach, that they were unwilling to share their knowledge with the students, that they are in class to drain students' knowledge, etc.

Student 1 said that she felt like some of her professors were not prepared to teach, and since they were not prepared to teach, they would give students a lot of material to read.

**Student 1: I would say that some professors were not prepared. They were not well prepared to teach us. I feel strongly about that that some professors were not well prepared to teach us, instead they would give us a lot of materials... (Interview #1)**

She also expressed that at times she viewed the teacher's role in the class as one of draining students' knowledge. They wanted to hear from the students but were never willing to share their own expertise with the class.

**Student 1: ...the two professors, I guess, have their expertise, but they never let us share their expertise in class. They are renowned professors. They have been published. They have been publishing, but they never shared with us their expertise. They were just there to drain our knowledge. (Interview #1)**

Student 9 and 7 had similar perceptions as student 1 about the reason why teachers do not talk. Student 9 believes that there is a lack of preparation on the part of some teachers. He said that teachers do not participate because they probably did not read the assignments.

**Student 9: ...Which is the specific role of teacher? I think I made the point of what is the role of teacher here. Teacher don't talk, they listen. Because they didn't have the time to read the papers either or the books. (Interview #1)**

Student 7 expressed the same view about the lack of preparation on the part of the teachers.

**Student 7: ...And maybe this is something I have been thinking about lately, he [the teacher] was there to have students read a whole bunch of stuff that I doubt they had read the same week we were reading. Maybe they hadn't read some of the stuff, maybe they had read some of the stuff years ago but maybe they gave us all those readings to read**



and the opportunity to speak about the readings as an exploratory thing. Maybe they wanted to see what we could come up with and maybe they would learn from us. (Interview #1)

She believes that they are busy researchers and that they do not have the time to read and prepare for teaching, and therefore they invent rationalizations to excuse themselves from teaching.

Student 7: ...But, they were not there to teach us about what they themselves had learned so that we could consider their views and elaborate our views even in accordance to their views or in contrast to their views. **I have thought that busy researchers do not have time to become good teachers, so they invent those rationalizations like these constructivist, you know, things,** but I myself from my own experience I remember how many years it took me teaching the same course to be able to give very good lecture on a topic offering like a broad view and at the same time an interesting theory illustrated with concrete examples from our real life. (Interview #1)

Student 6 (a male; from Asia) expressed that in his experience in proseminar he felt like the teachers basically played the role of a moderator. They did not present any formal lecture, and they were unwilling to share their expertise and knowledge.

Student 6: ...they [teachers] were playing the role of moderator for discussion in the classroom. There were no formal lectures although I wouldn't want lectures all the time in the classroom. **There were no formal lectures about issues, about topics. As far as of presentations by the professors-** there was almost none, which I think this is very important. At least part of the 3 hour seminar they could have had parts of it information shared from the expert knowledge they had. Because one of the professors is a very prolific writer in many of the issues we talked about in the classroom... **He has written a lot but what lacked in my opinion was, he was not willing, there was no opportunity for him to share his expert knowledge....** (Interview #1)

Student 8 (a female; from Latin America) explained to one of her teachers how she viewed the behavior of silent teachers. She illustrated her views by comparing the silent teachers here with unsupervised teachers in her

country. She said that unsupervised teachers in her country would come to class unprepared to teach and would just ask students to talk about what they read. She concluded by saying that this is the type of behavior she has observed here with some of the teachers in her classes.

Student 8: ... Oh! I must tell you this. I asked one of the professors, the same one I had the problems, because by that time I was more confident, I could talk I did not have an assistantship in the college, I didn't think I depended on anyone. I asked, I told her my impression of the class. I said, **the impression I get, the fact that there are no comments, no closure, no anything, the impression I get, and I am telling you this because this is what happened in my country, I said; In my country some people have more than one job and when they work at schools where there are lots of supervision and so forth, they do a good job, but they go to the public schools and no one supervise them they ask the students OK, so tell me what you read today, and everybody talks, and that's how I feel. So, some of the classes that's what I felt, they just sat there and said OK, so, let's talk about the reading, and everybody talked and the class was over.** (Interview #1)

Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) viewed the silence of teachers not only as a passive behavior but also, in fact, as a betrayal to the students. She stated that she hated this position taken by some of her teachers. The teachers, she said, would not say anything about the content being discussed in class. They would never share their experiences, insights, or what they had studied or learned. They would offer nothing.

Student 7: ...The experience in prosem 1 for me was horrible. It was agony. It was suffering. It was miserable. I hated it because we were a whole bunch of people. Some of us were international students, some were Americans and we got a syllabus with a certain scheme that we should consider in analyzing the topic the course proposed. **But the professors wouldn't say anything about the content that was supposed to be discussed in the class.** We had a huge amount of readings to do every week, around ten short articles. Then we would come to class and we should be prepared to say interesting, intelligent and insightful things about the readings while the professor, one of them

by the way was a [specific field of study], **those professors would never say a word about American education. They would never tell what they had studied or learned. They wouldn't share their experiences or their insight. They would offer nothing...** I hated that and the more I think about that I come to the conclusion that **a professor who is silent in the classroom, he is really betraying the student.** (Interview #1)

She continued by arguing that teachers have the moral and professional obligation to inform students about the latest developments and issues in the discipline they teach. Of course, this is impossible to happen if teachers are unwilling to talk. She said that teachers must know something about the discipline if they are teaching the course. And it is essential that they share that knowledge with the learning community they are attempting to create in the classroom so that students can continue building on that knowledge and thus advance the field of education.

Student 7: **...I really think that a professor who has spent years and years of his life studying well certain topics, he has the moral and professional obligation to inform the student of the latest development of the issue.** He's not supposed to expect that the student starts from scratch and reads everything they read during their career. The new generation has to learn from the old generation just to bear these psychological frameworks. Because if we are supposed to learn, we have to start learning from the point they are and if we are supposed to give a contribution to advance knowledge we are here in school to become researchers, etc., so we have to start from the point where they are now and develop and advance from that point on. (Interview #1)

Besides not providing their insight and input on the discussions in the classroom, some teachers also did not provide feedback to the learners as they carried on conversations with other learners in class. Student 8, for instance, explained that not receiving any feedback or reply to her suggestions and comments in class made her feel like what she had to say did not matter. She said that she would have liked to hear some kind of reply to her

comments, anything, agreement or disagreement. The teachers' silence and body language of impatience toward her made her feel frustrated and disrespected as an adult.

S: What created the frustration? What were the points that you can say these are the things that created frustration...

Student 8: The frustration arrived, and I think it has something to do with not treating people as if they were adults. **When you speak, even a child when they speak they want people to listen to them to what they are saying, and you make some comments whether good or bad. But you have something to say about what the person is saying.** Another frustration is that the group who were there, the group of adults like me, younger than I am, I was the only foreigner in the group, everyone else were Caucasian and from the U.S. and a lot of them from Michigan. **I was the only person who spoke differently, and even with the two, the team teachers, there was an impatience when I spoke. What I said was not important enough to say: I don't agree with you, or why do you say that, that doesn't sound like it makes sense. Even if they told me that they were listening to me, but I talked, and we went on to other things.** (Interview #1)

The student was frustrated not only because she did not received any comments or feedback on her ideas but also because she perceived teachers being impatient with her about her language skills. Although a couple of other students (2 and 9) made mention of language being a barrier for taking part on the discussion in the classroom, student 8 was the only one who made mention of the teachers being impatient or insensitive with her language skills. Her point, however, is that what was mostly frustrating to her was to have not received any feedback on her comments and point of view.

In one occasion Student 8 confronted one of her teachers about the lack of feedback and direction in the class. The student decided to write in one of

her journal entries about her feelings about the class. She expressed her need for direction and more clear expectations.

**Student 8: ...In that particular course, one of the journals we wrote I decided that instead of referring to the material that we had to read, I wrote a journal about what I was feeling in class. And I told them that I felt like I was in an airplane and we were going into a storm and the pilot didn't even advise to put on our seat belts. And we could get knocked out of the plane, bump our head or whatever and that was no difference. I mean, then I said, I don't want you to tell me what to do, or how to do it but at least tell me what the parameters are in the course, let me know what to expect. (Interview #1)**

After reading the journal entry, the teacher invited the student for a meeting. She responded to the student's complaint by arguing that this is one of the problems she has with students from certain parts of the world, "They want to be told."

**Student 8: ...So, after I wrote that journal the professor invited me to sit with her and talk. And I was very upset because she said that this is one of the problems she had with students from, Asian students and Latin American students that they want to be told, that they don't want to think, that they don't want to do things, and that to me was very insulting. (Interview #1)**

The student argued right back because she felt disrespected by that comment. She refuted the comment made by the teacher by saying that this was not true about Latin American students. She explained that in her country teachers lectured but that does not mean that they have the final word. She stated that, after a lecture, the teacher opens the class for discussion and students can question the view of the teachers. But the voice of the teacher is heard and appreciated by the students because they expect that the teacher

knows the subject he/she is teaching and their expertise will contribute to the students' knowledge.

**Student 8: ...And I told her, I don't know about Asian students, but let me tell you about Latin American students, I said we come from a country, at least the ones I know, that at the university level, the teacher lectures, but that doesn't mean that we agree with what the teacher says, when he finishes lecturing then we open the discussion and we discuss on what the teacher said. But if he is the professor he knows, we have confidence that he knows the subject, the content more than we do, so he has something to add to what we know and we can question his reasoning, we may not be able to question his information, but we can question his reasoning... (Interview #1)**

She continued by saying that here, however, it is very different because students never hear what teachers are thinking. She said that she would have liked to know what teachers think about her thinking process but she never received any constructive feedback.

**Student 8: ...here we talk and talk and talk and we never hear what you are thinking. And if you are the person who has the knowledge, I am interested in knowing what you are thinking about what I say. I write my journals and you have never, either of you have never said this is good idea or anything. (Interview #1)**

The professor then responded to this with another argument. She told the student that it was not important for the student to know what the teacher thought about her thinking.

**Student 8: ...And she said: is that important? What I think about what you think is not important. So I said: no? And she said: no. Because you construct your own ideas and you construct your understanding, and that is what is important. (Interview #1)**

Student 8 did not agree with the teacher's stand on this. She argued that it is important for her to know what the teacher thinks about her thinking

because in the end the teacher is the one who will make a judgment on the student's paper. So she said that if the teacher was going to grade her, she would like to know what are the criteria for this evaluation because knowing these criteria would help her to assess her own progress. However, she did not get any of that.

**Student 8: ...and I said: and do I grade myself? If whatever I say is good, that means that everybody gets the same grade. But if you are going to decide, it means that you are making some kind of decision about what I am thinking, and if you are going to make decision about what I am thinking, I think I should know what kind of decisions those are. So I know if I am in the right track, I am not thinking in the right way, I am not reasoning logically, and then I can see where I am going wrong, but there is no comment about anything. (Interview #1)**

Even after this conversation, the professor did not change her position on the issue and the student maintained her own. The student said that the teacher's position may sound logical but it doesn't make sense to her as the student. Finally the professors decided to ask other students how they were perceiving the class, and they also expressed some frustration with the course.

**Student 8: So, she insisted that it is not important to know what she thinks. And I said as the professor it might sound logical to say that but as a student it doesn't make sense. And then what they did, because apparently even though I was the only foreigner the problem was not mine alone. What they did then, is they asked the other students, to write how they felt about the class so far. (Interview #1)**

### *Paradoxical use of constructivist approach to teaching*

Several students talked about their perceptions of the reasons why some teachers choose the silent role in the classroom. They talked about these teachers' behavior as one of trying to implement constructivism in the

classroom. However, some of them expressed that these teachers' views on constructivism may not have been correct and in some situations the implementation of their constructivist teaching approach may have been contradictory. That is, students said that at times what teachers taught and what they practice were incompatible. Also, some teachers practice a constructivist approach of teaching in certain aspects of the teaching-learning process but not through all of it.

Student 7 explained that her perception about the reason why some teachers choose to be silent was that they did not want to influence students' ideas and ways of thinking. She said that teachers seem to believe that students say things to please teachers and therefore they did not want to influence students. She concluded that this was the teachers' position in what they believe a constructivist teaching approach should look like. She disagreed with this position and stated that teachers' silence in the classroom is really a betrayal of students.

Student 7: ...They would offer nothing and of course that was an ideological framework to justify this position of the professors. I call them the silent professors. **They were doing constructivist approach to teaching and learning. They didn't want to influence our learning and our ideas because they thought that students say things to please professors**, so that was the zeal they had about us and that's the posture they assumed in the classroom. I hated that and the more I think about that I come to the conclusion that a professor who is silent in the classroom, he is really betraying the student. (Interview #1)

Student 7 discussed this issue again in another interview. She pointed out that, though teachers may believe that they are being constructivist by allowing students to talk and voice their opinion, and by not throwing their



knowledge onto the students, she said that she would have liked to have teachers talk. She explained that she would have liked to have them share their knowledge and expertise with the class so that she and the other students could know the teachers' views better and profit from their knowledge. She inferred that this did not mean that she would simply take this knowledge on face value; rather she would reflect on it and try to use it to build on her own knowledge base.

**Student 7: ...Though, some of them think that they are really progressive, constructivist, democratic. They are giving the words to the students, right? Giving voice. The students should be happy because they can say anything, right? In the classroom. They are not lecturing, they are not throwing knowledge down onto you, but I want someone to throw his knowledge down onto me so that I know what he is really talking about where he comes from and where he wants to get at, you see. So, that I can profit some how, I can, how do you say, get a ride with you. It doesn't mean that I am going to stay at the point where you are. Maybe you are much ahead of me. Maybe your choice and my choice won't be the same, right? But, at least I can take a ride. (Interview #3)**

Student 8 explained that she does not agree that what some teachers enact in the classroom is a constructivist approach to teaching. She argued that constructivism is not about having a therapy session in the classroom. It is not about students just coming to class and talking about their feelings, and it is not about teachers being disengaged in the classroom discourse. A constructivist teacher facilitates learning by sharing his knowledge and by intervening in the classroom discussion when appropriate.

**Student 8: I don't think facilitating means hands-off. It means that I will sit down and everyone just say whatever they want, to me that is not facilitating learning. I think Macedo and Freire have a paper on something like that, where they say that in many cases the idea of**

**constructivism as they have seen developed here is like a therapy. Everybody comes and talk and say how they feel, and what they think and we feel good about it and it's done. But that's not it. There has to be some intervention, and the person who is more capable of intervening is the person who is in the role of the teacher because they are, supposedly have the knowledge and the understanding of the content so that they are able to intervene when it is necessary. (Interview #1)**

Student 9 (a male; from Latin America) explained, as he was discussing good and bad courses in his academic experience, that he believed that some teachers were confused about their teaching conception. They seemed to have wanted to be constructivist but what ended up happening was that they confused the students. He inferred that not talking, giving insufficient feedback, and not assessing students needs are not what he understands to be the roles of a constructivist teacher and that is the behavior that some of his teachers enacted.

**Student 9: ...I think a bad course is when the professor or the teacher holds a double philosophy of teaching. I mean sometimes he wants to be constructivist, but in fact he or she is not. They are confused about his/her own conception of teaching. So he/she is not clear yet. Because he doesn't want to give lectures, he said to be constructivist but being constructivist, I don't mean that I don't agree with constructivism, I do agree, but there is some kind of constructivists that are just confusing with their students. Because they don't talk, because they give this feedback almost nothing, and because they don't spend time trying to figure out what you want. They have spent time in thinking what they want for the class. But they don't give time to students. You can see that in the kind of feedback that you get. (Interview #3)**

Student 9 explained also that he experienced a double standard of implementation of constructivism in his introduction course. He said that the relationship between learners and teachers in the course seemed very informal. Teachers were called by their first name, which was different from his

experience back home. However, he said that this informality only appeared to be true while in the classroom. That is, during classroom discussion teachers were very open and informal but when they had to grade the students teachers became very formal and traditional. He stated that it was almost like having two standards, one for the classroom and one for grading.

S: [What was the learning climate like?]

Student 9: It looked very informal, it was a kind of shocking for me. The kind of experience that I have about teaching and learning in college education is very different. Here the **teachers were very informal, I call them by their first name rather than calling them doctors** which is the way I talk with my teachers in my home university. **The relationship** between professor and myself, and classmate and myself were very similar. **It was very, very informal.** But it looked like, **but when they have to grade your paper, they change this relation, you don't know why and they become very formal and very demanding and very different.** So, it seems to me that they have **two standards for dealing with classes. One is the informal standard they show in the classroom and the other is the real standard when they grade you.** (Interview #1)

I asked student 9 what was different about the two standards. He replied that, from his point of view, the teachers were not really formal. However, he explained that the issue is that teachers work in the classroom from the rhetoric that there are no right answer and that anything goes during discussions. However, the truth is that they have some of the answers. They have an agenda and they use it to make judgments on the students' papers. So, it appears as if they have two standards of relating with students -- one in the classroom which is informal and where learners can talk openly without their ideas being judged, and one when grading the students' work, which is formal and evaluative.

S: What was the difference between these two? Were they more formal when they were grading?

Student 9: I think they are not formal. My position is that they want to show a kind of constructivist environment in the everyday classes and then when they grade you, they become very formal in the sense that they become very didactic. Traditional teachers, they know the answers but in the process they are working with the rhetoric that, there are no right answer, that there are not perfect answers. This is the feeling that I have from these prosemin classes. ... they look very open in the everyday interaction but in the assessment of the papers, they already have an agenda and I was very frustrated about that. (Interview #1)

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) also spoke about the issue of different standards adopted by the teachers in the classroom and during grading. She said that, in the classroom, students were encouraged to explore and talk and the teacher listened without any comments as if all the students were saying was fine. What concerned her was that although teachers did not provide any feedback to students' ideas nor shared their beliefs about what was discussed in the classroom, they would be grading her not in relation to what she said in class, but in relation to their (the teachers') theoretical perspectives. But these perspectives were not shared with the students and therefore were unknown to them.

Student 1: ... They [teachers] don't say anything, you know. They don't tell you their pain [their stories]. I mean, even if they haven't told you where they stand in those issues, they are going to grade you. You know, with their theoretical background. They are not going to take into consideration that this is what you said in class and they never said a thing. You know, they ask to explore, talk and talk. Yet, they do have their own understanding of issues. They don't talk about them and when you write papers, they grade you along their understanding. (Interview #1)

Student 8 expressed frustration with the constructivist approach implemented in one of her courses. She explained that the teacher's lack of participation did not help her. Since teachers did not provide any comment or feedback to learners, she was unsure if the ideas and thought process she was sharing with the class made sense. She argued that in real life our ideas and thought processes need to be validated and placed against a body of knowledge that has been developed and established. So, she seemed to infer with these comments that the teacher, who has probably more expertise in the content, should intervene and, in fact, correct students thoughts and ideas if they are not in line with the body of knowledge which has been validated in the literature.

**Student 8: I never knew if what I was thinking made sense or not. I didn't know. And it was the first time I was reading that author and it was a very difficult author. Everyone was struggling with him, and I didn't know if I was making sense. And there was never a comment that: this is a good interpretation, this is a good idea, always, what do you mean? say more, develop, always questions always questions, and then we spoke even a little about constructivism, and I said I think the idea around here about constructivism is not what constructivism is, we construct our understanding of things because of all that we bring but there is a cannon out there and we are measured on the cannon, so we can't disregard the cannon. As much as we want to say so, what makes things work out in the long run is that we have something that is what we accept as a reality, whether we construct it or not. But if I am off the wall even though it is my own ideas and I am constructing it, no one wants me to work with them, I am off the wall. And I have to be measured against something to be considered that I am not making sense. So, I need to know if I am making sense. (Interview #1)**

Student 8 also explained that when this feedback and intervention are lacking students are in some way being cheated by the teachers. The reason is that since one's ideas are not being challenged or corrected when needed;

in the classroom, one tends to write about those ideas thinking that all that one is saying makes sense – only to later learn that this was not the case.

**Student 8: ... if I am in a course and I did discuss everyday on my own way of seeing things and I have no idea that, OK, so, this doesn't make sense. When I write my paper, I write it in the same way. But when the paper is being graded it is not graded in relation to what I think or how I think the thought process should be, it is graded within the context of what the powers that be understand the thought processes to be. So, when you have a discussion in class and those things are not made, OK, when they are not explicit, the students are being cheated in a sense. Because here you are saying all these things that you think are so great or so wonderful and no one says: where did you get that idea from? How can you come to that conclusion? Does that sound logical? And you think, wow, this is great and you go write it. (Interview #1)**

Student 4 (a female; from Asia) explained that the climate in one of her classes was constructivist, where learners would talk, make arguments and construct knowledge, and this was positive for her. However one aspect that she found to be missing, which is similar to what the other participants have mentioned above, was the participation of the teacher. She said that the students were having difficulty learning the material and they ended up requesting that the teacher offer some instruction on the topics discussed.

S: What did the classroom learning climate look like in this course?

Student 4: Kind of constructive learning. I think people read and make sense of the argument, and discuss. Kind of seminar and people construct, but we always wish the teacher can lecture because it is too hard to understand. I think this is basically one of the courses that people requested the teacher to lecture a little while. (Interview #3)

Student 8's statement below seems to summarize some students' feelings about the constructivist teaching approach they experienced, especially in their proseminar class. It seems that, although teachers taught

about constructivism, they failed to apply it. They failed to assess and incorporate learners' needs and interests in the teaching-learning process and to make explicit the "need to know."

Student 8: ...even though they talk a lot about constructivism, we were never asked how could we benefit from this class. (Interview #1)

### *Summary*

The silence of teachers caused a negative and frustrating experience for several of the students. They seemed to have been frustrated because they were expecting to hear the voice of the teacher in the teaching-learning process. They were not necessarily against the teacher's role as a facilitator, which was a common role for teachers in the program, but they were frustrated with their lack of engagement in the teaching-learning process. Silent teachers did not share their experiences and knowledge, did not comment on students remarks, did not provide feedback, did not elaborate on the content discussed, did not bring discussions to a closure, and did not make their theoretical framework views explicit to the students. They were silent.

There was an ideological framework that justified these teachers' silence. They may have been practicing their interpretation of constructivism. Their practice, however, was not comparable with several of the students who were expecting a more engaged teacher in the teaching-learning process. They wanted to hear the teachers' voices and what they had to offer since they were teaching the course and had probably been studying that field for many

years. Therefore, the teachers' silence was not well received by the students; rather, it was frustrating, seen as contributing to a negative experience with the teaching-learning process, and finally seen as a betrayal to the learning community in the classroom.

### Summary of International Students' Perceived Experiences

International students' accounts of their perceived experiences fell distinctly under positive and negative experiences with the teaching-learning process. Students made clear distinctions about what was effective and what was ineffective about their experiences. As far as the role of participation is concerned, positive experiences were seen as those where:

- the teacher and learners could negotiate in the planning and implementation of the teaching-learning process;
- learners were given the freedom to develop their own agenda in the course;
- discussions were centered on relevant topics which affected the educational interests of the learners;
- learners' prior experiences were included in the discussion process;
- teachers provided guidance and background to the topics discussed;
- teachers elaborated on the problem to be discussed before opening it for group discussion;
- teachers participated in the classroom discussion as expert as well as co-learners;
- teachers provided effective feedback during classroom discussion as well as in writing assignments; and



- the amount of reading was minimized so that learners' could read for understanding.

Negative experiences were characterized as those where:

- students seemed to be competing to talk in class;
- there is no attempt from the group to collectively construct knowledge;
- learners' goals, interests and background are not taken into consideration;
- teachers do not provide background on the topic discussed;
- international students are not motivated to participate in the discussions;
- norms of participation are not made explicit; and
- discussions and topics are dispersed, segmented and lack theoretical framework.

As far as the role of learners' prior experiences, effective teaching-learning processes were characterized as those where learners' prior experiences are valued by the community of learners, where international students are encouraged to share and connect their reading assignments and writing exercises with their home experiences, where teachers attempt to draw international students' prior experiences into the classroom discussions, where teachers treat students as adults by respecting their history and the knowledge they brought to the classroom as professionals. Negative experiences were characterized by the opposite of what I mentioned above. In these ineffective situations where students' prior experiences were ignored, they felt like they were not treated as adults and professionals and that frustrated them.

Finally, as far as the role of the teacher, students perceived experiences to be positive when they had teachers who were engaged and connected in the teaching-learning process and negative experiences when their teachers were silent.

What would international students ideally prefer their teaching-learning experiences to be like?

In order to assess international students' ideal teaching-learning experiences I asked them to reflect on the different aspects of the teaching-learning transaction described above in this study. More specifically, they were asked about their preferences concerning each of the following aspects of the teaching-learning process:

- a. the learning climate;
- b. the roles of the teacher and the learner;
- c. teacher-learner interaction;
- d. the instructional approaches;
- e. the roles of the teacher and learners in the decision making process of course content and course requirements;
- f. relationship of course content to educational goals;
- g. role of learners' prior experiences; and
- h. evaluation process.

International students were very vocal in expressing what their ideal teaching-learning experiences would look like. On several occasions these ideal conditions of learning were present in what they had experienced in some

of their courses. Thus, when they spoke of preferred ways of learning, they restated aspects of what they had described as positive experiences. They also discussed their preferred teaching-learning experiences by contrasting those to the negative experiences they have gone through in other courses. They did that by describing what could have been done differently to improve those negative experiences.

Presented below are these nine international students' descriptions of what they prefer their teaching-learning experiences to be. Participants' comments are organized under the three domains discussed above -- that is, the role of participation, the role of learner's prior experiences, and the role of the teacher.

In order to emphasize some of the points I intend to illustrate about these international students' preferred conditions of learning, I have provided excerpts from the interviews with the participants. In some of these excerpts I have put part of the text in bold to call the readers' attention to the important statements made by the students which further emphasize these points. As mentioned above, in order to preserve participants' voices, I have chosen to present the excerpts from the interviews as they were spoken by the international students.

### Preferred Role of Participation in the Teaching-Learning Process

What were international students' preferred views on participation?

The quotes under the following subheadings describe international students' thoughts on what would have been an ideal teaching-learning transaction as far as the participation of teacher and learners in the educational process. As will be shown, overall, students prefer a teaching-learning process where they can participate in the planning of their learning activities. Also they believe that in an ideal teaching-learning process both teachers and learners should participate in the classroom discourse by sharing their knowledge and experiences with the classroom learning community.

### Developing Frameworks to Guide the Discussion Process

Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) stressed the importance of teachers developing universal categories and frameworks in order to incorporate all learners in the participation process. She said that she did not have a chance to talk about her experiences in her courses. She wished that she would have been able to, not because she likes to talk about herself but because she wanted to be able to exchange experiences with other students. She would have liked to talk about these experiences under categories and frameworks that are more universal and inclusive of all students' experiences. She said, however, that this type of approach was not adopted very often in her courses.

Student 7: No, I never had a chance to talk about my experience. On the other hand let me say this, I'm not the type of person that is dying to tell about her own experience just to tell my own experiences to people. **I want to be able to talk with people who have different experiences based on some type of categories that can reach my experience and other people's experience. Those categories do exist. So when I claim that we needed some more universal perspective in the courses here, I complained about that before to professor and people here. That's what I meant. If this is a university, you're supposed to talk in a language in which you can fit your experience different people with diverse experience can fit their experience and make sense of their experiences and communicate among themselves without prejudices and misunderstandings.** But, I don't think the most of the courses are concerned with this type of approach, some are. The ones which are, they really adopt explicit frameworks and they adopt various frameworks. (Interview #1)

She went on to provide an example from one of her courses where this type of approach was used. She concluded that, when there is a clear and explicit framework, students can engage in a more cohesive and productive discussion because they can speak the same language which is guided by these specific categories and frameworks.

Student 7: ...For instance, a course I had with [a teacher] we could analyze different issues and curriculum and teaching according to a positivist framework, critical theory framework, feminist framework. **When there is a clear, explicit framework that our people know what its about, they can discuss a variety of experiences but they are kind of speaking the same language, they can present a different view and different aspect, they can disagree but at least they can say "well I think this experience is going to benefit the students in this way" and someone else can say "I think this experience is going to benefit the students in this way," and someone else can say "I think this might make it harder for students in that way," but I can say "oh I disagree but I know what you're saying," you see?** (Interview #1)

Student 9 (a male; from Latin America) agreed with Student 7 that in a good course participants should be provided with theories and frameworks for discussion in order for them to develop a common language. He also added

that students should be able to make decisions on the projects they want to work on, and that their papers should be related to their own research. He also said that teachers need to develop a relationship of trust with learners. He implied that this can happen by teachers sharing their knowledge with students and by being more explicit about their teaching beliefs.

S: What makes a good course?

**Student 9: For me is, having structure, having theories and having framework. Developing a common language during the class, that is important. Giving students a room for doing their own project. Using old papers [he wrote] that was important for me. Connecting your own paper with your own life with your research. And I think that the student also needs to feel that the professor knows what he is talking about. I think there is a relationship which needs trust. You need to trust. And the philosophy of teaching is more explicit. For me that's what it is. (Interview #3)**

### Organizing the Participation Process

Four students offered suggestions on ways in which participation could be organized in order to be more effective to their learning.

Students 6 (a male; from Asia) pointed out three things that he prefers in a classroom learning climate. First, he believes that the social interaction of the learners is essential in creating a community. He said that students come from a variety of professional backgrounds and it is very important that learners and teachers get to know each other so that they do not feel like strangers in the classroom.

S: What do you prefer the classroom learning climate to be like in a course? What should it be like?

**Student 6: The three things I want to say. The three things I want to talk about now. First is the formal teaching classroom. You start a class with**

graduate students in a classroom. **I will expect some kind of introduction all the time. Opportunity for students to get to know each other. Both the students getting to know the professor and getting to know the fellow students. That should be one important thing which I think should be done. Because we are adults in a classroom. We come from different parts of the world and there are teachers who are from other places who are there. But most of the time we feel like total strangers unless the 13 or 14 times in the whole semester you sit next with somebody, one on the left and the right. It's only time you get to talk to them. ...So that's one thing I think, some way of trying to get people to talk to each other and try to have opportunities to work together even on class term papers. (Interview #1)**

His second point was that the reading assignments were not achieving the expected goals that the College might have had established for students. He said that the reading was overwhelming students because of the amount of material they had to read, but it was not helping them to look into the issues in depth. He believed that students were not benefiting from it.

Student 6: ...Then a second point is, it is, I don't know, this university or the college may be doing this for whatever purpose they might have on their mind. The amount of reading materials they give, but it is certainly not working the way they want it to work, I think. That is my perception. It might be a strategy to overwhelm people just coming to a program. You know? That came up that much of reading. Again I'm saying they might have their own objectives, but generally on my part and what I talk to my friends I think it is not working what it should work. Why? Because **people are not really benefitting from the readings. It is like you have the breadth, but you don't have the deep understanding- that is -- you cover a lot things. You seem to cover a lot things, a lot of topics, but are you really going through to great understanding? really bring out the discussion from there? I really doubt it very much. (Interview #1)**

He also explained that some of the material read was foreign to international students and difficult to understand. Since no relationship was built among learners, students did not get together to help each other.

Student 6: ...More importantly for people who are coming from other countries- when somebody talks about Horace Mann, there is reading material from that, I don't know anything about Horace Mann. And it is a

very American concept. We have never heard, international students that come here, know, they have never heard about Horace Mann. ...And you're supposed to read and supposed to have the background information to understand the text. ...Again, going back to my first point -- **since you don't have that cordial relationship among friends in the classroom, you hardly get any help from anybody. If I have, if in the classroom we develop a kind of cordial relationship among friends, among students. If I had difficulty in the first time I been here I can immediately call up somebody, I can talk to, "Can I meet you for coffee and can we talk about this?" At least you are connected.** It was like once a week you meet, after that you're just totally on your own. And you're like blind folded and you are going into a forest. And it makes a lot more sense if these things are taken into account. (Interview #1)

Finally, he said that the teaching-learning approach should focus more on the quality of participation. He suggested that the 3 hour class could be restructured to provide for more small group work and learners' presentation of their work to each other, so that learners would have a deeper understanding of the material studied.

Student 6: ...And third point I think I want to make is the teaching and learning strategy. **There has to be more participation among students. When I say participation I'm actually trying to ask for qualitative changes in student participation.** What I mean by qualitative change is -- there was participation, there were people talking, there were people participating. That's not what I mean. I mean it's like group work. **The three hours can be used more effectively in terms of getting students to work in groups, group [study in order to go deep], have a deep understanding of the materials and do presentation for class.** Have groups presenting and trying to have counter arguments where you can go into it. (Interview #1)

When asked what kind of course structure would be more appropriate for her learning, Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) said that it would be one in which the teacher provides a theoretical context from which learners can address a problem or issue. She said that when the problem has been



situated and a framework has been provided for the discussion then she can formulate her own perspective on the issue at hand.

S: What kind of a structure do you believe would be appropriate and would be adequate for your learning?

Student 7: **For my learning and for anyone's learning and for any teaching, I think people [teachers] have to situate the issue or a problem, they have to situate it in space and time. In a historical context. In what I call a theoretical context.** They have to say things like okay, we are going to analyze, try to answer, this particular question, why do people ask this question? Whether they ask this question? When do they ask this kind of question, what issues has been provided? I think a professor has to offer this kind of framework. We are talking about this and why are we talking about this. Is this an educational problem? When, where, how, etc., right? and what have been people, researchers, scholars, been saying about this problem? and then like me a student, I can see how the professor is framing the question or what are the, let's say, what is the knowledge that has been produced about this particular issue and I can interact with that and then I can situate myself in that, right? From that point on I can develop my own view, my own take on that issue. (Interview #3)

She went on to say that providing this structure or framework is essential for her learning because as a foreign student she is not familiar with the educational terrain or discourse here. In order for her to be able to engage in meaningful dialogues, she needs someone who will start this dialogue by giving a picture or framing the problem to be discussed.

Student 7: ...Specially being a foreigner I have to dialogue with people who, how can I say, who show me a certain terrain, right? Because **I am not familiar with that kind of terrain being a foreigner. I don't know the educational discourse that has been developed here.** I don't know the particular problems that have been happening here so **in order for me to engage in a dialogue, I need someone to start the dialogue by describing a picture for me so that I can look at that picture, consider it, and then engage in a dialogue** because I have my own picture that I bring from my previous experience, and my previous experience is a foreign experience, right? (Interview #3)

As far the interaction in the classroom between teachers and learners, Student 9 hoped that there would be more sharing by both parties. He hoped for more interaction with his teachers rather than doing reading assignment so that he would have a better notion of what his teachers' points of view were. He also hoped to have had the opportunity to share writings with classmates, one thing that he said was not done because he believes American students do not feel comfortable sharing their work. Thus, he hoped for a more open interaction with both teachers and other learners and that both would share their work.

S: How should teachers and learners interact?

Student 9: **They have to respect more in what the other people already have, what they want with the doctoral program and what they think about their work. I would prefer less reading and more interaction with my teacher.** I am still curious about what they think about this field. I don't know. I think they know what I think but I don't know what they think. I don't know what are the conceptual tools that they are using for making sense of these readings. I wish I can know more about them. The same idea holds for my classmates too. **American students they don't share their writing** so I finish here my courses and I haven't read no one's paper from American students. I have no idea how they write. I know how the international students write. They share. I read one paper from one American. **I think interaction should be more open. We should share the papers.** Its not easy to share here. (Interview #1)

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) discussed effective ways in which the teachers could have improved the discussion process in the classroom. She said that she learned from some of her classroom experiences here that this is possible. First she explained that real discussion is focused on specific issues and it is not competitive. Teachers need to provide the issues to be discussed and as Student 7 earlier described, they need to elaborate on the

problem, that is, provide the background for the issues discussed in order for students, especially international students, to have some information to guide and help them in taking part of the classroom discourse.

S: What do you think would have been effective? What other instructional approaches could have been used that would be more helpful helping you to learn?

Student 1: In that class? **I would have loved to see them engage us in discussions. Real discussions, not where we were competing. Real discussions because I later on discovered that that was possible. Where students are engaged in real discussions when they discussed issues. They were given issues to discuss. Even the background, such that even if you don't know something, you have the background and you can fumble along those lines and you are not going to be afraid to try. (Interview #1)**

She also noted that in order to improve the implementation of small group discussion, which she believes is a good approach, teachers need to be more conscious about organizing the groups so that there is an equal representation (when appropriate) of international and American students in the groups. This is important she implies, because American students may be able to help international students better understand the context and the background of some of the issues discussed since they are more familiar with the educational system here.

Student 1: ...**They could have still used the group method but in that class I should think something should have been done about the groups. I guess there was quite a way of how the groups were made up. Every week was the same. They should have tried to put different people in different groups and hoping that the members were going to teach one another, not just have a group with almost all international students who do not have any background to count it all. Nothing has been explained to them. From the readings you don't get all what people are discussing about. They always come up with different things altogether. So, the group method, I guess, would have been good if they had decided to deal with it in a different way all together. (Interview #1)**

### Content Inclusive Participation

Student 2 (a male; from Africa) explained that the ideal situation for the proseminar would be to have learners participate in creating the agenda for the course so that their voices can be heard in terms of issues that they wanted to explore. He added that students should not be exploring just American issues but also general issues in education which affect both American and International students.

**Student 2: ...We international students have a lot to offer, so maybe the agenda for the seminar could be created in a collaborative way where the students' voices get heard in terms of issues that they want to explore. We are not only exploring American issues but also other educational issues in general which affect both American students and international students. ...It's interesting, but when everything is centered around the history of American education, it becomes less interesting for us. They could have tried to make us part of it, participating and creating the agenda. (Interview #1)**

Student 4 (a female; from Asia) perceived the teacher's and learners' roles to be ideal when the two parties worked together. She supports the notion that there should be mutual input in the development of a course. She said that teachers should assess what students want to learn. They should attempt to listen to the students and develop requirements as well as teach content that address students' needs. She also stated that teachers need to meet with students and clarify to them what the course will be about and what they will be able to gain from the course.

**Student 4: I think maybe, students and teachers should work together. They [teachers] should ask students what they want to learn, or kind of learning opportunity they can provide. There are students from different background, specially international students. Concerning [being concerned] for international students is really helpful, so, maybe the teacher, or the instructor, before maybe should have a meeting with**

them to advise how, what this course is about, how are they going to organize, listen to the students, potential students who will attend that course. What they feel, maybe they lack a certain kind of background, they want professor to maybe make a little bit clear in that course. **So, get students' feedback before the class, then the teacher may try to think students' requirements or needs and try to help them to attend to that special level.** (Interview #1)

Student 3 (a male; from Africa) stated that an ideal proseminar course would have covered educational systems of more countries. In his proseminar the teachers discussed education in two countries. He suggested that the content should be more global, which would give students and professors the opportunity to learn from each others' background and experiences. He also said that teachers should take time to orient international students about the way the course will be conducted. International students should especially be given orientation on how to participate in classroom discussion because, as he explained, these students come from different educational systems which may not use this type of approach to learning.

**Student 3: ...I would love to see many other countries included in the content of the teaching in the course and maybe it would be also helpful for international students in particular to have a kind of maybe an orientation. This is an orientation course but to be told in advance about the way that course is to be conducted. Especially the part of participation because some of the international students would take a long time before they start participating. And one can not blame them because that is based on the system in their countries, which is not participatory. I would advise that maybe international students be given some prior tips before the class or information that they are required to participate in discussion and so on. But my main requirement is that of global tendencies, global sort of education, and to touch on different countries. Because we can learn together with the professors.** (Interview #3)

Student 7 stated, when responding to the question of what would be an ideal learning climate, that she found the learning climate here to be very rigid

as compared to her experience in her home country. She said that in her country, students and teachers worked together in developing the syllabus for the course. The syllabus she said was negotiated, not simply given to students by the teacher. She explained that there is also a difference in the conception of reading. She said that here students are expected to read a lot; however she prefers to read less and be able to read things well and in depth. Finally, she said that she likes to choose what and how to study, and she likes to be able to ground topics historically and to elaborate on the context in which a problem is posed.

S: If you would be thinking of the learning climate that would be ideal for you and also international students, what would that be like?

Student 7: I think that despite the apparent informality of the American classroom context, this context is extremely rigid. I have had other learning experiences that give me a parameter to judge my experience here and other good experiences that I had happen in the class in [her country]. **I had experiences at graduate level in which students would elaborate the syllabus with the professor the semester before the course would start. That syllabus is always negotiated in the classroom in the beginning of the course in [her country] and that happens at undergraduate level and that is not a practice here. The syllabus here is done and that's it. The students are supposed to follow what's written there about reading assignments. Of course, you can choose what you are supposed to read but then you are reading more and the reading load is already enormous here because here a different conception of reading is implemented. In [her country] we read very well and deeply. We can do a whole course by reading one book. Of course that book has to be very good and very rich, but here you have to read quantity and its about scanning. Some premises here are different, but I'd like to choose what to study and the way I study. I like to read slowly and deeply, so I like to read the way I like to read and the way I'm good at. I like to ground topics historically and I like to elaborate on the context in which a problem is posed and here there is not much of an opportunity for that. (Interview #3)**

In summary, students expressed preference for teaching-learning experiences where the participation process embraces the following characteristics:

- discussions are guided by theories and explicit frameworks;
- learners participate together with the teacher in elaborating learning objectives for the course;
- teachers elaborate on issues and topics to be discussed in order to create a context for discussions;
- teachers and learners participate in the classroom discourse sharing their experiences and knowledge;
- the classroom discourse is global in nature, in order to include the needs and interests of all members of the learning community.

#### Preferred Role of Learners' Prior Experiences in the Teaching-Learning Process

The following are selected quotations which describe international students' views on how they would have liked their professional and educational experiences to be integrated in the teaching-learning process.

#### Knowing and Respecting Students' History

Student 9 (a male; from Latin America) stated when talking about his preferred learning climate that it is important for the teachers to know their students and what they bring to the teaching-learning process. It is not enough just to know where students come from; teachers need to be familiar with the students' academic and professional background in order to meet students

where they are and not where the teachers think students might be. That is the only way, he said, that one can really create a learning community.

**Student 9: I think that teachers need to know where their students come from and what's happening, for me is that they [teachers in prosem] didn't know who I was. They knew that I come from [his country] but they didn't know about my paper, my academic life, the kind of work that I have and you only can make a learning community when you know the people... (Interview #1)**

Student 9 also stated that a better climate for the proseminar course would have been one where the teachers would respect students' history. In his case, he said, in the proseminar his history was not respected. Teachers seemed to have treated him as if he did not know anything and had to start from scratch, which was unacceptable to him.

**Student 9: ...I feel that they didn't respect our history. So, they want to show us that we have to start from zero which in my case I felt that I was stupid because I didn't need to start at zero. It is valid for Americans for some reason they are comfortable with starting at zero. I don't know why. So a better prosem could be a climate in which they respect our history. (Interview #1)**

I asked him what he meant by having teachers respect his history, and he said that it meant having teachers be honest with him and try to understand his background -- where he came from.

**Student 9: In my case it could mean that they could be more honest and try to understand where I come from and don't force me to write a paper about the common school movement in [my country] when we didn't have this common school movement and they didn't understand that my history is too different than American. (Interview #1)**

Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) agreed with Student 9 that teachers need to consider students' prior knowledge and background. She said that, though humility is a condition for learning and that students may not



know it all, teachers should consider that learners come into the learning activity with some knowledge.

S: You mention that the professor treat you as if you don't know anything.

**Student 7: I understand that humility is a condition for learning. I think that's the basic premise when you start a course. You have to assume that I don't know and you have to assume I do know, but to a certain extent. On the other hand, you have to consider what is my background because I know certain things. Most people if they don't have academic experience, they know a lot about other things just from being a part, from experience. They may not have elaborated on their knowledge but there are things to be considered. In my case and in the case of many international students, we already have reached this point academically already. (Interview #1)**

Student 7 also stated that including learners' background and experiences in the teaching-learning process is a simple principle that teachers should put into practice in order to create a conducive learning climate; however, this had not always happened in her courses here. This was a difficult issue for her to accept, she said, because though the teachers did not seem interested in international students' previous background, they were expected to participate in the discussions.

**Student 7: ...I think if you have foreign students in your class, and if you have people from different cultures even if they are from the same ethnic groups, different social classes, etc., you really have to practice that older story about taking in consideration the students' previous backgrounds and this really didn't happen here. Being a foreigner here is very difficult because of that. My previous background is not interesting for them, but they expect us to join their conversation. Besides, we ignore the assumptions implicit in their conversations and they are not willing to clarify what those assumptions are. (Interview #1)**

Student 7 went on to explain that it is important that teachers and international students (or learners) clarify their views and assumptions in order

for them to understand each other. If that does not happen, she said, it becomes a problem for the international student because the teacher may perceive the student's different perspective as a lack of knowledge.

S: Can you give an example?

Student 7: Yes I can. For instance, if a professor's conception of truth is positivist or if his conception of truth is post modernist. He says, there is no truth and if my conception of truth is relativist, like historically and culturally. The communication between me and him is going to be odd. He won't understand me. **...the problem is that when assumptions are not clarified and not made explicit, I am the one who is going to be evaluated as someone who doesn't know what she is saying. "She's this foreigner who just got here? She says that? It doesn't make sense to me. So, she's got to be ignorant."** I think that is something that has happened sometimes between international students and professors. Because you have to make your assumptions explicit. I mean we have to and they have to. But if this is not a practice, if they are not aware of the possibility that we may have different starting points for our arguments. Your starting point is based on your American experience and my starting point is based on my foreign experience, **so if we don't clarify, what is the starting point? What are the implicit assumptions? What are the stories that we lived? How are we going to communicate and understand each other? Of course, I am the one who is going to lose something because by being the student, I'm the one who doesn't know, I'm more ignorant than the professor so he is going to judge me in terms of I don't know what I am saying.** (Interview #1)

### Planning for the Incorporation of International Students' Prior Experiences in the Teaching-Learning Process

In response to the question of how the introductory course could have been more effective in helping the international students to achieve their educational goals, Student 8 (a female; from Latin America) said that teachers need from the beginning to assess students' needs, educational issues of interest and problems that they want to address, and structure the course

taking these and their experiences into consideration. This does not mean that teachers cannot prepare their curriculum and syllabus in advance, but it means that they should be flexible and should leave space for the incorporation of students' experiences into the teaching-learning process.

**Student 8: ...I think that one of the things might be from the beginning to get an idea of the students, what kind of educational issues that interests them, what type of problems they are troubled by. What things they want to problematize, and then use the grad students experiences to structure how we look at the course. In that sense, because professors have to have their curriculum and syllabus prepared, it would not mean necessary not being able to prepare it but prepare it in a way in which they are able to incorporate adult students' experiences in their classes. ...So, basically the idea would be to incorporate the experiences that the students bring, the problems that they thing they would want to resolve and struggle with, and use the term to work on those issues in a context of whatever the professors are prepared. (Interview #1)**

Student 5 (a female; from Asia) explained that an ideal course should have a smaller group of students so that the teacher would have a better opportunity to get to know students and their needs. That would contribute to the teachers being able to assist students in reaching their educational goals.

Student 5: I am thinking in terms of a Ph.D. program, we need to have smaller classes, small ones, one on one, a kind of tutor. Going there and talk to the professor and let him know what I need. They need to know our needs. And then try to help us to reach our goal.

She also inferred that whatever happens in the classroom or whatever students are asked to do should have a rationale for it and it should be helping them to reach their goals. She used the reading assignment as an example. She mentioned that a lot of students were questioning the reason for the overwhelming amount of reading assigned to them. In her case, she said that

she did not mind reading a lot as long as what she was reading had meaning to her.

**Student 5: It is OK to read many books but the reading should shape or help the student to reach his/her goals.** There is no need to be reading all articles if they don't have meaning to students, to their goals. **Students need a clarification for the need to know. ...I don't mind to read too many books, but everything should shape my goal for me to reach my goal.** Then you can motivate the students to learn. There is a lot of people talking that we have been here to read all of these articles, for what? I don't need that. (Interview #1)

Student 4 (a female; from Asia) explained that the ideal way to include learners' experiences in the teaching-learning process is for teachers to provide learners with the opportunity to rethink their previous experiences in view of the new content they are learning.

S: What role should the learner's experiences play in the teaching-learning process? Should it be included in the T-L process?

**Student 4: ...the ideal way, I think is that the teacher give you the chance to rethink your previous experience no matter is included or it is not [if you rethink it should be included]. Even if your experience is irrelevant to the content, but this content should help you to reflect your previous experience...** (Interview #1)

She went on to say that the teacher plays an important role in guiding the group to explore these experiences in an organized and focused fashion. If they do not provide guidance and focus during the discussions, she said some students' experiences may be excluded or not made clear.

**Student 4: ...I think the teacher, the guidance of the teacher is important because if the teacher just like let the students go everywhere, I think it is important for students to speak up their voice but if they go everywhere then you don't feel the focus, then maybe some people's experience will be included and some others will not be clear.** (Interview #1)

Student 6 (a male; from Asia) said that in one of his classes the teachers did provide an opportunity for international students to share their experiences but he wished that this would have not been only one occasion during the semester. He rather that it would occur more often as different topics were discussed in class.

**Student 6: There was one opportunity which was given at the end of the course for the six of us from different countries was to talk about the educational system in our countries. That was not done, encouraged in all the other classes, which would have been wonderful learning experience both for us and also for the Americans. Not to learn, I am not saying that they should have used my experience or the international students experiences. What I am saying is every time you talk about an issue for example, School reform was done in 1840 by Horace Mann, OK what was he trying to do? It would have been wonderful in my opinion, if they had asked: was similar things like this done in your country, maybe later or maybe before, which was along that line? ...Whenever there is an opportunity having people talk about their own experience, bringing their own experience. Own experience I am not saying idiosyncratic experiences, but the larger issues. And I obviously would like to talk about our problems we face. (Interview #1)**

In summary, students expressed that an ideal teaching-learning process takes into consideration learners' background and prior experiences. In order for this to happen, the following needs to be present in the learning environment:

- teachers need to assess learners needs and interests;
- teachers need to know their learners -- their academic and professional backgrounds and the experiences they bring into the learning environment;
- teachers and learners need to determine together learning objectives for the learning activities to assure that learners' needs and interests as well as the problems and issues they bring from their home country can be addressed in the teaching-learning process;

- teachers need to show respect and value learners' histories;
- international students' should be allowed the opportunity to share their experiences and reflect on those experiences as they learn new content (this should be done both during classroom discussion and in their writings);
- content for the course should be organized in a way that addresses and supports the achievement of learners' educational goals.

### Preferred Role of the Teacher in the Teaching-Learning Process

Students had a lot to say about their expectations of the role of the teacher in the teaching-learning process. On one hand, some of these expectations were met by several teachers in these students' experiences, which caused satisfaction and excitement. These experiences have already been recorded above and will not be repeated here. (I encourage the readers to review them in chapter 4, under the role of the teacher, because those experiences also reflect the students' preferred condition of learning). On the other hand, in many situations and especially in the introductory course (proseminar), as discussed above, students did not experience ideal conditions of learning; in fact they were frustrated with the role teachers played in the teaching-learning process. Now in this next section I discuss what these students stated to be their preferred ways of learning as far as what they expect from the teacher in the teaching-learning process.

## Building the Learning Climate

Student 1 (a female; from Africa) stated that an ideal learning climate is created by efforts of the teacher. He/she should set the tone for the learning climate where students feel non-threatened. The teacher, she said, should treat students as mature adults. He/she should respect students by providing the opportunity for them to discuss issues that are relevant to them. He/she should create a climate where students feel at ease in differing from the teachers' point of view.

S: What is preferable to you in a learning climate? What should be present in the classroom?

**Student 1: At the doctorate level, I should think that professors should learn to accept doctoral students as mature people and treat them as such. I should think they should have some respect in the teaching/learning situation. We should be able to deliberate about things that concerns us and things that concerns the professors themselves. They should be able to teach us some things that they believe in and we should be able to deliberate about how we differ. That is one thing that I like about discussing issues. We can differ with our professors, but then they would have set the climate where we can discuss, where one is not threatened by what they have to say. (Interview #1)**

For Student 8 (a female; from Latin America), an ideal learning climate begins with the teacher establishing and making explicit what the parameters for the course are, and clarifying to learners what the course will be about. Also, she said that the teacher should assess the needs and expectations of the learners for the course, a concept which several of the participants alluded to as being an important function of the role of the teacher. She concluded by saying, that although teachers talk a lot about constructivism, it is not always applied in their teaching.

S: What would be an ideal learning climate for you?

Student 8: ...I would say that the learning climate, **the first thing that the professor should do is to establish what are the rules, what are the parameters, what are we doing here? ...beside that I would find out from the students, whether they are young adults or adults, what are the kind of things that we can do here to make this class more interesting, what kind of things do you [students] expect from this class.** And even though they talk a lot about constructivism, we were never asked how could we benefit from this class. (Interview #1)

In an ideal seminar Student 5 (a female; from Asia) said the role of the teacher should be one of identifying students' potential and guiding them in using their potential and the new knowledge they are acquiring to achieve their educational goals. Teachers should also respect students and treat them from day one not as students but as professional educators.

Student 5: ... **They [teachers] have to find out what is their [students] talent, their ability, they are here not for nothing, they have their dreams and goals for education.** As professors, they need to find each persons' talents and facilitate that talent to shape their goal. ...**The ideal seminar to a Ph.D. program is to shape these students' understanding of education and then to help them, to walk them to be an educator.** Right? It is not students. **The day they came to the program as educators, professor treat them like that and then how to help them to be more of this professional like in the profession.** (Interview #1)

Student 6 (a male; from Asia) stated some expectations about the role of the teacher as a result of his experience with the proseminar course. The role of the teacher, he said, should be one in which the teacher is in touch with what is happening in the dynamic of participation in the classroom. Teachers need to be sensitive to the learning environment. They need to approach students and try to figure out how they are doing in class and what are the difficulties they may be facing. Finally, besides identifying these difficulties, teachers need to



address the issues and be proactive in fostering engagement of all students in the teaching-learning process.

Student 6: ...Then the other point is in terms of the role of the teachers -- **I would have liked they have realized the difficulties of the students, not only international student, students on the whole were facing. Why are they not participating? Why is it only some people dominate the discussion? Is there something bothering the students?** Talking to us. I would have appreciated one of these professors talking to international students. What's the problem here? Do you have a problem? And care enough interaction. I would like. **Besides realizing that, taking some actions, concrete actions, as to motivate and try to get more students to participate so they also have this experience, benefiting from the classroom discussion...**  
(Interview #1)

Thus, students expect teachers, in an ideal teaching-learning environment, to set the tone for learning by creating a learning climate which is non-threatening, respectful of adult learners, relevant to learners' needs and educational goals, and inclusive of all members of the learning community.

### Engagement in the Teaching-Learning Process

Student 7 (a female; from Latin America) stated that she would have liked to have her teachers share their knowledge, experiences and stories. She recommended several topics for the teachers to discuss in the first day of class in order for students to understand their teachers' background. She suggested that teachers should share their educational history.

Student 7: ...**I want them to give their knowledge, their experience, their stories.** And that is something that they seldom do. **Just start the first class telling me your educational life.** Okay. We are in an education program, right? So you are a professor. Tell me, how did you see school or like school when you were in elementary school, middle school, high school? How did you choose your university major, whatever. How did you start your, how do you say, scholar career? What

research have you been doing the past few years? How did you choose to study this issue? Okay, what have you learned in the course of your years of experience as a researcher? Why are you a quantitative not a qualitative or vice versa? **Tell me your story, your engagement with issues.** The way you do. The way you produce knowledge. (Interview #3)

She also sees as the teacher's responsibility to be engaged in "selling" his/her discipline, the course he/she are teaching. By that she means teachers should be more proactive in providing a rationale for their courses and their importance for the program and the learners' educational endeavors.

Student 7: ... you have been teaching this course for a few years, what is your view of this course? Is it important to teach this course? Why do you think this course is in the program? Why do you think I need to learn this? Why do you think it is a good source for me as a student to take your course? Tell me, why do you like this subject that you are teaching? Why do you think that is going to broaden my view of educational issues? You know, I really think that a professor or teacher, any kind of teacher, in that sense he sells a knowledge and he has to convince the student that this knowledge, this little window which is his piece of knowledge, the way he approaches complex educational problems, why is this little window of value? You see? Somehow a professor has to convince a student that it is important to take a sociological perspective, for instance. History is great, you know, if you want to start history of education, you are going to profit a lot, blah, blah, blah. (Interview #3)

Student 7 seems to be arguing that the teacher needs to provide theoretical tools to students and challenge them to consider those frameworks as they address educational issues.

Student 8 stated that an important area in the role of the teacher is that he/she needs to be engaged in the teaching-learning process in order to contribute to learners' learning. They need to facilitate learning, not by sitting back and letting students talk but by getting involved in the discourse and

asking pertinent questions that will lead learners to guided reflection and discovery. Facilitating learning, she asserted, does not mean being hands-off.

**Student 8: ...the role of the teacher is to enable learning, it's to enable understanding, and sometimes to enable that learning and understanding you need to ask guiding questions. You need to see where a reasoning goes, point out things that will make the person reflect on what they are saying. Those are the roles that I think the teacher has to do. I don't think facilitating means hands-off. That it means that I will sit down and everyone just say whatever they want, to me that is not facilitating learning. (Interview #1)**

Student 1 agrees with Student 8 that teachers need to be engaged in the teaching-learning process. She expects, for instance, that the teacher will explain or lecture a little on the topic at hand and then have students discuss it. After that they still should be involved in guiding students' learning and helping them to understand the topic. She said that this is essential because many times she was left with a lot of questions which were not answered by the teacher. Student 1 made reference earlier that she felt lost in some of her courses because as an international students she did not have the background for the topics discussed. This is why she feels it is very important that the teacher assume a role of explaining and guiding student's understanding.

S: What should be the role of the teacher and the learner?

**Student 1: Teachers should be able to explain the lesson or the lecture. They lecture a little to the students [and then have them] discuss, but then teachers should always be helping students to understand what they are learning about, not leave them on their own to discover. A lot of times we were left with a lot of questions because no one cared to explain to us. (Interview #1)**

Student 4 (a female; from Asia) also finds that the teachers should be more engaged in the teaching-learning process. In her proseminar course, the teacher did just that. She believes that the teacher needs to be engaged by providing comments/feedback on students' arguments/ideas, and also by bringing the discussion to closure, providing a summary of the views and ideas discussed, and giving students key points from the discussion that they can take home with them. She said that these are important especially for international students because they do not always understand all that was discussed in the classroom, so having a summary from the teacher helps them in better assimilating new knowledge.

**Student 4: ...I think after the discussion of the topic the teacher should give us some comments not just without doing anything because we don't know or I think the teacher's role should make some comment or generalization or summary and give us some key points, even just to repeat. That's fine. Because for our international students at the beginning sometimes our listening or sometimes is not so good. When people, native speakers, speak so fast sometimes we didn't catch their point and the teacher can make a summary and then point can be more clear. (Interview #1)**

Student 7 made a key statement about what she views to be the role of the teacher in the teaching-learning process. Her view was shared by many of the participants who also described teaching-learning experiences where their teachers were silent in the classroom. She argues that the role of the teacher should be one of assuming a main part in the discussion process in the classroom. If teachers will not actively participate in the classroom discourse, if they will not contribute to the discussions by sharing their knowledge and experiences she argues, what is the reason for them to be in the classroom?

She said that if their role is not to be part of the community of learners, they might as well stay in their offices and focus on their research. She implies in this quote below that the teacher should be involved in the discussion process. They should share their knowledge, coordinate the discussion, help connect values and ideas, and provide direction for collective elaboration of ideas and creation of knowledge.

**Student 7: The teacher needs to assume a main role in that dialogue because we students can communicate about whatever we want to outside of the class too. But, if the point is having the students share ideas among themselves then why is the teacher there? We don't need a teacher. Let us share our ideas the whole day wherever we want to and then we present the paper to the teacher. The teacher stays right there in his office doing his research and I just present the paper which is the result of my interaction with my colleagues and my readings. Why don't they establish a mode of teaching and learning like that? Why is the teacher present in the classroom if he doesn't have to say anything to really exert this role of the more knowledgeable one and who is coordinating the discussion and the one who is really helping connect values in his courses, let's say pointing a direction for the collective elaboration? ... (Interview #1)**

In summary, students seemed to prefer a teaching-learning experience where teachers are engaged and connected with the learning community by creating an adult-centered learning climate and by contributing as a co-learner to the teaching-learning process.

### Summary of International Students Preferred Conditions of Learning

International students' views on what would be an ideal teaching-learning process in their courses focused on several aspects. As far as the role of participation is concern, students emphasized the importance of teachers assessing learners' needs, backgrounds and professional

experiences so that they could develop classroom discussions as well as course requirements (reading assignments and papers) which would help learners to achieve their educational goals. Another aspect addressed by some of the students was the importance of organizing the participation process. Some of the suggestions were for teachers to provide universal categories and frameworks for the discussion process; to provide opportunities for learners to get to know each other and to work in groups in class so that first, they would not feel like strangers and secondly, that they would be able to collaboratively help each other to learn more in depth the material before them; to provide the structure in which the learners could collaboratively develop the agenda for the course and thus have their voice/interest/needs heard; to minimize the amount of reading so that students could address issues in depth instead of superficially; and to have the teacher explain the background and elaborate on the problem or content to be discussed, and to have teachers provide opportunities or encourage learners to share their work with each other.

As far as the role of learners' prior experiences in the teaching-learning process, students first of all emphasized that teachers need to practice the old principle about taking into consideration the students' previous background and experiences. They need to assess learners' needs and interests and include them in the teaching-learning process. Students pointed out that teachers should respect their professional history and treat them not as empty

slates but as adults who bring professional, educational and personal experiences and knowledge to the learning environment.

Finally, as far as the role of the teacher is concerned, students prefer a teacher who is engaged in the teaching-learning process; a teacher who talks and shares his/her expertise/knowledge with the learning community; a teacher who elaborates on issues and provides theoretical tools for classroom discussions; a teacher who brings closure to classroom discussion; a teacher who treats his/her students as adults and professionals; a teacher who provides critical feedback which leads learners to further understanding of the content that is before them; a teacher who finds the potential in his/her learners and guides them to use it for their personal and professional growth, and finally, a teacher who is not silent.

## Chapter 5

### **DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS**

In this chapter, I discuss the three remaining (summarizing) questions proposed in this study and the implications of the study for American universities as they attempt to provide quality education for international students.

First, I would like to address question number 3: "What are the differences between international students' perceived and preferred experiences with the teaching-learning process?" Secondly, I will address question number 4: "To what extent do international students' perceived experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?" And then question number 5: "To what extent do international students' preferred experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?" Finally, I conclude with a brief description of educational implications of this study for international students' education, recommendations for further research, and personal reflections.

Before summarizing the findings, I remind the reader that the study has focused on students' perceptions of their teaching-learning experiences. The faculty involved teaching the courses might describe their teaching practices, their intentions, and the characteristics of the teaching-learning environment



quite differently. In fact, future research might explore how teachers' perceptions compare with students' perceptions of the teaching-learning situations.

**What are the differences between international students' perceived experiences and their preferred conditions of learning?**

As we were able to observe in chapter 4, there were both similarities and differences between international students' perceptions and preferences with the teaching-learning process. Students' perceived experiences were characterized by both positive and negative aspects. The negative aspects were different from what students reported to be their preferred conditions of learning. But their positive experiences were many times stated as being their preferred conditions of learning.

Students' positive and preferred experiences with the teaching-learning process were characterized by such themes as connectedness and engagement. Students reported perceiving their experiences as positive when, for instance, their teachers were connected or engaged in the teaching-learning process, or when participation was engaging, relevant, and connected to the students' needs and interests, and finally when their prior experiences were used as resources for their individual learning and the learning of others. Therefore, what students reported as positive and effective in their teaching-

learning experiences were also what they considered to be their preferred conditions of learning.

The differences between the negative experiences and the students' preferred conditions of learning were more sharply distinct. First, it was the overall belief of the majority of the students that teachers should exert a more active leadership/expert role in the classroom. They should create structure for their courses and in that structure provide the opportunity for learners to collaboratively redesign the course syllabus with the teacher, taking into consideration the students' needs and interests. Teachers should voice their opinion in the classroom. They should elaborate (give a brief lecture) on the topics to be discussed, be explicit about their views on different issues addressed by the group, and also attempt to bring closure or provide a summary to long classroom discussions. Students expected that teachers would actually teach, rather than only come to class to listen to students talking. They were not advocating that teachers should always lecture to students but they were hoping to have the teachers share their knowledge, experiences, and expertise with the learning community as well. Last, students expected and in some situations experienced the teachers to be co-learners in the teaching-learning process.

These expectations, though fulfilled in some courses, were not a classroom reality for the majority of these international students. As I have demonstrated in chapter 4, students reported that several of their teachers

assumed a silent role in the classroom which led students to have frustrating experiences with the teaching-learning process.

Secondly, students expected that the participation process both in the planning and implementation of the teaching-learning process would be more adult/learner-centered. Students expected to be given more freedom in participating in the planning of the course content and the course requirements. They would have liked to be allowed to select reading assignments that were relevant to their educational goals and background. They would have also liked to be given a choice to focus their reading, writing and classroom discussion on issues and problems that were real to their home country context, and they would have preferred to have classroom discussions where both teacher and learners would contribute to the learning community and where collaborative construction of knowledge would be a reality.

As I discussed in chapter 4 under the role of participation, these were expectations that were not met in many of the classrooms. Students reported that in several of their courses they had no freedom to negotiate the syllabus that was given to them by the teacher. The content, the requirements, and the evaluation process were all dictated by the teacher. Students had very little to say about what classroom and course structure should look like. The discussions in the classroom were perceived as disperse and disconnected, and many times about issues that international students found to be irrelevant to their needs, interests, and educational goals. Students also found that the

dynamic of participation was competitive and that there was very little effort on the part of teacher and learners to construct knowledge together.

Finally, international students expected the teaching-learning process to be much more inclusive of their history, prior experiences, and background. This, however, was not always the case in several of their courses, as can be observed in chapter 4. International students hoped that their prior experiences, history, and background would have been acknowledged and valued by their teachers. For them, acknowledging their experiences meant that the teachers would treat them as adult professionals who had something to offer to the learning community. Also, the teachers would not ignore the students' experiences and knowledge, treating them as if they knew nothing.

As far as valuing international students' experiences, students hoped that teachers would have provided opportunities for them to share their home experiences with their classmates and would have encouraged and given them the freedom to bring in these experiences to shed light on the educational issues addressed in the classroom and on writing requirements.

Students also expressed that teachers could show that they valued international students by being more global in their approach to the content selection for their courses. Students would like to see teachers reading as well as assigning readings that are more international in nature. That would help teachers to be more aware of what is happening in education around the world and to make their courses more inclusive of international students' experiences and background.

In summary, the differences between international students' perceived and preferred experiences may have had to do with students' and teachers' different conceptions of teaching. Students were looking for a much more engaged teacher. One who would:

- collaborate with them in the teaching-learning process,
- be a co-learner and not just an observer of the learning community,
- elaborate on the issues to be discussed,
- share their views on these issues, and
- make explicit their theoretical beliefs and frameworks.

Students were also expecting a learning environment where participation would be inclusive and relevant to all learners and where their experiences, backgrounds, interests, etc., would be valued, acknowledged and incorporated in the teaching-learning process. However, what students reported to have gotten from some of their teachers do not reflect these expectations.

In conclusion, international students' perceived teaching-learning experiences and preferred conditions of learning had both similarities and differences. Students' preferred conditions of learning were similar to what they perceived as positive teaching-learning experiences. However negative teaching-learning experiences were very different from what students reported being their preferred condition of learning.

**To what extent do international students' perceived experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?**

In order to respond to this question, I will discuss international students' perceived experiences by comparing them to the eight aspects I identified in the teaching-learning transaction embedded in the andragogical model: 1) learning climate, 2) roles of the teacher and the learner, 3) nature of teacher-learner interactions, 4) instructional approaches, 5) planning/decision making, 6) content relevancy, 7) role of learner's prior experiences, 8) evaluation. It is important for readers to be aware that because of the similarities and the interdependent relationship of these eight aspects of the teaching-learning transaction, some of the discussions around these aspects will overlap.

As will be discussed below, experiences which were positively perceived by the international students were reflective of Knowles' adult learning principles presented in the andragogical model. Almost all of the eight aspects discussed below were present in the description of international students' positive experiences. However, experiences which were negatively perceived by the international students did not reflect the adult learning principles embedded in andragogy.

I will briefly describe the eight aspects of the teaching-learning process here to remind the reader of their meaning as stated by Knowles (1980) in the andragogical model. (Please see also chapter 2 for a more extensive description of the andragogical model). Following the description of these aspects, I discuss how international students' positive and negative perceived

experiences compare to the andragogical model. I have used some bold print throughout the discussion to highlight the aspect of the teaching-learning transaction being addressed.

*Learning climate* - as described above, the andragogical model characterizes the learning climate as one of physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, cooperation, freedom of expression, and acceptance of diverse points of view. Most important the teacher needs to provide a stage in the classroom where learners feel free to dialogue and create knowledge. This is achieved by the teacher being open and clear about the expectations and objectives for learning, and clarifying the learner's "need to know." Also when the teacher nurtures a psychological climate where adults are respected and their experiences are valued, they cooperate instead of compete, and they feel safe about expressing their feelings and ideas.

*Role of teacher and learner* - the andragogical model characterizes the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning, a resource person, a motivator, and a guide for learners in their process of becoming more self-directed and achieving their educational goals. The learner is called to be an active instead of a passive receiver of information, and willing to take responsibilities in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their learning.

*Teacher-learner interaction* - the andragogical model characterizes the interaction among teacher and learners as one of mutual trust and respect. The teacher respects the views, aspirations and goals of the learners and attempts to guide them toward the achievement of their educational goals.

Though the teacher may be the expert in the room, he/she sees himself/herself as a co-learner in the process of inquiry.

*Instructional approaches* - Knowles (1980) infers in andragogy that the instructional approaches should encourage the active participation of the learners in the process of mutual inquiry. They should also engage learners in cooperation and collaborative construction of knowledge.

*Planning/decision-making* - Knowles (1980) advocates that teacher and learners work together in developing the objectives for learning and selecting materials and methods for learning activities. The teacher needs to provide leadership to the group by creating a planning structure for shared decision-making.

*Content relevancy and role of learners' prior experiences* - one of the underlining assumptions of andragogy is that adult learners come to the learning activity with a growing reservoir of experiences. These experiences need to be incorporated in the teaching-learning process as resources for learning for the individual learner and others. The learners' prior experiences, backgrounds and interests should guide the teacher in organizing the learning activities. They should aid the teacher in determining relevant learning objectives, selection of content and requirements for learners and selection of instructional approaches, which can facilitate learners' reflection of their previous experiences via the use of the new knowledge.

*Evaluation* – andragogy supports the notion of learners' self-assessment/evaluation of their efforts in the teaching-learning process.



Knowles (1980) advocates that teachers should develop, together with learners, mutually acceptable criteria and methods for helping learners measure their progress toward the achievement of their educational goals.

Having discussed these aspects as they are presented in the andragogical model, we can now compare them with the students' perceived experiences.

### Positive Perceived Experiences

International students had some experiences with courses which reflected the andragogical model, and others that did not. Courses which were perceived to be positive and effective were characterized by the principles embedded in andragogy. They were described as having an informal and interactive **learning climate**. In these courses teachers and learners respected each others' views, history and background; teachers addressed learners as adult professionals; learners were encouraged to share their experiences; teachers knew students' backgrounds; teachers and learners were actively engaged in the classroom discourse; and learners collaborated with each other. There was a sense of community, and teachers and learners constructed knowledge together.

In these courses, **teachers** had an active leadership **role** in the classroom. They were engaged in the classroom discourse by presenting knowledge, lecturing, teaching, and by collaborating with learners in a process of mutual inquiry. Teachers also assumed the role of bringing discussions to

a close and summarizing the many views offered by students in classroom discussions. International students, especially those with more language barriers, were particularly appreciative of this role because they felt that, through this summary, they were able to have a better sense of what was discussed in class, since they did not always understand all that was being said during classroom discussion. (Please see summary of Role of the Teacher as a co-learner in chapter 4 for more details). **Learners** were actively engaged in the discussions in the classroom, as they discussed issues that were relevant to their professional experiences and educational goals, and they were given the opportunity to make decisions on what to read and what to write about in their papers. (Please see summary of Role of Participation in chapter 4 for more details).

**Teacher-learners' interaction** in these courses, was characterized by trust, collegiality and respect. Learners were treated as adults and as people who have knowledge to contribute to the learning community. Teachers were explicit about their expectations; they shared their beliefs and knowledge, and were honest with students by providing them with challenging and constructive feedback on their discussions and writings.

In these courses, the **instructional approaches** were balanced between group discussions, and teachers' elaboration and dissemination of content. That is, the courses had small and large group discussions but there were also occasions where the teacher spoke/lectured/elaborated, or gave his/her expert and co-learner opinion on the content at hand. The discussions focused

around specific frameworks and categories, which gave guidance for the classroom discourse. Although students were not given enough **decision-making** power in these courses to select what they wanted to learn, the **content and requirements** were at least in part selected by taking into consideration the assessment of learners' needs, interests, backgrounds, and educational goals. Some teachers chose to select articles which were meaningful to international students. Learners were assigned **relevant** international articles (**content**) to read and they were given the opportunity to decide what they wanted to write about, which meant that they could write about the problems and issues that they encountered in their home country.

**Learners' prior experiences** were welcome, valued, encouraged to be shared in the classroom, and written about in the students' writing assignments. (Please see summary of Role of Learners' Prior Experiences in chapter 4 for more details). Finally, in these courses, **evaluation**, though similar to other courses where students had to write a paper, provided opportunities for students to write about what was relevant to them. They also had in some cases a chance to write drafts of the paper and receive constructive feedback from their teachers before they turned in the final version of a paper. For some students, this was a sign that the teacher was interested in learners' learning and not only in giving them a final grade. All these aspects contributed to making these courses relevant and a positive experience for international students.

In conclusion, all these characteristics, which were perceived by international students as contributing to positive experiences with the teaching-learning process, were congruent with and are supported by what Knowles (1980) advocates as effective adult learning principles.

### Negative Perceived Experiences

Courses which were perceived to be negative or non-effective by the international students were not reflective of the andragogical model. From the point of view of the participants, these courses were usually characterized by curriculum structures and behaviors on the part of teachers and learners which were not congruent with what is advocated as effective adult learning principles. They were characterized by aspects such as a rigid curriculum structure, where learners were told what to read, write, and learn; an environment where learners were not treated as adults or professionals because their history, background, and experiences were ignored and excluded from the teaching-learning process; teachers who did not teach and were not engaged in the classroom discourse; learners who did not feel like they were part of the learning community; and finally, classrooms where there was a lack of collaboration among teachers and learners.

In these courses the **learning climate** had an informal appearance as far as how teachers and learners behaved. Teachers were called by their first name and students were invited to talk about their ideas and points of view. However, students had no opportunity to negotiate what they wanted to read,

discuss, and write about. Students also were never asked about their needs and interests and what they were hoping to gain from the course. They were simply given a syllabus that described what they were supposed to do. Thus, though the climate seemed informal and open, in reality students experienced it as rigid; there was no negotiation on what the educational objectives should be. The discussions in class were referred to by one student (Student 8) as a “psychotherapy session” because of its nature, where everybody simply talked about their individual ideas/feelings and they felt good about themselves, but there was never any effort by the teacher and learners to pull the ideas together collaboratively and make meaning of all that was being said in class.

Moreover, these discussions were perceived more like a competition on the part of the learners to talk, rather than a collaborative effort to construct knowledge together. These characteristics, of course, contradict Knowles' (1980) views of a learning climate characterized by trust and respect amongst teacher and learners; the use of learners' prior experiences as a resource for learning; the planning of goals and objectives with learners; and a collaborative environment rather than a competitive one.

In these courses, **teachers** assumed a silent **role** in the classroom. From the students' reports, they did not teach, talk, or participate in the teaching-learning process as co-learners. Students perceived the teachers to be in the classroom just to initiate and moderate the discussion, and to take note of who was talking/participating. Such teachers did not elaborate on the topics discussed, nor serve as a resource to the learners. They just came to

class and asked students to talk about the reading. This kind of position by some teachers is not compatible with Knowles' (1980) perspective on the role of the teacher. Teachers in the andragogical model are collaborators and co-learners in the teaching-learning process. They are very engaged in the learning community by serving as experts/resources in the classroom and by being involved with the learners in the process of mutual inquiry. Thus, a silent teacher cannot be an andragogical teacher.

The **learners' role** in these courses was to read the assignments and come to class prepared to talk. They had to participate in the discussions because that was part of their grade. Students stated, some with sarcasm, that apparently they did not have to make sense in what they said in class as long as they talked. The reason they seemed to believe that is, first, because there was seldom feedback from the teachers on what learners shared, and secondly, students talked without making any effort to connect what they were saying with what others had said. Learners also were supposed to connect the new content they were discussing in class with their own experiences and prior knowledge, although they were not usually given the opportunity nor encouraged to do that activity during class discussions or in their writings. Their experiences, knowledge, and history were ignored and not included in the classroom discourse. However, as one student (Student 7) stated, they still had to participate.

Finally, learners had no decision making power to contribute in the planning of these courses. They were not given the choice to select what they

wanted to learn; they were just told what they would learn and do. This role imposed on the learners led them to frustration with and disengagement from the teaching-learning process. This role, as experienced in these courses, is incompatible with what Knowles (1980) advocates as an effective role for learners in the teaching-learning transaction. The learner in the andragogical model is trusted with the responsibility of being actively involved in the planning and implementation of the teaching-learning process, rather than just being a recipient of it. Knowles (1980) charges the teacher with the responsibility to create a structure where learners can be involved in a mutual process of formulating learning objectives, selecting material and methods, and implementing learning activities. He argues that it is only through this involvement that learners will feel a sense of commitment to the goals and objectives of the learning experience.

In these courses, **teacher-learners' interactions** were usually unproductive, confusing, and frustrating to learners. Teachers did not interact much with learners in the classroom because the teachers did not talk. They did not provide feedback to learners nor contribute in the classroom discussions as co-learners. They mostly asked learners to talk about the reading, and then they listened to them. Students found this to be both confusing and frustrating. They would have hoped to have productive discussions with their teachers and hear their perspectives but they felt this did not happen.

They also found the interactions to be confusing because teachers seemed to have two standards of relating with learners. In the classroom, teachers related very informally and openly with learners and they were very receptive of learners' perspectives on issues. However, when they took the role of evaluators, the relationship changed and teachers became very formal, traditional, and didactic with learners. The interactions were frustrating also because students felt that teachers did not treat them as professionals. They did not respect learners' histories and backgrounds and they excluded learners' prior experiences from the teaching-learning process. Finally, teachers were not explicit about their expectations, they did not share their beliefs and knowledge with students, and they did not provide challenging and constructive feedback to learners.

These types of interactions amongst teacher and learners were not reflective of the adult learning principles advocated in the andragogical model. Knowles (1980) advocates a learning environment where there is mutual trust and respect, and where learners are treated as adults. That means that teachers are explicit with learners about their expectations and expert knowledge, and they address learners as colleagues/educators instead of students. They also share their experiences and knowledge with the learners and encourage learners to do the same. This, however, apparently was not the case in these courses because, as reported by the students, teachers did not dialogue with learners nor contribute to the learning community as co-learners in the spirit of mutual inquiry. They chose to be silent.



In these courses, the **instructional approach** consisted mostly of large group discussions. Again, learners were given a reading assignment and they would come to class and discuss it. Teachers usually provided no elaboration on the topic or articles read. They literally, as reported by the international students, would start the class with a question or would ask the learners to talk about their reactions to the reading. From there on, the teachers' instructional approach was to listen and to probe learners to... "Say more." The approach of actively involving learners in classroom discussion is, in fact, congruent with the andragogical model. However, it would have been more reflective of andragogy if the content that students were reading and discussing was relevant to them and if the goal of the discussions was to contribute collectively to each other's learning instead of just talking about the reading. International students reported, however, that, first, the amount of reading was so overwhelming that they seldom had a chance to read it all, and secondly, the readings were disconnected and irrelevant to their needs and interests as international educators. Finally, another aspect of this instructional approach, which was not reflective of andragogy, was the teachers' withdrawal in contributing as experts and co-learners to the learning community.

Students reported that the content and requirements in these courses were selected solely by the teachers. Learners were given no **decision-making** power to plan or decide what they wanted to study in these courses and how they would like to go about achieving their educational goals. Furthermore, they were not asked about what their learning needs and

interests were. Students reported that in some of these courses, they were given the opportunity to choose what they wanted to write about, but in others they were just told what to do. Students were given a syllabus at the beginning of the semester, which was prepared by the teacher, and there was no conversation about negotiating the curriculum to be studied or the requirements to be fulfilled. This approach to planning the teaching-learning process is not reflective of andragogy. It excludes the learners' participation in elaborating and determining their educational learning objectives, and it also undermines the importance of assessing learners' needs, interests, background, and experiences before determining programmatic learning objectives.

As has been mentioned in some of the comments above, **learners** perceived that their **prior experiences** in these courses were ignored and excluded from the teaching-learning process. Students were not encouraged nor given the opportunity to reflect or share their home experiences, or address educational issues they faced in their home countries with other members of the learning community. As one student put it (Student 1), it was as if the teachers wanted international students to forget about their home experiences. Since learners' needs, interests, background, and experiences were not assessed, international students felt like what they knew and what they brought to the teaching-learning process were not valued by the teachers. Also because this assessment was not done, the **curriculum content** and the reading **assignments** were many times **irrelevant** to the needs and

educational goals of international students. Especially in the proseminar course, the students studied the history of American education, but no attempt was made to compare this educational system with others. The exception was the proseminar attended by two of the participants, which in fact, addressed the educational systems of two countries. Teachers in these courses seemed to have had their own agenda of what they wanted learners to learn, and they failed to assess if their curriculum agenda was relevant to international students. They seemed to have assumed that they knew what these learners needed to know and what they needed to be exposed to in order to acquire that needed knowledge and skills.

Thus, this approach taken by the teachers was contradictory to the andragogical model. Andragogy advocates the use of learners' experiences as a resource for the learning of the individual learner and of other members of the learning community, and a resource to guide curriculum decisions such as selection of relevant course content and requirements.

As far as **evaluation** is concerned, Knowles (1980) advocates that the teacher should involve the learners in developing mutually acceptable criteria and methods for measuring learners' progress toward the achievement of their educational goals. Also they should help learners to develop procedures for self-evaluation so that they can follow their own progress toward the achievement of learning objectives. This evaluation process suggested by Knowles (1980) in the andragogical model was apparently not reflected in international students' experiences in these courses. Students reported that

the evaluation processes used in these courses were decided by the teachers. Learners were not consulted or involved in any planning of how their progress would be assessed. Of course, as mentioned above, learners were also not involved in any of the decision-making processes related to establishing learning objectives, selecting content, requirements, etc. The approaches used to evaluate learners usually included participation in the discussions in the classroom, papers, and in some cases reflective journals.

The discrepancy between the perceived experiences and Knowles' ideas on evaluation are even greater when we consider that some teachers did not provide constructive feedback for learners during classroom discussions nor in their writing assignments. Students reported many times being frustrated because they were not sure if what they were saying and writing about made sense, because the teachers would not make any substantial comments on such work. Thus, students, besides not being involved in the planning of assessment procedures, were left without knowledge about their progress because they did not receive constructive feedback on their arguments and thought processes. In conclusion, the evaluation process used in these courses was not reflective of Knowles' (1980) adult learning principles.

In summary, all these characteristics, which were perceived by international students as contributing to negative experiences with the teaching-learning process, were not congruent with and are not supported by what Knowles (1980) advocates as effective adult learning principles.

To what extent do international students' preferred experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?

In order to respond to this question, I will discuss international students' preferred experiences by referring them to the eight aspects of the teaching-learning transaction discussed above. I have used bold print throughout the discussion to highlight the aspect of the teaching-learning transaction being addressed.

International students' preferred conditions of learning were reflective of what is advocated in the andragogical model as effective adult learning principles. Students' preferences were described as the following.

Students expected a **learning climate** where learners and teacher would respect each other's history and would collaborate in the process of mutual inquiry. This should be a climate where students are speaking a common language, that is, where norms, expectations, and frameworks are explicit and understood by all members of the learning community.

Students' expectation about the **role of the teacher** is that he/she should speak in class. They believe that teachers should be actively engaged with the learning community. They should share their experiences, knowledge, and expertise with the learners and create a classroom climate where adult students can do the same. Students do not expect teachers to lecture to them all the time but they would like to hear their opinions as members of the learning community. Teachers should provide frameworks and directions for

discussions in class as well as elaborate on the problems and issues which are being brought forth for discussion. Teachers also should take responsibility for summarizing or bringing discussions to closure so that “things are not left in the air” (Student 8).

As far as the **learners’ role** is concerned, according to the participants, they should collaborate in the classroom instead of competing with each other. They should be given the opportunity to get to know each other and work together in study groups or project groups. They should try to contribute to the learning community by sharing their experiences and ideas, and by attempting to construct knowledge collaboratively with the teacher and other learners. Learners should also participate together with the teacher in the elaboration of educational objectives for their courses. They need to make their needs, interests, and backgrounds known to the teacher so that together they can make curriculum decisions and plan learning activities.

According to the participants, **Interactions among teachers and learners** should happen often. Teachers should discuss the reading assignment/content studied with the learners by participating in the classroom discourses. They should address learners as colleagues and not just as students. As one student (Student 5) put it, teachers should talk and relate with students as colleagues and educators. Teachers should also interact with learners by providing feedback and comments on their (students’) arguments and ideas so that they have a sense of how they are progressing with the development of their thought processes and academic arguments.

Students prefer **instructional approaches** which emphasize small group discussions, as compared to large group discussions. In small groups international students feel more at ease to discuss, ask questions and get to know their classmates. They also prefer teaching-learning sessions where the teacher spends a part of the session lecturing. That is, they prefer classes where teachers elaborate on the issues/problems/topics at hand, providing introduction, background and their own views on these issues, as well as providing a summary or conclusion for the discussions. Student would have liked to read less and go more in depth in the reading assignments. They did not appreciate the “skim reading” approach suggested by some of their teachers. This approach may work well for domestic students who may understand the context in which several of the articles were written, but it is not effective for international students who have not grown up in this culture or educational system, and therefore do not naturally understand the American context. They also expressed desire to have more in depth and organized discussions in the classroom instead of covering so many topics and not being able to have relevant and meaningful conversations with other members of the learning community.

As far as **planning/decision-making** of course content and requirements, students would have liked to participate in the elaboration of the syllabus for their courses. They would have liked to be involved in deciding what to learn and how to go about learning it. They would have liked to discuss with the teachers what their needs and interests were, so that together they

could have made decisions on what should be read, discussed and implemented in order to help learners achieve their educational goals. Finally, students would have liked to decide what to write about in their papers, and, more importantly, they would have liked to be able to address issues and problems that were part of their home experiences.

To students, it is very important in the teaching-learning process that learners be given the opportunity to share and reflect on their **(learners') prior experiences**. They stated that they come to the Ph.D. program not as novice students but rather as professionals and therefore with a lot of experiences in the educational field. These experiences, they believe, should be addressed in the teaching-learning process because these home experiences serve as frameworks for their understanding and exploration of the new content and knowledge they are exposed to in the Ph.D. program. These experiences are also important because they represent the issues and problems these professionals bring into the Ph.D. program for which they hope to develop strategic solutions. International students also believe that if their prior experiences and backgrounds were given consideration in the teaching-learning process, the **content**, reading, and discussions would be more **relevant**. By choosing to be inclusive of international students' experiences, needs, and interests, teachers would be motivating these learners to be active participants in the teaching-learning process.

Students suggested that **evaluation** should be developed in a way that allows for students to have a sense of their progress in the course. They



expressed a preference for a more formative type of evaluation instead of just summative. In one course, learners only got a final grade for their papers but never received on-going feedback on their work. One student (Student 8) suggested that teachers should be willing to read students' draft versions of papers before receiving the final copy. This would provide an opportunity for the learner to receive feedback from the teacher and make changes to improve their work. Thus, evaluation would not be just a grade on a final product but an on-going process. She said that "education is more than just writing papers and getting a grade. It is about refining what you do." Another student (Student 4) suggested the development of a portfolio where the learners would be collecting evidence of their work throughout the whole Ph.D. program. This, she said, provides a tool for learners to be aware of where they are in the process of achieving their educational goals; it gives them the tool to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and helps them to see areas they need to improve. Students would also like to have the freedom to select what they want to write about in their papers instead of being told what to write. Student 9 stated that he did not mind writing a paper to get a final grade as long as he was given the freedom to choose to write about a topic that interests him and not what the teacher wants him to write about. In summary, evaluation should be negotiable, it should focus on both formative and summative aspects, and it should inform the learners about their progress in achieving their educational goals.

In conclusion, international students preferred conditions of learning, as described above, are congruent with and supported by the andragogical model.

### Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have several implications for international students' education in America universities. Below I discuss their implications for the literature, faculty, and international students.

#### Implications for the Literature

As I mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, most of the studies on international students' education have focused on what Tinto (1987) calls the social system of students' academic experiences, that is, the social adjustment, needs and problems of international students (Moore, 1965; Lee, 1981; Heikiheimo and Shute, 1986; Mallinckrodt and Leong, 1992; Henderson, et al. 1993). Very few studies have critically assessed the academic experiences, especially the teaching-learning experiences of international students from their own perspectives (Dunnett, 1977; Konyu-Fogel, 1993). This study, besides serving as a forum for international students to share their experiences about the teaching-learning process in an American university, is also a contribution to the literature as it offers a perspective on international students' teaching-learning experiences which was previous lacking.

The findings of the study do not disconfirm what has already been written in the literature about the adjustment issues, needs, and problems

international students face in American universities. These nine international students also reported having difficulties in adapting to the American culture, the American educational system, the English language, etc. However the study adds to the literature in international students' education in American universities by providing new insights concerning aspects of both positive and negative teaching-learning experiences for Ph.D. adult international students. It also provides insights concerning international students' preferred conditions of learning in an education Ph.D. program previously not recorded in the literature.

The study also contributes to adult learning theory as it used andragogy as a framework to understand/critique adult international students' teaching-learning experiences. It also provided empirical evidence to Knowles' work, which has not been fully empirically examined. That is, what international students reported as being positive teaching-learning experiences and as their preferred conditions of learning support what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles.

Although students' positive and preferred experiences were congruent with andragogy, a question emerged about the meaning of learner involvement and the learner-centered approaches to teaching. There appears to be a contradiction in what students expected of the teaching-learning process. While students reported preferring a learner-centered approach to teaching, they also seemed to want to "be told." That is, they expected teachers to "set the structure for learning, talk, teach, and give input" in the classroom

discourse. To resolve what seemed to be a conflict of views on the part of the students, I needed to further explore Knowles' (1980) notion of participation in order to understand the real meaning of participation/involvement and a learner-centered environment for adult learners.

Knowles (1980) advocates learner-centered teaching and mutual participation of teachers and learners in the planning and implementation of the teaching-learning process. Students wanted to participate in the design of their courses; however few professors provided that option to learners. Typically, learners received the syllabus for the course and did not have a lot of input into it. Though learners did not have much say on the course design, they were given the opportunity to participate and be involved in the implementation of several of their courses. That is, they were given the opportunity to talk in class. However, the type of involvement and participation which were fostered by some teachers did not seem to respond to students' needs. Though students wanted to be able to participate and share their experiences with their learning community, which appeared to be what teachers were fostering in the classroom, students were also hoping to have teachers share their expertise and be involved in the classroom discourse as co-learners instead of being silent. So what seemed to be a learner-centered approach to teaching was perceived by the international students to be one-way participation; that is, students would talk and the teacher would just listen and not contribute as a member of the learning community. Therefore, for the students, the mere exercise of talking without input from the teacher did not equal

meaningful/participatory, learner-centered classroom discourse. Involvement seemed to mean participation of all members of the learning community in the teaching-learning process.

Moreover, for the students, learner-centered participatory teaching-learning process was not just a matter of teacher and learners talking but it was what they talked about. Students did not see the teaching-learning process as effective if what they talked about was perceived as irrelevant to their educational goals and the problems they hoped to address in their Ph.D. program. To these students, meaningful involvement and a learner-centered approach to teaching meant that teachers should provide an environment where teachers and learners constructed the agenda for the course in mutual cooperation. Also a learner-centered approach would mean that both teachers and learners would actively participate in the classroom discourse, sharing their knowledge and experiences, and talking about issues that reflected the needs and interests of all members of the learning community. Thus, what appeared to be a contradiction between learners' expectations and what teachers were providing was perhaps not such a contradiction. That is, this apparent conflict can be understood by examining these students' meanings concerning effective involvement/participation and learner-centered approaches to teaching.

### Implications for Faculty

The findings from this study have implications for the instruction of adult learners that should be of interest to faculty when planning educational activities for international students. These findings suggest practical recommendations for how faculty could be more effective in developing engaging and connected teaching-learning experiences for the multicultural population present in the American university classroom.

It is important here to acknowledge that these findings as well as the following recommendations may not be generalizable to all faculty and all disciplines. The setting in which this research took place, which was just one department in a College of Education, may have had a philosophy in place which was unique to the department and therefore may differ from other Colleges and departments. It is possible that the department has a particular tradition or set of values and assumptions about teaching and learning that influence directly or indirectly the teaching practice of the faculty. Therefore, the findings and the following recommendations may only be applicable/transferable to settings which are similar to the one studied. These recommendations include the following:

1. Teachers need to be aware that they are teaching in a multicultural classroom, and therefore cannot take for granted that all learners will be familiar with the American classroom environment and concepts particular to the American culture. They need to be explicit with the learners about the norms of participation in the classroom, and they also need to explain American concepts (for instance, the term "Republican", mentioned by Student 6) that otherwise would be foreign to international students.

2. Teachers need to assess international students' (learners') needs, interests, backgrounds, and experiences in order to develop learning objectives that are relevant and supportive of students' achievement of their educational goals.
3. Teachers need to develop a planning structure for their courses where they allow for learners' participation in determining the learning objectives so that (international) students' needs and interests as well as the problems and issues they bring from their home country can be addressed in the teaching-learning process.
4. Teachers should strive to know their learners well -- their academic and professional backgrounds and the experiences they bring into the learning environment in order to include these experiences as resources for the individual learner's learning and the learning of others. Students emphasized that they appreciate being treated as adults and professionals and that means having their history valued and respected.
5. Teachers should assume a co-learner role in the classroom rather than a silent one. They should be engaged in the classroom discourse by providing frameworks and elaborating the problems and issues to be discussed in class, facilitating the flow of the discussions, providing their expertise to the group, and expressing their own point of view.
6. Teachers should be explicit about their teaching philosophy and expectations so that learners do not have misconceptions about teachers' views and teaching practice.
7. Teachers should include learners in developing evaluation processes that are mutually acceptable (students mentioned several, which are reported above). They should also make sure to provide constructive critical feedback for learners in order for them to have a sense of their progress in the course and in the overall achievement of their educational goals.

### Implications for International Students

The findings from this study have implications for international students as they pursue their graduate education in American universities. International students may need to be more proactive about communicating their needs,

interests, and educational goals with their teachers, if faculty do not bring up these issues with students. International students may want to discuss the following items with their teachers even before signing up for a course.

1. The purpose and the objectives for the course and how this course might support the achievement of the student's educational goals.
2. Their backgrounds and experiences and what their educational goals are, so that the teacher can assess and be able to elaborate on the extent to which the course would or would not be beneficial to the individual student.
3. How the course is structured as far as what will be covered and required of the learners, so that the student can make a decision if the course is suitable or not for helping him/her to achieve his/her educational goals.
4. What the teaching approaches and the norms of participation in the course are, so that students can familiarize themselves with the classroom dynamics in the American university classroom. (This is especially important for new international students, who may not be familiar with the American classroom environment.)
5. What the teacher's philosophy of teaching is, and how he/she implements this philosophy in the course. This may help students understand decisions and behaviors enacted by the teacher in the teaching-learning process and may help students to provide better feedback to faculty on their teaching, which consequently may lead teachers to reflect on and, if needed, make changes in their teaching practices.

Thus, if teachers do not address the issues described above, which was the case in some of the courses reported in this study, international students need to assume a more proactive role and approach the faculty about them. In my own experience as an international student, I have been very pleased that most of my teachers have been willing to listen and support students. International students need to acknowledge this fact and feel confident about approaching their faculty.



### Recommendations for Further Research

Because of the lack of research about international students' teaching-learning experiences in American universities, more research of this nature needs to be implemented. For instance, a similar study could be implemented with international students from other disciplines. It would be interesting and an important addition to the literature to explore the similarities and differences across disciplines in international students' perceptions and preferences concerning the teaching-learning process. Possibly, various disciplines have different approaches to the teaching-learning process, and international students in other disciplines may be having experiences which differ from those reported by the participants.

Further study also could explore the perceptions and preferences of domestic students with the teaching-learning process. This would help answer whether the perceptions and preferences reported in this study are particular to international students or if they are true to a broader audience of adult learners in a College of Education. Finally, yet another study could include the perspectives of the teachers. The research design could look at international students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process as compared with the teachers' description of their teaching philosophy and enactment of it. From this study, it is not clear whether international students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process actually reflected what teachers were attempting to implement in the classroom.

### Final Reflections

The goal of this study was to assess the academic experiences of international students in an American university. This study has begun to address issues surrounding the experiences of international students with the teaching-learning process, a focus which were lacking in the literature. It has provided intriguing ideas about how a group of international doctoral students perceived their teaching-learning experiences and what their preferred conditions of learning are.

International students perceived their experiences to have both positive and negative aspects. They considered experiences to be negative when the teaching-learning process was disengaging and disconnected, and positive when the contrary was true. Students' positive and preferred teaching-learning experiences were congruent with what Knowles has advocated as effective adult learning principles, but negative ones were not. A message that came through very clear in this study was that students wanted to be more actively involved with the planning and implementation of the teaching-learning process. The reality, however, was that they had very few opportunities to participate in the planning of their courses.

Involving students in the teaching-learning process is a worthwhile goal but the logistics of making it happening may not be so easy. In order to accomplish this goal, the following questions remain to be answered: How could students' involvement in planning the courses and syllabi actually be implemented? When should students join the planning? What are the

incentives for the faculty to involve the students? How will faculty and students deal with philosophical and cultural differences in the planning process? Other questions concerning students' engagement and connection with the teaching-learning process are: How can teachers include the experiences of all learners in the classroom discourse? What should be the content addressed in a multicultural/international university classroom? How can teachers make the curriculum and content more global in order to include all members of the learning community? Teachers, educational policy makers, department chairs and deans should all be interested in these questions in order to ensure optimal learning experiences for international as well as domestic students.

On a more personal note, this study has illuminated several of the roles I play in life. First, as a learner, it has taught me to be more proactive about identifying the goals or issues that I bring to the learning environment, and making them known to whoever is leading a learning activity in which I am involved. Such effort on my part will maximize my opportunities to learn and to help others as they pursue knowledge. Second, as a teacher, I have realized the importance of assessing and listening to my learners as I plan learning activities for (with) them. I see the importance of discussing with learners my philosophy of teaching in order to avoid misconceptions about what happens in the classroom. The study also has taught me to balance or mix different types of teaching strategies in order to accommodate the diverse needs of learners. Third, as a researcher, I have had the privilege of knowing the nine participants, valuing their experiences, and providing a stage on which they could share

views on a topic important to them. Finally, as an adult, husband, father, and spiritual being, I have been challenged through this project to strive for balancing all aspects of my life as well as to be persistent and committed to finish what I start.

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