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# **Introducing Critical Elements of Cross-Cultural Scholarship Development: A Discussion Toward a Model**

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## **Abstract**

Theorizing existing literature, we present a model outlining five essential elements to guide cross-cultural scholarship practices. A scenario showcases how to apply these elements to practical situations.

*Keywords:* Cross-cultural scholarship, international academic cooperation, cultural impact, adult education, adult learning

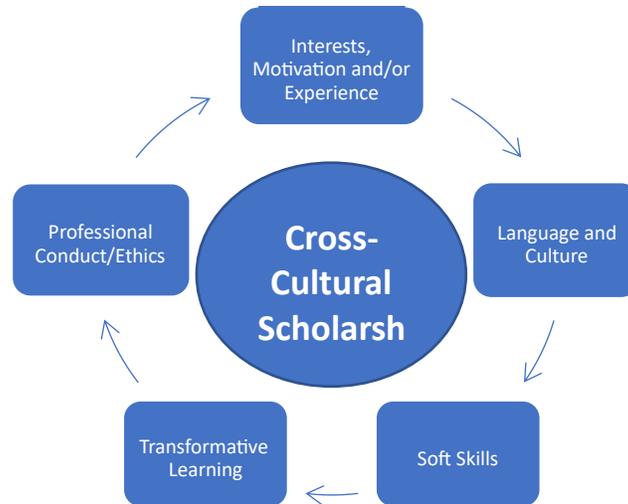
Internationalization and social mobility have increasingly promoted the development of adult and higher education international scholarship. This is evident in the growing development of cross-cultural academic collaborations and partnerships (Landorf, Doscher, & Hardrick, 2018; Sun & Kang, 2019). These cross-cultural educational engagements have significantly promoted global travelers, difference-makers, personal change effectors, and global progress facilitators (Ninnes & Hellstein, 2005). Further, adult educators have attentively conducted global sharing and dialogues. The Cyril O. Houle Scholars in Adult and Continuing Education Program (HSP), as an example, conducted "Global Issues, the Roles, and Responsibilities of Adult Education" (Merriam, Courtney & Cervero, 2006, p. XIV), sharing research thoughts and issues to be resolved that contribute to mutual development.

Planning global academic collaborations requires thoughtful engagement toward shared learning/working goals and outcomes (Healey, Glint, & Harris, 2014). To fill the gap, the authors reviewed existing literature extensively, based on which we outline five essential elements to guide cross-cultural scholarship toward a model for practices. A scenario is included to showcase how to these key elements may guide a practical situation.

## **Critical Elements of Cross-Cultural Scholarship**

The authors have identified five crucial elements for developing cross-cultural scholarship by analyzing empirical research studies on cross-cultural collaborations, conducting thorough literature reviews, reflecting on the researchers' personal experiences, and integrating classic adult education theories and principles. These elements are Interests, Motivation and Experience; Language and Culture; Soft Skills; Transformative; and Learning Professional Conduct/Ethics (See Figure 1)

**Figure 1: *Critical elements of cross-cultural scholarship***



### **Interest, Motivation, and/or Experience**

Research shows substantial interest, motivation, and experience are essential for developing cross-cultural scholarship (Sun & Kang, 2022). These factors empower individuals to overcome difficulties and gain positive experiences while working in unfamiliar cultural contexts. By gaining firsthand experience in navigating and adapting to different cultural complexities, scholars can become more proficient in building relationships, managing conflicts, and achieving shared goals in cross-cultural scholarship development. Therefore, drawing on one's interests, motivation, and experiences is critical for success in engaging in international collaborations.

### **Language and Culture**

While English is often used as the primary language in cross-cultural scholarship development, it's essential to recognize the value of understanding and to utilize the local language, as it carries its culture and norms that often cannot accurately translate directly into another language. Therefore, relying solely on translators can create a barrier between scholars and prevent them from fully comprehending each other's cultural traditions, values, norms, and beliefs (Sun & Kang, 2021). To communicate effectively and effectively, it is essential to develop language and cultural proficiency. Studies have shown that not being able to speak each other's language can hinder cross-cultural scholarship development (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

### **Soft Skills**

Soft skills play a crucial role in fostering effective cross-cultural scholarship development. These skills encompass several essential people skills, such as communication, interpersonal relations, facilitation, and cultural competence (Kim, 2001). By possessing these skills, scholars can interact and learn from individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds individuals, promoting an inclusive and engaging scholarship environment (Burnett & Huisman, 2010; Deardorff, 2006; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Soft skills also enable scholars to manage emotional stress and potential conflicts arising from social and cultural differences. Moreover, having a deep understanding of cultural differences allows individuals to work efficiently with people from diverse backgrounds.

### **Transformative Learning**

Transformative learning is a powerful journey that can lead to personal and professional growth. Transformative learning involves a shift in an individual's perspective, beliefs, and

assumptions, leading to personal and professional growth (Mezirow, 1991). When individuals engage in cross-cultural scholarship development, they are compelled to adjust their prior frame of reference and change their way of thinking. This process makes them more open to new experiences and ideas, increases self-awareness, and fosters a better understanding and appreciation of cultural differences. Through this transformation, individuals are more likely to move beyond superficial understanding and embrace a deeper appreciation of diverse cultural perspectives. This shift promotes empathy, respect, and understanding, challenges assumptions and biases, and contributes to a deeper understanding of both their own culture and the cultures of others (Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

### **Professional Conduct and Ethics**

The foundation of professional conduct and ethics lies in moral development (Varner & Beamer, 2010). For cross-cultural scholarship development, professional conduct and ethics must recognize, acknowledge, and respect cultural differences, maintain confidentiality, and avoid actions that may unintentionally harm others or undermine scholarship development goals due to differing social and cultural distinctions. Therefore, professional conduct and ethics should be considered and guided by shared values, principles, and beliefs for decision-making processes. It is essential to uphold ethical standards and values while learning about each other's social context to achieve the best professional qualifications and standards. In the cross-cultural scholarship development learning process, respect, trust, integrity, transparency, honesty, and accountability play crucial roles in a newly undertakable and workable professional standard.

### **Connecting to Adult Education Theories**

The five critical elements presented in this article offer a discussion point for developing a model or a set of principles to guide cross-cultural scholarship learning and development. These fundamental elements demonstrate the potential to help integrate adult education theories and research into cross-cultural scholarship practices. Experiential learning and situated learning, for example, involves learners, environments, and activities in constructing meaning and developing knowledge and skills in different settings (Lava & Wenger, 1991). This truly happens in the cross-cultural scholarship process. Our emphasis on developing interest, motivation, and acquiring experience, as well as language and culture in cross-cultural scholarship development, further emphasizes the importance of practicing culturally responsive skill sets (Wlodkowski, 2008) and helping resolve personal disjuncture (Jarvis, 2007), institutional hindrances, and social issues and social change (Freire, 1970; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

Collective inquiry is highly valued by appreciative inquiry that aims at “creating a culture with high standards that simultaneously embrace ongoing learning, change, and improvement” (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 5) to facilitate adult education instructional activities and collaborative undertakings. Professional conduct and ethics are also critical to adult education professional practices. As global learners/scholars, adult educators often consider themselves co-learners. This co-learner status significantly impacts how they co-construct knowledge professionally and ethically, addressing complex problems collaboratively that transcend borders or a single culture (Landorf & Doscher, 2015). This is also a learning process to become conscious that solely aiming to disseminate knowledge from one side to another will not be successful, even if it may be the original goal (Sun & Kang, 2021).

Transformative learning, on the other hand, offers a powerful perspective and skill set to help alter the prior frame of reference and/or habit of mind (Mezirow, 1978; 1991), understand expectations, navigate cross-cultural contexts, co-construct a mutual plan and knowledge with partners to take actions toward joint goals in the process of cross-cultural scholarship development (Cranton, 2006; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

In sum, adult educators need to be mindful of the five critical elements outlined above when conducting cross-cultural scholarship. These elements could inform scholars interested and motivated for a holistic understanding of the nuances of conducting meaningful and practical cross-cultural scholarship. Therefore, discussing a model and set of principles has significant implications for the field, theoretically and practically.

### **Practical Applications Scenario**

Franklin is an experienced adult educator in the U.S. higher education setting with over 20 years of expertise in teaching and researching educational program planning for training programs. He is highly regarded for planning quality programs for adult learners. He has shared his insights and experiences at various conferences. Franklin has also contributed significantly to the literature on current developments and issues related to program planning, further solidifying his reputation as a renowned scholar. Franklin's exceptional expertise has attracted international students who have either taken his classes or pursued graduate education under his guidance. Recently, a higher education institution in Japan contacted him through one of his international students to be their consultant in developing a new curriculum for a workforce education program.

This is an exciting opportunity for Franklin as it allows him to share his research and teaching expertise internationally. However, he does not have experience in real-site collaboration nor much cross-cultural scholarship, as he has yet to develop the international dimension in his career. He speaks only English and has limited international travel for vacations in a couple of English-speaking countries. He is concerned that he may encounter issues he has never encountered here in the U.S. Yet, he wonders what he needs to do.

### **Guidance from the Key Elements**

As a well-known adult educator in the U.S., Franklin aims to aid the Japanese higher education institution in developing workforce education programs. He is eager to go and apply his program planning knowledge and skills. With the information from the scenario, how can we help him prepare for his cross-cultural scholarship adventures in Japan? What should he consider before thinking about helping the Japanese higher education institution? What mindset would he develop working in a cultural setting that he has never experienced?

While the five-critical-element presented in this article could help Franklin to prepare for his international scholarship endeavors, to begin with, we must understand his strengths and areas of development to help him understand what it takes for this cross-cultural scholarship. First, we know that Franklin is highly interested in working on this international project. He takes his mission as applying his knowledge and skills to helping the Japanese educational institution to develop new programs. However, he lacks real experience working with Japanese, nor he speaks Japanese or understands its social and cultural norms and traditions that impact socializing, interactive, and decision-making processes. Helping him become aware of these situations, his motivation and interest may drive him to learn some cultural traditions and simple Japanese. This learning process can also facilitate his understanding of some differences between the two countries in general and educational systems in particular.

Second, as an experienced professor in higher education in the U.S. who has attracted international students to his program, Franklin may present great soft skills, professional conduct, and ethics as his strengths developed from his rich career experiences. However, he may consider the different ways of socializing and interacting in Japan. Because the international students he has interacted with are in his cultural settings, where international students are expected to adopt the U.S. cultural tradition, classroom normal, and teaching and learning

expectations. Thus, for success, Franklin has to consider altering soft skills based on Japanese communication and socializing norms.

This brings us to the third key element that Franklin must develop a transformative mindset in the whole process not only understand that he may need to learn language, culture, ways of communication styles but most importantly, he also needs to change his prior frame of reference regarding how his knowledge and skills in program development and planning may fit into the new culture settings. Too often, scholars become excited and eagerly transmit and disseminate their knowledge and miss the context for local understanding and applications.

Finally, Franklin must also calibrate his professional conduct and ethics to align with Japanese professional conduct and ethical standards, in addition to applying the U.S. ones solely. This is a co-learning process for mutual understanding toward the shared goals that must be established at the beginning with an appreciation for each other. To summarize, if Franklin carefully considers how the five crucial elements of cross-cultural scholarship are interconnected, he and the Japanese higher education institution could have a valuable learning experience that helps them achieve their collaboration goal through this scholarship opportunity.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Theorizing from the literature, this article outlines five critical elements for cross-cultural scholarship development. It highlights the importance of learning foreign languages and cultural traditions motivated by an interest in sharing and learning from others in an internalized context. It has significant implications for adult and higher education scholars to develop their crosscultural scholarship capacity.

These elements rested upon research theories offer us newer space for professional and personal development as lifelong learning faculty and global learners. Understanding and paying attention to these critical elements when engaging in international academic collaboration and scholarship helps scholars create new opportunities to transform and become more open to alternatives with comparative and appreciative learning approaches. Further, as non-Western perspectives and human wisdom become more accepted and valued in educational research and studies, global scholarship capacity building is becoming another professional and personal development area for us all as faculty and educators. We invite further discussion from the global learning community on this model formation.

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