

学霸：Academic Hero

**-- An Investigation of an Informal Bilingual Volunteer Peer Teaching Model in
Supporting Chinese International Students' Learning**

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Abstract:

The growth in the number of Chinese students in Western universities has prompted academics to explore different pedagogical practices suitable for diverse classrooms. Some persisting contradictions between Western and Eastern conceptions of education exist in the practices and institutional structures that students encounter daily. Designing appropriate curricular and learning activities is crucial to the embedding of Chinese international students' learning experience in the West. Adopting a practice-based approach, this ethnographic study investigates how an informal bilingual volunteer peer teaching model, entailing a mix of pedagogical practices, contributed to improving Chinese international students learning experience in a Western context. This paper advocates a movement beyond the boundaries and the limits of the fixed pedagogies and turns toward diverse pedagogical practices in teaching Chinese students. This paper also provides new insights about curricular design for academic and institutional practices in order to further develop Chinese students' positive learning experiences in the West.

Key words: Chinese students, practice-based, international students, peer teaching, higher education, diversity, bilingual teaching

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The increasing numbers of Chinese international students enrolled in Western higher education institutions are creating opportunities and challenges for both academics and students because of the diversities in tertiary classrooms (Heng, 2021; Kimmel & Volet, 2010; Leask, 2009; Wu, 2015). Some Chinese international students experience academic stress (Heng, 2019; Yan & Berliner, 2010) and struggle to adjust to the Western learning environment and to make a successful transition from the Chinese education system and pedagogical practices into Western tertiary classrooms (Jiang & Smith, 2009). Western teachers may encounter difficulties when addressing Chinese international students' learning needs and concerns (Cruickshank et al., 2012; Summers & Volet, 2008). Some Western teachers may have limited exposure and understanding of the nuances of Chinese learning practices which can result in these students being categorised as rote learners (Watkins & Biggs, 1996), passive learners (Jiang & Smith, 2009), with “lacks” or “deficits” (Clark & Gieve, 2006) and as a “problematic” group (Tan, 2011). Nevertheless, over the last decade, a large and diverse number of studies have been conducted to enhance the learning experience for Chinese international students. For example, studies have been conducted in the areas of learning strategies and pedagogy (Chen & Bennett, 2012), intercultural pedagogies (Wu, 2015), constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011), intercultural competency (Leask, 2009), academic performance (Crawford & Wang, 2015), curriculum internationalization (Cheng et al., 2018; Leask, 2012), learning behaviours (Kang & Chang, 2016), learning experience (Heng, 2019; Su & Harrison, 2016), and anxiety and social communication barriers (Andrade, 2006; Marginson et al., 2011), difficulties in developing friendships with domestic students, and a lack of sense of belonging (Campbell & Li, 2008; Cruickshank et al., 2012; Volet & Ang, 2012). Yet, limited studies have been conducted with a practice-based

approach to examine *what* practices and institutional arrangements can support their learning. Accordingly, this paper investigates how an informal bilingual volunteer peer teaching model, entailing a mix of pedagogical practices supports Chinese international students' learning experience in the Western context.

Pedagogical challenges in teaching Chinese international students in Western classrooms

Education systems in Australia and China are situated with different social and cultural contexts, and each system is defined by its own contradictions and tensions in teaching and learning (O'Connor, 2020; Ryan, 2010a). The implications of pedagogical and curricular differences in both systems demand further investigation to elucidate this complex situation in Australian tertiary education (Chen, 2014; Floyd, 2011). It can be challenging dealing with the diverse learning needs in classrooms and promoting student engagement and advancement of skills and knowledge (Hornsby & Osman, 2014; Summers & Volet, 2008).

The Chinese education system entails a complex mixture of ideological, political, economic factors, educational policies, and Confucian philosophical, social and family influences (Heng, 2018; Yu, 2009). The Confucian tradition has been embedded in the Chinese culture for around 2500 years and influences most aspects of Chinese culture, including the education system (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Traditional Chinese education is described as 'teacher-centred,' 'classroom-centred' and 'textbook-centred' (Hua et al., 2011) and the acquisition and transmission models are often adopted in teaching. Globalisation, as well as the sheer size of the Chinese population and the education system drive the need for standardisation and efficiency in pedagogy.

In contrast, Western culture often promotes collaborative-based constructivism and fosters critical thinking skills in educational approaches and teaching practices (Chiu, 2009; Kang & Chang, 2016). Asking questions and challenging the teachers and peers are seen as signs of deep learning that leads to group construction of knowledge (Liu et al., 2010; Thompson & Ku, 2005). However, teaching practices are not homogenous and educational concepts sometimes contradict each other (Cousin, 2011; Floyd, 2011; Hager & Hodkinson, 2011), for example, a significant increasing reliance on pre-recorded online lectures co-existing with an emphasis on engaged participative learning environments. In western classrooms, transmission-based, participative and constructivist models of learning co-exist (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Porcaro, 2011; Prosser & Trigwell, 2014) and tensions and contradictions exist between the process of massification and its effects, and the pedagogical requirements for quality control (O'Connor, 2020; Ryan, 2010b). For example, achieving learning outcomes in large classes that is a feature of higher education is challenging for academics and institutions (Hornsby & Osman, 2014).

Despite broad endorsement of constructivism within the higher education literature, there is little agreement about what constructivism is and should do within this context (Kirschner et al., 2006; O'Connor, 2020; Van Bergen & Parsell, 2019). Some argue that the Western constructivism approach assumes a prescriptive, outcome - orientated approach (as seen in Biggs and Tang's work 2011). Such an approach positions core curriculum knowledge as settled and unproblematic (O'Connor, 2020) and neglects the epistemic questions in knowledge (Goodson, 2008). Unsurprisingly, teaching Chinese international students in a diverse Western tertiary classroom can be difficult. Some academics struggle to help their Chinese international students and therefore tend to oversimplify these students' approaches to learning due to the lack of deep understanding of their practices and constructivist learning practices (Kirschner et al., 2006).

Peer teaching

Peer teaching has spread and is accepted in higher education and has become embedded in certain education communities (Rees et al., 2016). Peer teaching is reported positively in the literature, with advocates suggesting it enhances learning (Kassab et al., 2005), relieves of exam-related stress (Kommalage & Thabrew, 2011) and serves as a helpful adjunct to the curriculum teaching (Naeger et al., 2013). Similarly, research shows that, in a peer-teaching relationship, the peer teachers fulfil roles such as information giver and facilitator as well as providing a role model for their peer learners (Bulte et al., 2007; Ma et al., 2010). Peer teaching offers opportunities for new knowledge and skills to be learned by students and enriches cognitive and social congruence (Lockspeiser et al., 2008). Cognitive congruence is achieved because of the similarity of tutor and student not only in social standing, where peer teachers seem to express a better understanding of students' needs and concerns, but also in intellect and thought processing, where the similar educational level leads to greater cognitive congruence compared to faculty-led teaching (Lockspeiser et al., 2008; Schmidt & Moust, 1995). As such, peer teachers may express complex topics in ways that increase learners' receptiveness and understanding (Lockspeiser et al., 2008; Rees et al., 2016).

Sense of belonging

We need to belong to learn, and this belonging is an intrinsic condition for the creation and sharing of knowledge (Lave, 2019). Accordingly, developing peer relationships and friendships are essential to support international students' learning (Guan et al., 2008; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Sawir et al., 2008) and student success and retention (O'Keeffe, 2013). International students may feel anonymous in an unfamiliar crowd and experience the context as lack of social belongingness (Arkoudis et al., 2019), and isolating or distancing (Gomes & Tran, 2017; Hockings, 2011; Mann, 2001). Consequently,

international students may feel reluctant to participate in classroom activities such as discussions when they do not experience the classroom as inclusive (Tatar, 2005). Students' relationships with teachers and peers and their overall feelings of belongingness may support their positive learning experiences (Arkoudis et al., 2019), and such relationships significantly impacts their educational persistence (Cooper, 2009). A sense of belonging through social networks enables students to feel empowered to contribute to learning conversations (Thomas, 2002; Zepke, 2013) and generates connections that create propensity for learning (Keevers & Abuodha, 2012).

There is no simple answer to the complexities in teaching Chinese students in a Western university classroom. Thus, exploring different teaching practices, pedagogy and moving beyond a fixed view of pedagogical concepts and practices becomes meaningful for higher education (Löytönen, 2017). This view invites us to engage with the complexity and open the possibilities in understanding pedagogies through multiplicities, such as connections, experiences, and contextual factors instead of compartmentalization (Löytönen, 2017). The informal bilingual peer teaching model, that is the focus of this paper, is a response to this call as it connects the differences between pedagogies, sociocultural background, parental influence, and Confucian educational beliefs to the context of Chinese international students studying in a Western learning environment. This study, underpinned by practice theory, aims to explore how this teaching model enhances Chinese international students' learning experiences in Western classrooms.

Practice-based approach

Practice-based theories are prominent in educational literature, including in the area of learning in professional practice (Green & Hopwood, 2019; Hager & Beckett, 2019; Kemmis et al., 2012) and higher education (Keevers et al., 2014; Sykes et al., 2014). A practice-based approach focuses on a relational perspective (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008),

emphasising the relationships among people, and the material world which is continuously changing (Hager et al., 2012). Such an approach highlights the connectiveness and entanglement of one's past, present and future, "everything that is has no existence apart from its relation to other things" (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 3). Practice-based studies comprise of a diverse body of work that have developed explanations of social, cultural and material phenomena based on the notion of practices (Barad, 2007; Schatzki, 2019). Schatzki (2019) describes practices as the complex interactions of a temporarily evolving, open – ended set of sayings, doings and relating between people, other beings and material artifacts. These practices are linked through a 'teleoaffective structure', that is, "range of normativized and hierarchically ordered ends, projects and tasks, to varying degrees allied with normativized emotions and even moods" (Schatzki, 2002: 80). This normative conception of practice emphasises that practices are constituted by the mutual accountability of their performances to what is at issue and at stake in a practice (Rouse, 2007). Therefore, practice-based approaches view learning as socially, collectively and normatively constituted rather than individually constituted (Ray et al., 2020). This approach offers a good fit to study Chinese students' learning in an informal bilingual peer teaching program at an Australian university, as it stresses the importance of context and culture.

Study site and methods

The Chinese Commerce Academic Development (CCAD) is an informal, voluntarily organised, bilingual, peer teaching program for Chinese international students that is mainly used for accounting and finance subjects in the Business Faculty, at a regional university in NSW. All the CCAD leaders are high-achieving students in the Faculty of Business, and include Higher Degree Research (HDR)

students, Dean's scholars and casual academic tutors. Their practices were recognised and by the faculty through the formation of CCAD; but it is still largely based on voluntary work. The CCAD classes are bilingual and are conducted in English and Mandarin, with Mandarin being the principal language used.

This practice-based study employed ethnographic methods and was conducted for 18 months, over three consecutive semesters between 2013 and 2014. The researcher shadowed five participant students weekly; observed and interviewed three CCAD leaders and seven faculty members. Ethics approval (HE14/079) was granted prior to the data collection. The five participating students in CCAD programs, were aged between 20 and 23 years of age, and held student visas. None had experience studying outside of China prior to their enrolment in the commerce undergraduate degree. The data collection included formal semi-structured and informal interviews with the students and their CCAD leaders and faculty members. The research project also entailed observations of the students in lectures, tutorials, Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), CCAD workshops, and library studies. The researcher took fieldnotes during the observation and interviews and wrote reflective notes after collecting the data (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). The process enabled the researcher to “zoom in” on the entwined practices and generate the sensitizing research questions to identify the practices that students employed in their learning journey (Nicolini, 2013).

The data was collected in Mandarin to enable the students to think deeply and discuss freely (Wu, 2015) in constructing their social worlds (Silverman, 2011). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data was coded and reported in this paper with the participant students, CCAD leaders and faculty member's pseudonym. Samples of translation and the observation notes were shared and checked by the participant students to ensure the accuracy of the data.

The data analysis required studying the practices at hand, engaging with the “messiness” of the data, and tracing connections and re-interpreting the findings in the light of the insights provided from different angles or positions of the data (Nicolini, 2009). The data was analysed in a multi-layered process involving various stages: transcribing, translating, exacting and categorising key points, generating provisional themes, mapping clusters of practices and selecting data evidence. The categorisation and generation of themes were discussed with and confirmed by both Ph.D. supervisors. All the data was processed from an initial Word document to a spreadsheet, and then coloured and organized with separate Excel workbooks. Through this process extraction and analysis of the related CCAD data were consolidated and categorised; interconnections and inconsistencies in students’ learning experiences and practices were then revealed.

Results

The following section presents six results of this study including, hybrid – bilingual pedagogical approach; Jason Xueba (学霸) – Jason; Confucius’ dialogic practices in asking questions; prompting higher level of cognitive skills; linking and summarising; meeting social needs and concerns and teaching academics’ concerns.

Hybrid – bilingual pedagogical approach

The description of the arrangement in two CCAD classes illustrates how distinctive its pedagogical approach was in the context of the business faculty. The overcrowded CCAD classroom and the pedagogical practices are unlike anything the researcher had previously experienced at the Business faculty in this university:

It is a normal tutorial classroom, full of students (about 80 students in a standard tutorial room of 40) and students have moved extra desks and chairs from other classrooms. The desks are allocated next to each other, and there is no gap in

between, with one little aisle left to one side. Everyone is very keen to learn, and the atmosphere is intense. The leader uses Chinese slang and some key English concepts words and drew diagrams on the whiteboard in both Chinese and English. The examples used are in the Chinese context... students are chatting and giggling because of the humorous approach (Fieldnotes, 0906:30).

The CCAD setting offers students an opportunity to “hang together” to learn in the rare tutorial arrangements. A second observation with a smaller group has a different arrangement but some similarities:

It is a standard lecture/tutorial room, and students sit in a circular classroom, and the leader, Jason, uses predesigned slides. The way he conducted the class is not like a peer-learning format, as it is more like a lecture. Students take notes or take photos of the slides. He asks questions to encourage students to participate.

Students were involved intensively. They are busy, taking notes, looking at Jason, or talking with friends about what they are doing. They are active participants, which is in contrast to what I observed in normal lectures and tutorials, they were not so active and did not show much interest in the teaching most of time. The atmosphere is also light, as from time to time, his humour triggers some laughter (Fieldnotes 1505: 5).

It is observed that the atmosphere of the CCAD workshop is different from the normal lecture/tutorial in the university. The CCAD leaders adopt a hybrid pedagogical approach by combining constructivism and transmission models in the teaching, by presenting the lecture slides and encouraging students to join the discussion. The students participate in the discussion and respond to the teacher’s questions actively. The communication between the teachers and students is informative and effective because students engage with the teaching materials and teachers in the situated space of the CCAD classes.

Another key aspect of CCAD is that it is conducted mainly in Mandarin and partially in English. Students report that the bilingual pedagogical technique help them overcome language and cultural barriers and understand the subject content in Chinese and English. Lin says:

The key is that the classes are conducted in Chinese and therefore there is no language barrier. The students can think in the “Chinese way”. The CCAD leaders explain the key concepts in plain Chinese (Lin, 1406:3).

In the observation of a CCAD workshop, I note,

It is so interesting to see that Jason uses a Chinese business case study to explain an accounting concept. The case studies link to the students’ background knowledge and the example given makes sense to students and is much easier to understand as students are familiar with the context. In this class, they responded to questions asked and joined the discussion actively (Fieldnotes, 1505:10).

Through CCAD’s practice, a shared schema is achieved between teacher and learners.

Similarly, Su mentions that “... Sunny uses Chinese in teaching and some Chinese examples when she explains the difficult concepts. It is very helpful for me” (Su, 2008:11).

Jason Xueba (学霸) – Jason

The observations and interviews show that the sessions conducted by the CCAD leaders involved much more than peer teaching, learning and tutoring. The seemingly contradictory combination of different approaches includes the way that they put together disparate sociocultural pedagogical and institutional practices, roles and personal characteristics. For example, the leader Jason, similar to other leaders in CCAD, has a number of roles including Dean’s Scholar, PhD student and tutor. His Chinese background, sense of humour, age (he is older than the students), use of Chinese slang and case studies examples, and he has experience in studying in

Australia and is familiar with institutional practices and Australian culture. His classroom' practices such as drawing diagrams in Chinese and English, use of illustrations from Chinese contexts, fluency in accountancy and finance practices and theories and in English and Chinese pedagogy all play a role in his ability as a leader. His strong, embedded social and cultural understanding is evident in his sense of humour and the way that he interacts with students. For example, Jason alludes to filial practices by teasing the students, suggesting ironically, that they spend their time watching movies rather than studying and that if their parents knew they would be in trouble. While Jason is not a lecturer, he is highly respected by students who called him Xueba (学霸), or in English "academic hero".

Confucius' dialogic practices in asking questions

CCAD leaders' understanding of Chinese Confucius and Australian pedagogies is illustrated in the way they ask questions. As the participants report, their approaches are different from the way their lecturers and tutors normally ask questions because CCAD leaders not only focus on explaining concepts but also on triggering them to think about the reasons why the lecturers choose to use the specific concepts. It also appears to be dialogic in the Confucian sense of trying to engage students more deeply. Chinese students are familiarised with such an approach in the past, therefore, they can establish the connections between the past and the present when learning new concepts (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). This approach encourages students to inquire about the meaning in the context of relationships by asking specific types of questions. Ting says:

[CCAD] helps me to know the internal relationship [between the concepts] to cope with the change in the exam questions... CCAD helps to set up the relationship between concepts, even if the exam questions are changed, I still know how to relate the concepts and know how to do it... the teacher often asks, *do you know why? Do you know why the teacher talked about this concept? I will*

show you something to make it clear. Then he shows the relationships in between, step-by-step, until we understand (Ting, 2808:5).

The leaders purposely ask questions and help the students link the concepts together by showing the connection between different concepts and how they are used in different accounting subjects. Ting's view is in line with the researcher's observations that "Lucas (CCAD leader) uses a process map on the white board to show the connection between different terms in both languages to help students recognize the relations between the key academic concepts (Fieldnotes 1505:16), it appears that the established connections help students to see the big picture and to identify topics that might appear in exams.

Prompting higher level of cognitive skills: linking and summarising

From an academic practice perspective, bundles of practices utilised by CCAD facilitate students' learning prompting them to identify the key difficult concepts and demonstrating how to set up links between concepts. As such, students focus on comprehending the concepts and theories, consequently, this improves their higher level of cognitive skills. Su works out which classes to attend and which teachers can assist her to learn effectively. She describes,

Before I went to Sunny's class [CCAD workshop], I felt like I was in the clouds, and all seemed puzzling. After the workshop, I feel that there is a clear path in front of me (Su, 2008:7)

Clearly, the class helps her clarify confusions in her mind. In Su's view, Sunny helps her to eliminate unimportant things, so she can focus on relationships between concepts and answer exam questions effectively:

Sunny uses the diagrams to show their relationship and how they affect each other, and then explains and links the concepts together to make the relationship clear. He is very good at linking the concepts . . . there are many concepts, which

I have not thought through, but after he discussed them, they become clear to me (Su, 2008:8).

In one of the interviews, Su says she was sent by her father to study in Australia and her focus is always on how to pass exams, so she can obtain the graduation certificate. She reflects that the CCAD approach not only helps her to understand the difficult concepts but also provides strategies to prepare for exams. Lin compares the different approaches between CCAD and PASS. He also articulates that the CCAD leader, Joe's approach identifies the key confusing concepts which helps him prepare for exams. Lin says,

I attend the CCAD workshop. Joe summarises and connects the links from two topics.... Which is different from the PASS leader's approach. The approach is similar to a normal lecture. ... is more useful as it helps to discover which some concepts I still do not understand (Lin, 0416:2).

Meeting social needs and concerns

Students participate in CCAD workshops for academic and social needs. In the group, all the students face similar issues in adapting to the foreign learning environment. For example, Lin is disappointed that he has few friends and that the different institutional practices and arrangements at the university make it difficult for him to develop friendships with other students.

I have to find new friends each session, as I have never met most of students in my class before. To connect with other Chinese students and communities is an easy option to meet people and make friends (Lin, 1909: 5).

Lin's experience shows that institutional practices can produce a different learning environment and experiences for students.

I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to the new learning environment as no one knows me or cares about me much as they did before in China. I do not feel

embarrassed if I make mistakes in answering the questions or if I cannot answer the teacher's questions in the class . . . they are just strangers around me (Lin, 1909:5).

Lin manages to connect with other Chinese students by becoming active in Chinese student groups:

I ask questions to other Chinese students; we share study materials. I join some Chinese student groups, such as CCAD, and this Chinese students' learning research (Lin, 1408:3).

Lin joins the Chinese student groups and has more connection with peers and feels like he belongs. Students become emotionally connected with peers through familiar socio-cultural practices through daily practices (Rouse 2007). Similarly, Chuchu has a clear motivation like Lin, lives in the university's accommodation and joins the international students' clubs and participates in the activities to create her social networks. The social networks open new opportunities for students' learning because through the networks students can share their study experience.

Teaching academics' concerns

The hybrid pedagogy used in CCAD helps students deal with the challenges associated with learning about complex English concepts by combining academic and sociocultural practices in the teaching. Although both the faculty executive and teaching academics acknowledge CCAD's contribution to learning and teaching, they also express potential concerns. Some academics express concerns, as Terisa explains,

The main concern is that Chinese students use CCAD as an alternative to formal teaching hours (lecture and tutorial). Consequently, it reflects in the low attendance and student engagement rates in formal teaching hours (Terisa, 1305:5).

She continues,

The focus on students' exam performance enables students to practise short-cuts that may be unhelpful in their long-term development of important study practices that also may support student learning. The implicit contradiction is also evident in that student learning may be traded off for exam performance (Terisa, 1305:6)

Some academics also express concern that it is unfair that other international students do not have similar opportunities. Even though the concerns are understandable, potentially the lecturers and tutors could learn from the practices of CCAD to enhance engagement in the formal lectures and tutorials.

Discussion

This study investigates how an informal voluntary peer-led model offers an alternative bilingual and culturally sensitive hybrid pedagogy entailing educational, sociocultural, and institutional practices to assist Chinese students face the challenges in learning in Western tertiary classrooms. Students' learning is intertwined with practices of their peers, the CCAD leaders, faculty members and institutional structures (Schatzki, 2019). Although this study was conducted in one regional university in Australia, the findings of this research reveal a number of wider benefits and implications as follows.

Firstly, the bilingual peer teaching method, enabled students to express themselves freely in group discussions using their mother language (Cui et al., 2015). This bilingual approach helps to interpret subject materials for Chinese students in their first language, and this is perceived to offer great comfort to students who feel unsure and/or anxious about subject materials, assessment tasks and exams. The CCAD leaders skilfully apply Chinese examples and strategically use Mandarin in teaching and communicating the complex concepts and meanings in core subjects to ensure students' understanding (Littlewood & Yu,

2011). Such an approach addresses the challenges that Chinese international students face in learning which are caused by lack of English academic literary and specialized disciplinary knowledge. Furthermore, this approach also tackles the issues Chinese students have due to the norms and conventions that are embedded in Western cultural values and beliefs (Wang, 2012), such as how to ask questions and join discussions. These difficulties cause stress and anxiety for students and contribute to them avoiding joining discussions with local students, asking questions, and engaging with their teachers in classes (Yan & Berliner, 2010).

Secondly, CCAD provides alternative pedagogical practices in teaching Chinese international students which help them to navigate courses and overcome the barriers and differences between two educational systems. CCAD acts as a bridge which enables students to have a transitional pathway into the Western learning environment. The CCAD leaders capably employ the hybrid approach that not only includes Confucius pedagogy, but also the fundamental elements of acquisition, transmission, and constructivist approaches. The Confucius pedagogy inspires students with dialectic questions that helps them understand the concepts and disciplinary knowledge. The acquisition and transmission approach can be seen in how the students are explicitly taught how to answer exam questions. The constructivist approach is evident in the ways that the leaders ask the students questions that push them to relate the concepts to everyday accounting and finance practices by using Chinese examples.

Thirdly, the CCAD leaders and Chinese international students co-construct this model which builds strong connections and establishes trust-based relationships between the leaders and the students in the situated learning environment (Yakhlef, 2010). Students' learning is intertwined with the practices of their peers and CCAD

leaders, and also indirectly connects to Chinese culture, community and the education system. Students' educational and sociocultural practices become entangled with their peers and teachers in this environment and are socially and collectively construct and co-construct in their learning (Xu, 2019). The CCAD environment not only enables students to have the opportunity to connect with other students and support each other through familiar sociocultural practices (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009), but soften culture shock and smooth intercultural adjustments (Lin, 2006). Such a space assists students to create a sense of belonging through their daily practices and establishes constructive social relationships with peers from similar backgrounds (Keevers & Abuodha, 2012). Having close relationships with their peers assists students to navigate the transition to a Western learning environment. Students' learning is inseparable from interactions and relationships in every aspect of student life (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). There is no clear line between Chinese students' study practices and social practices in this learning process.

Fourthly, it is evident that tensions exist within and between the practices and institutional structures that students encounter as part of their journey in the university. The faculty may need to consider legitimating CCAD model by endorsing it officially and including it in the formal curriculum. It helps the institution not only with the ongoing challenges they face with large and diverse classrooms and reduces the pressure arising from the limited resource and increased international student populations (Marginson, 2014; Stigmar, 2016). Such an approach further facilitates collaboration and builds a two-way learning role in which faculty members may have opportunities to learn from CCAD leaders to enhance their cultural humility and cross-cultural capabilities (Foronda et al., 2016; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). The process enables the faculty members to examine their own identity and biases and assists them to recognize the hidden curriculum (Lee & Lund, 2016), and acknowledge individual limitations in knowledge and skills, thereby establishing a

growth mindset of lifelong (Tinkler & Tinkler 2016). This process also calls forth teacher's practicing self-awareness and self-reflection when interacting with others to ensure them to be attentive to culture, power and privilege (Foronda et al., 2016).

Significance of this study and conclusion

The findings of this study illustrate how the CCAD leaders have developed a method in assisting Chinese international students to bridge gaps between transmission, acquisition, and constructivism, and support student engagement in learning. The pedagogical practices adopted by leaders help to address issues of high failure rates among Chinese students in core subjects. This informal, primarily voluntary peer teaching model is a practical example of designing curriculum and pedagogical methods of Peer Learning programs to improve international students' experience in a Western University (Leask, 2009). The strategy of developing bilingual lectures and academic support programs in core subjects and conducting Western pedagogical practices workshops could potentially make the first-year transition less complicated for Chinese international students (Kift et al., 2010). Institutional practices could legitimize, support and develop peer teaching/learning programs to facilitate students learning at the start of their courses, thereby, enhancing students' learning experiences and success at university. This study suggests universities need to pay more attention in supporting the students' collaboration and developing a sense of belonging and community. A further qualitative longitudinal study to follow up students' learning across their entire degree would provide insight into how their study practices have changed over time with the CCAD support they received.

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