


Spring 5-11-2018

Understanding Hidden Diversity: The Third Culture Student Experience at USD

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Understanding Hidden Diversity: The Third Culture Student Experience at USD

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Abstract

The intention of this research was to expand the common notion of who international students are. This research uncovered the unique experiences of third culture students at the University of San Diego with the hopes of raising awareness of the existence of this group of students. The term third culture [student] was defined as an individual “who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parent’s culture” (Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock, 2017, p.23). Third culture students have experienced a highly mobile life; a kind of lifestyle that is unique and unfamiliar to many USD students. Utilizing two cycles of Appreciative Inquiry, this research explored the questions: What are the experiences of students who identify as third culture students at the University of San Diego and how can I as an aspiring higher education practitioner facilitate greater understanding of what it means to be an international student? Findings of this research created awareness in the lived experiences of third culture students and complexities of student identities, which debunked the common notion that international students refer to students have entered America on a student visa. The desired outcome and implications of this work were to raise awareness among the general USD community about the complexities of being international and creating an inclusive environment that welcomes all students who consider themselves to be international.

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Introduction

In the context of American higher education, one is typically considered a degree-seeking international student if he or she is a foreign passport holder on the F-1 (student) visa. While the legal status is necessary for institutions to distinguish policies and resources for domestic and international students, it oversimplifies cultural complexities that exist within both groups. Moreover, the separation between domestic and international students by legal status neglects the exploration needed to understand what it truly means to be international. For example, are students who never left their home country until attending the University of San Diego, international? Or are domestic students who followed their parents on military, missionary, or international corporation expatriation and spent a significant number of years abroad, not international? So what does it mean to be international? It is my belief that students who are truly international, who are global citizens, are third culture students.

Third culture students are individuals who have spent a significant number of their childhood years away from their passport country. As college students, third culture students bring with them a wealth of traveling experience, knowledge, and insights about cultures other than of their own, and desire to be in multicultural settings. As the Graduate Assistant of the Office of International Students & Scholars (OISS), I have had the privilege of working closely with third culture students. I co-advise the International Student Organization (ISO) and the International Orientation Team (I-Team) with my supervisor. Working with the I-Team for three semesters has been a very valuable experience. The first I-Team that I worked with in the fall semester of 2016 consisted of 12 members, two of whom self-identified as third culture students. One of them, who is a junior this year, has been selected to be the chair of fall semester 2017 I-Team. The chair recruited another fellow third culture student who is not classified as an

international student. This third culture student identifies as Colombian American, and has lived in France, Oman, and Indonesia before repatriating back to Texas for high school. During the interview for recruiting I-Team members, this student revealed that she contemplated transferring out of USD in the first semester because she could not find a sense of belonging in the American student population. While this student identifies as being international, she was not aware of the international community at USD because the OISS houses contact information of international students only. Since the student was admitted to USD as an American citizen, the OISS did not have her contact information and thus, could not reach out to her regarding events and resources existing among the international community. The word “international” can be misleading and exclusive. Unfortunately, domestic students who consider themselves to be international, whether it be because of their cultural background or travel history, are reluctant to join the international community because they are not recognized as an international student by the institution. The word “international” usually connotes inclusion and diversity, but based on my observations, I wonder if the international community at USD has been as inclusive and diverse as it can be.

The Office of International Students & Scholars (OISS) at USD has two main functions. One, is to serve as a compliance and regulatory role in students’ and scholars’ immigration-related matters. Second, is to provide services and resources that support international students’ and scholars’ transition and success at the institution. This research focused mainly on the non-immigration-related support and services that is currently being offered to international students and scholars. The purpose of this research was to explore what it means to be an international student by understanding characteristics of third culture students, their experiences at USD, and how I, as an aspiring global educator, can provide support to students who consider themselves

to be international, regardless of their classification at higher education institutions. Embedded in my research are my values of empathy, community, and trust. The research questions that framed this study are: What are the experiences of third culture students at USD and how can I facilitate greater understanding of what it means to be international? This research used the 4-D stages of Appreciative Inquiry: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny, to collect and analyze data. Data was collected through surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups.

Background

The term *Third Culture Kids* was originally coined by Dr. John and Ruth Hill Useem who conducted research on students in India who had received Western education. The research led the Useems to establish the term “to cover the styles of life created, shared, and learned by persons who are in the process of relating their societies, or sections thereof, to each other” (Useem, 1999) and referred to children who accompanied their parents abroad. Typical cases of third culture kids are children who accompany their parents on military, missionary, or international corporation assignments ranging from a couple of years to over a decade.

Authors David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken (2001) published the book *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up among Worlds*, currently republished as *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*. The book contains extensive information on the characteristics of third culture kids (TCK), a collection of first-hand stories, and recommendations for educational institutions and sponsoring organizations to address the needs of third culture kids and their families. Some of the needs include addressing loss and grief (Gilbert, 2008) and negotiation and maintenance of identity (Grimshaw and Sears, 2008). Being exposed to a highly mobile lifestyle means that third culture kids go through transition to new cultures, places, and relationships more frequently than children who stay in one place for most

of their childhood. The consequences of a cross-cultural lifestyle have led researchers to also focus on mental health and counseling implications (Limberg and Lambie, 2011). I anticipated themes of loss, identity, and relationships to come up during my research and it was my intention to discuss what USD has done well to address these needs and what can be improved through the research method of Appreciative Inquiry.

As my research focused on college students, I used the term *third culture students* (TCS) as opposed to *third culture kids*. As defined by Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock (2017), the definition of a third culture is:

A way of life that is neither like the lives of those living in the home culture nor like the lives of those in the local community, but is a lifestyle with many common experiences shared by others living in a similar way. (17)

Pollock and Van Reken (2009) also elaborated that:

Time by itself doesn't determine how deep an impact the third culture experience has on the development of a particular child..... [but] the time when it happens can. It must occur during the development years - from birth to eighteen years of age. (p. 21)

To be slightly more specific for my research, I recruited students at the University of San Diego who have spent at least two years away from their passport country or parents' culture during or before high school. While the impact of a culture on an individual cannot be determined by the time spent in a culture, I believed that it requires at least two years to overcome culture shock and begin to understand the values and norms of the new culture. Hence, participants of my action research were current USD students who have spent two or more years away from their passport country or their parent's culture. As some of my participants carry dual citizenship between America and other countries and spent a significant number of years in one of the

country of citizenship, there were some blurriness as to whether these students were third culture students or not.

At the University of San Diego, there is much talk about creating a diverse and inclusive campus. There are several offices that are dedicated to the commitment of diversity and inclusivity, one of which is the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) and the student groups that it advises. Working as the graduate assistant at OISS has allowed me to realize the greater potential of the OISS and its respective student groups of addressing the existence and needs of students who are international by heart but not by visa status. As a consequence of globalization and increasing mobility, more and more children are raised in ways that deem them international. My formal role is to support the international community at USD and the students I mostly advise are students who entered the country like me, on a student visa. Since international students face separate regulations regarding minimum credit hours, working, and cultural adaptation challenges compared to domestic students, my role allowed me to advise and support international student transition and success at USD. Over the two years working at the OISS, I have met several domestic students who identified as being international and expressed interest in our international community. I have also met several international students who have lived abroad as a child away from their passport country or their parent's culture. It became increasingly fascinating for me to listen to their unique experiences at USD and understanding what it means to not only service the international community but also promote international education.

Context

The organizational setting for my research is the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) at the University of San Diego (USD). As a Graduate Assistant, part of my

responsibility is to co-advise the International Student Organization (ISO) and the International Orientation Team (I-Team). Being a graduate student and part-time employee of the OISS has been confusing to some students, especially for those on the I-Team. Most of the challenges of being the advisor for ISO and I-Team but only a part-time employee at the OISS stem from students not seeing me as an authority. In addition, it has been difficult for students to understand the relationship between my assistantship and my study. Despite the confusion and blurring of my roles, I saw this as a benefit to my research to establish rapport with students while expressing my aspirations as a higher education practitioner.

My roles as a graduate assistant of the OISS, advisor of the ISO and I-Team, and graduate student of the MA in Higher Education allowed me to see things from different angles. While this may have been confusing to others, the various roles that I played optimized my learning as an aspiring higher education practitioner. I was able to tread boundaries more seamlessly and flexibly compared to someone who adheres to only one defined role. The other role that I also played is being an international student who was raised in a multicultural household. Although I do not fit the definition of third culture students, my experience of studying at schools attended by many expatriate children, growing up with parents from different countries, and attending a culturally homogenous university in Hong Kong allowed me to easily establish a rapport with third culture students at USD who were once expatriate children attending a predominantly White university and some, coming from family of multiple cultures.

There are two reasons why this action research was important. The first reason was on a personal level and the second reason was on an organizational level. This action research was a valuable experience for me to understand the complexities of student identities, one of which is being a third culture student. In tapping into the experiences and understanding the needs of

third culture students, I hoped to explore ways to better support international (not in the legal sense but in the cultural sense) students. At an organizational level, I hoped to inspire college faculty, administrators, and students to explore the idea of being international and what that might mean to them and the college community that they serve. Especially at the Office of International Students and Scholars, I hoped that findings in this research will further continue the conversation of what it means to be international and how we can better support students who are not foreign passport holders but identify as international.

During the pre-cycle, advisors at the OISS were interviewed to gain deeper insight to the functions of the OISS and the student groups that they supervise. Advisors were also asked to share their individual roles within the OISS and their perspectives about the future of the international community at USD. Data collected at the interviews also served to identify current practices that address the needs of international students and areas of growth. Across the board, advisors stated that there are two primary functions of the OISS. The first one is to serve in compliance to immigration policies and the federal law. Advisors update and maintain students' immigration documents and advise international students on adhering to policies and federal law. An equally important function is to provide support and resources that help students to navigate the American culture and higher education system to succeed. Some examples of support and resources that the OISS provides apart from immigration advising are the international orientations, visa workshops, and career panels. Many of the community building programs and events are coordinated by the International Student Organization (ISO). Both international students and domestic students who consider themselves to be international serve on the ISO Executive Board every year. ISO's main focus is to serve as a *home away from home* for

international students and as a platform for social connections to be made among international students and between international and domestic students.

The International Orientation Team, also known as the I-Team, is a student volunteer team that is established semester to welcome new international students during orientation. During orientation, I-Team assists the OISS in physically setting up orientation sessions and facilitating community building events like the Harbor Cruise event every Fall semester. The I-Team serves as a mentor for incoming students who are far away from their comfort zone. The I-Team is particularly useful on move-in day when international students are given an earlier date than their domestic peers to move into their dorms. From the moment students are dropped off by their ride at the Missions Crossroads, the I-Team helps each international student to check-in at the Missions Crossroads with the Residential Life staff then walk or drive students to their dorms. This is a critical time for bonding between first-year international students and I-Team members who advise on where to get food on campus, how to do laundry, what to do on campus and more. Often, I-Team members make long-term friendship with incoming students because they leave strong and positive impression on students at the time when they most need guidance and support.

Once orientation ends and classes begin, new international students are prompted to join the International Student Organization (ISO). The ISO is a registered USD student organization that receives funding from the Associated Students and the Office of International Students & Scholars to create events and programs that welcomes all international and domestic students. For international students, ISO events and the ISO Lounge on the fourth floor of the Student Life Pavilion gives them the opportunity to reconnect with their international community as they spend most of their time in classrooms with American peers. Many American students also join

ISO and are often students who have dual citizenship with other countries or have returned from studying abroad. ISO hosts weekly coffee hours, monthly off-campus dinners at different ethnic restaurants, and cultural events like the annual International Expo & Cultural Fashion Show. ISO serves to be international students' home away from home and as hub for students who wish to learn about other cultures.

Methodology I

There are several epistemological assumptions that informed my action research method. Firstly, I believe that learning is lifelong and ever changing. According to Inoue (2015), as action researchers, we pursue “experiential knowledge, a type of knowledge situated in specific, real-life practice contexts and open to a variety of human and situational factors” (p.35). As higher education practitioners, it is our duty to acknowledge complexities of life and develop practice that can be changeable yet sustainable. Secondly, learning involves others directly and indirectly. “Action research means working with other at all stages of the process. At the data gathering stage you (singular or plural) are investigating your practice in relation with others; at the validation stage you negotiate your findings with others” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p.28). I wanted to find an action research model that encouraged strong communication among participants and co-creation of the experience. I believed that the Appreciative Inquiry model best fit the intention of my research.

The Appreciative Inquiry model emphasized the active participation of stakeholders. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is grounded on the “basic assumption [that] an organization is a mystery that should be embraced as a human center of infinite imagination, infinite capacity, and potential” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p.16). The practice of AI is also founded on four propositions:

1. Inquiry into the “art of the possible” in organizational life should begin with appreciation.
2. Inquiry into what is possible should yield information that is applicable.
3. Inquiry into what is possible should be provocative.
4. Inquiry into the human potential of organizational life should be collaborative. (p.4)

Appreciative Inquiry consists of four stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Each stage in the 4-D cycle serves a specific purpose. According to Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros (2008), the Discovery stage involves identifying and appreciating what has been done well. Participants shared stories of positive experiences and discuss the capacity to achieve more. The Dream phase envisions change by acknowledging the strengths of the organization and challenging the status quo. Participants discussed the potential of the organization and necessary changes. In the Design phase, participants created the organization’s new structure “by generating provocative propositions (also known as possibility statements or design principles) that embody the organizational dream in the ongoing activities” (p.45). Lastly, the Destiny phase is a time of “continuous learning, adjustment, and improvisation.....all in the service of shared ideals” (p.46). It is not the finish line but rather an ongoing stage that eventually will lead the organization back to the Discovery cycle for newer improvements.

The strengths of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) model is that active involvement is not only encouraged but necessary. The challenge with AI is that it is a new approach to organizational change. Participants will more than likely be unfamiliar with the concept of AI and will require an introductory experience of AI. Before the research commences, Cooperrider, Whitney, Stavros (2008) recommend participants “experience an appreciative interview that includes some variation of the four generic AI questions.....as follows”:

1. What would you describe as being a peak experience or high point in your life - personal or professional?
2. What do you value most about yourself? Your work? Your organization?
3. What is the core factor that gives life to your organization?
4. Describe your vision of the future for the organization and your world? (p.51)

The strengths of AI are also its own challenges and limitations. Since it requires high involvement of participants, introducing AI to participants, and explaining how AI will play a role in the research, I anticipated great amounts of time input not only on my part but also on participants. To convince participants that their involvement will benefit them and the organization in the long run, the pre-cycle also focused on initiating engagement and motivation in participants.

Needs Assessment

Advising the International Student Organization Executive Board (ISO E-Board) and the International Orientation Team (I-Team) has allowed me to meet several students who are not classified as international students but are passionate about serving international students. When I talked to them about their reasons for being involved in the international community, most of them have identified as being international and wanted to seek an experience that the American student population could not offer. This finding has made me contemplate on what it meant to be international and what are the characteristics of international students? I believed that third culture students were strong examples of what it truly means to be international. Therefore, I wanted to use this opportunity to learn from them and explore ideas that would empower me to advocate for international education.

To better understand the history and purpose of the International Student Organization

and International Orientation Team, I interviewed Chia-Yen Lin, Director of Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) and Greg Grassi, who is my supervisor and the Associate Director of OISS. Chia-Yen, who served on the International Orientation Team (I-Team) when she was a graduate student at USD, was a resource for me to learn about how the I-Team may have been similar or different from the time she served in year. Greg, who advises the both the ISO and I-Team, was a resource for me to also gather information on how both student groups have been similar or different in the past. I also interviewed the Assistant Director, Rhona Reyes, and the International Student Coordinator of the time, Amelia Bachtiar, to gain information about their roles in the OISS.

My research pertained to the international community at USD but the focus was not on the advisors of the OISS. The plan was to conduct a pre-cycle with the staff of the OISS to gain more background information of the ISO and I-Team and insight to what internationalism is to them. The pre-cycle was also conducted with third culture students that agreed to be in my research. Student participants were recruited using snowball method. I heavily relied on the several third culture students that I knew to reach out to their peers who are third culture students. The invitation to participate was not only confined to undergraduate students as I thought there may be graduate third culture students who can provide valuable insights as well.

Literature Review

Third Culture Kids

The number of third culture kids grow as more international corporations and embassies/consulates send their employees and their families around the world for various job assignments. Interracial/ethnic marriages, military, and missionary assignments also contribute to the increasing numbers of third culture kids. Due to a lifestyle of high mobility, many third

culture kids experience unresolved losses and prolonged identity confusion. Not being rooted to a country and being exposed to other dependents of expatriates creates a constant sense of loss and grief for children who frequently separate from their friends, belongings, and community. Third culture kids (TCK) often question who they are as their sense of self is in relation to others in similar situations and not completely in relation to the traditional aspects of identity like ethnicity. TCKs are often frustrated with explaining the complexity of their life as the majority do not understand and have not experienced the expatriate lifestyle. Rather than explaining the process of identity formation of third culture kids, Gilbert (2008) focuses on a significant theme of loss and grief that is salient in the narratives of many third culture kids. As third culture students attend college, they are no longer subjected to their parent's job assignments and have access to various campus resources, I was curious to know if third culture students regard their time in college as a time of stability.

A significant number of literature and resources online revolves around counseling implications for K-12 schools. Living in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world calls for school counselors to develop cultural sensitivity and programs that tackle third culture kids' lack of sense of security, stability, and even belonging. Limberg and Lambie (2011) placed importance of collaboration between schools, families, and students, to create a culturally competent education environment, in other words, a safe space, for students to develop a sense of belonging and identity (p.50). As a consequence of moving abroad and being educated overseas, a substantial number of third culture kids experience depression, anxiety and other mental-health related issues. Living in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world calls for school counselors to develop cultural sensitivity and programs that tackle third culture kids' lack of sense of security, stability, and even belonging. It is no wonder that school-based interventions

targeted at third culture students are prominent in international schools that third culture students attend all over the world.

Third culture kids, who are now adults and referred to as adult third culture kids, have also utilized the internet to write about their first-hand experience growing up as a third culture kid and what that means. As an adult third culture kid, Ndéla Faye (2016), wrote that she still struggles to answer the seemingly simple question, *Where are you from?* because of being biracial and not growing up at either parents' countries long enough to feel a certain way. Yet, she wrote that "I feel grateful for the experiences I've had, and I am proud to feel, above all, like a citizen of the world.....The sense of being at home anywhere, yet feeling that home is nowhere, is part of who I am" ("Am I rootless or am I free?", para.9). Third culture kids who transition into adulthood are now referred to as *adult third culture kids* or ATCKs. Literature or online sources focusing on transition to becoming an ATCK and specifically, college trajectories and experiences are sparse.

Understanding the experiences of third culture students is important not only because of the increase in numbers but also because many people similarly experience the feeling of being caught in-between cultures. Originally coined by sociologist, Dr. Ruth Useem:

The term *first culture* refers to the *home* or *passport* culture of the parents, and the term *second culture* references the *host culture* to which the family has moved or in which they have lived. The term *third culture* then refers to a *way of life* that is neither like the lives of those living back in the home culture nor like the lives of those in the local community, but is a *lifestyle with many common experiences shared by others living in a similar way*. (Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock, 2017, p.17)

As literature and sources have shown, there are both pros and cons to be a third culture kid. Most often than not, ATCKs are able to reflect on their childhood and confidently say that while there were challenges, they cannot imagine a life better than what they had. Yet, it is important to note that such positive thinking is an outcome of long years of reflection, contemplation, and exploration. This action research highlights the thought process and experiences of third culture students at the University of San Diego that have allowed them to see the benefits of their rootlessness and feeling in-between.

Identity Development

Using traditional theories of racial or ethnic identity development to analyze the third culture student identity is not recommended because their experiences cannot be simply understood in terms of their own race or ethnicity. The third culture student identity is complex because they are epitome for what is known as hidden diversity. According to Bethel and Van Reken (2003), hidden diversity is defined as a “diversity of experience that shapes a person’s life and world view but is not readily apparent on the outside, unlike the usual diversity markers such as race, ethnicity, nationality, etc” (Hidden Diversity in a Globalizing World section, para.1). This action research gained deeper understanding of characteristics of third culture students that are not easily identified by the naked eye. In fact, I believe that most of what makes each one of us unique, are internal qualities that we cannot see but can only sense and understand. Hence, it was useful for me to gain deeper perspective of the experiences of third culture students using Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory.

Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship: Self-authorship is a skill and a way of life that heightens self-awareness and confidence. Individuals who exercise self-authorship act from within and not from “values, beliefs, interpersonal loyalties and intrapersonal states from

external authorities” (Magolda, 2008, p.270). Magolda identifies three elements of self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments. Understanding how higher education practitioners can encourage self-authorship in college students is important because authenticity can be difficult to grasp and achieve at times of identity exploration. College is a time where emerging adults are given ample space, time, and opportunities to explore who they are and what they can and want to be. As highly impressionable social beings, emerging adults are susceptible to external forces like their peers. At such times, it is important for higher education practitioners to empower students to think and behave in a way that is aligned to their values and beliefs. The first key element to self-authorship is trusting the internal voice. Individuals who trusted their internal voice “recognized that reality, or what happened in the world and their control, but their reactions to what happened was within their control.....This led to a better sense of when to make something happen versus when to let something happen” (p.279). Once individuals form an understanding around what can be controlled and what cannot be, they can start to build an internal foundation, where they:

Consciously set about creating a philosophy or framework - an internal foundation - to guide their reactions to reality.....They reflected on how they had organized themselves and their lives and rearranged as necessary to align arenas of their lives with their internal voices. (p.280).

Lastly, individuals secure internal commitments by “‘crossing over’ from understanding their internal commitments to living them.....When the internal foundation became the enduring core of their being, participants felt that living their convictions was a natural and as necessary as breathing” (p.281). The intention of this research was to identify ways in which third culture students have formed and continue to form the way they understand themselves in relation to on-

going transition in their lives. Third culture students have always experienced transition and as they progress through and out of college, they will continue to experience transition. Hence, it is important that their self-authorship is understood in relation to the transitions that they have experienced and will continue to experience.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory: Schlossberg (1981) states that “a transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships” (p.5). To understand why people experience and react to transition differently, Schlossberg explored factors in three categories that affect one's adaptation to change. Adaptation is defined as “a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life” (p.7). The three categories that determine an individual's experience of transition and adapting to the change are their perception of the transition, characteristics of pre-transition and post-transition environments, and the characteristics of the individual. Factors that affect the perception of the transition are role change, affect, source, timing, onset, and duration. The combination of the elements determines the degrees of stress that an individual will experience. Characteristics of pretransition and post-transition environments include international support systems like the family unit, network of friends, and institution support. Characteristics of the individual include sex, age, socioeconomic status, and other ascribed status. The combination of all elements determines the impact of the transition on the adaptation process of an individual.

It is useful to analyze the experience of third culture students using Schlossberg's Transition Theory because transitions have characterized their life. While this research focuses on third culture students, they will proceed into adulthood with the skill set and behavior learned

from being a third culture kid and student. Hence, when talking about third culture students or any group in general, it is important to know that their experiences are not stagnant. Schlossberg focused on transition during adulthood because “as people move through life they continuously experience change and transition, and that these changes often result in new networks of relationships, new behaviors, and new self-perceptions” (p.2). Attending college, especially in a country one is not accustomed to, is a transition. Schlossberg believed that “it is not the transition itself, that is of primary importance, but rather how that transition fits with an individual stage, situation and style at the time of the transition” (p.5). It is also important to note that starting at a college is not the only transitional period for students. The period of transition can vary and attending college may bring other forms of transition like dating and joining student organizations. As a higher education practitioner who now has experienced both undergraduate and graduate studies in different countries, I believe that college life is full of transitions. Transitions occur even after college and during graduate studies. Therefore, I hope to empower myself in learning how third culture students have coped with transitions and how they have eventually come to see their international lifestyle not as a loss but as a gain.

Methodology II

My research included two cycles in addition to a pre-cycle consisting of the 4-D stages of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). I distributed surveys, conducted individual interviews and a focus group session to gather data on multiple levels. Next, I outline the various cycles and methods used to gather data.

Pre-Cycle (September & October)

The Pre-Cycle was a time to gather information about the history, background, and context of the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS), the International Student

Organization (ISO), and the International Orientation Team (I-Team).

Discovery: Identify & Appreciate. I interviewed four staff at the OISS to identify the history, purpose of the organization, and their role. Staff participants were briefly introduced to the Appreciative Inquiry model and how it will be used to identify strengths of the organization. Simultaneously, student participants were recruited using snowball method and a survey was distributed electronically.

Dream: Appreciate & Challenge. As current methods of practice in the organization is identified and its strengths appreciated, I developed follow up questions that challenged the status quo of the organization both during and after staff interviews.

Design: Challenge & Create. After reflecting on data collected from both staff interviews and completed surveys from student participants, I set up individual interviews with student participants to address their survey responses.

Destiny: Create & Act. I reviewed questions that I planned to ask during individual interviews and planned how I can create a space and time for which the interviewees and I can engage in a dialogue rather than a questions and answers session.

Cycle One (October & November)

During the Pre-Cycle, 11 students completed the survey. All 11 students agreed to be interviewed. However, a valuable participant who strongly identifies as a third culture student cancelled our meeting due to a schedule conflict with other commitments. While the participant expressed willingness to answer follow-up questions over e-mail, my preference was to speak to the participant in person or via phone call if necessary. The participant could not agree to a specific date and time to talk so I decided to not pursue her participation any further. Hence, 10 students were interviewed individually.

Discovery: Identify & Appreciate. Students were encouraged to elaborate on their survey responses. Interviews helped me to gain more information on how the participants identified as a third culture student and how it has positively and negatively shaped their experience at USD.

Dream: Appreciate & Challenge. As student participants and I engaged in a dialogue about the advantages of being a third culture student and how the USD international community has supported their identity, we also discussed what could be improved to address their needs.

Design: Challenge & Create. I organized my data to identify themes that appeared throughout the interviews that could be expanded on in cycle two. I thought of ways I could take advantage of meeting as a group in cycle two and created group activities that served as both icebreakers and data collection methods.

Destiny: Create & Act. I gathered availabilities of all students who were willing to participate in the focus group and picked the time that most participants were available. I reminded participants of the purpose of the focus group and reminded myself to express my appreciation for their participation.

Cycle Two (December)

Due to time constraints, three focus group sessions of one hour each were reduced to just one focus group of two hours. Participants provided me with great insight into their experiences at USD as a third culture student during individual interviews. I wanted to further explore themes that emerged during interviews and create an opportunity for them to discuss the messages they wanted to give to the whole USD community and what they wanted others to know about them. Hence, I did not invite staff to participate in this focus group as I had initially planned to because I wanted student participants to engage in an authentic and undisturbed

dialogue.

Discovery: Identify & Appreciate. I expressed my gratitude for students' participation in the focus group at the beginning of the session. I also acknowledged that while most participants knew of each other, there were several participants that had not met each other before. I facilitated the *What's in A Name* game which asks participants to use paper and pens to write and draw how they got their name, what their name meant, and any other relevant information that they would like to share to the group. I believed that participants enjoyed the process of talking about themselves, their family, and how their name changes depending on who they talk to or where they are.

Dream: Appreciate & Challenge. We then proceeded with an activity called, *When I think of..... I think of* This game primarily served as a data collection method for me. My intention was to use themes and keywords that I identified from individual interviews and survey responses to begin the game so that I could get more responses on what each theme or keywords meant to each participant. For example, I started the game with, "When I think of culture, I think of diversity" and participants would then express their own version one after another. After my statement, students responded, "When I think of culture, I think of language", "When I think of culture, I think of countries," and more like customs, furniture, principles, parents, and so forth. Other keywords that I used were traveling, home, acceptance, awareness, and open-mindedness.

Design: Challenge & Create. After the *When I think of..... I think of.....* activity, we proceeded to elaborate on the answers. Responses shared during the activity are presented in Appendix B. I started the discussion by asking, "tell us a time when you did not experience acceptance" and everything took off from there. Students were curious about each other's stories and had questions for each other like, "What do you consider your core as? I can't identify

anything that stays the same where I go.” Students appeared insightful and mature, especially when they expressed opinions like, “it is not our place to judge those who are not well traveled and be negative to them, but we do have our place to educate others.” I was delighted to see such candid conversations unfolding on its own.

Destiny: Create & Act. I reminded participants that this was also an opportunity for them to educate others on what it is like to be a third culture student. We scrolled through an electronic source *13 Life Skills All Third Culture Kids Have Mastered* (Ugwu, 2014) and I asked the group to create something similar together. They titled their list, “11 Things All Third Culture Kids Relate To” (Figure A).

Figure A

11 Things All TCKs Relate To

11 Things All TCKs Relate To

1. Dreading the question, *Where are you from?*
2. You realize how small the world really is (you have friends and connections everywhere)
3. You know a couple of words/phrases from different languages (21 languages identified)
4. Been exposed to different educational systems
5. Been to cool airports overseas
6. Having travelled on every single airline existing
7. Resonate with more than one culture (always in the middle)
8. Good at saying goodbyes
9. But can pick it back up where you left off even after few years!
10. Tend to be more independent
11. Despite challenges, wouldn't trade life for anything

I also wanted to discuss the option of creating a support group like this focus group where third culture students can periodically get together, but we did not have enough time for that.

The group expressed that “it could be fun” to have a group like this meet occasionally and some participants thanked me for this opportunity to feel “nostalgic” of a time in their past where they

could engage in candid conversations freely and at any time because most students around them were third culture students.

Listening to the stories of third culture students at USD has allowed me to recognize that participants were searching for empathy and understanding from others. The whole process of sharing their stories to me and even with other third culture students seemed to be very pleasant to them. Participants expressed their gratitude to me in looking into their lives and trying to understand the challenges they face at USD. That was when I knew that their voices were not heard, and it fueled my energy to continue exploring ways we can be compassionate towards others and ourselves. We can become compassionate individuals if we can suspend assumptions and letting come the idea that we are diverse in our own ways, often in ways that are not visible to the naked eye. The following sections will elaborate on findings obtained from the data collection process and introduce possible ways to address hidden diversity among third culture students and ultimately, everyone.

Findings

Who They Are

There were 11 participants who completed the survey (Appendix A). Only one was a first-year student, three were sophomores, three were juniors, and three were seniors. Their nationalities were Australian, South Korean, Singaporean, Filipino, Indian, and American. Five of them are considered domestic students at USD and one holds dual citizenship with Colombia.

Table B

Student Participant Information

The table below presents an overview of each participant's background with information relevant to their identity as a third culture student.

Student	Year of Study	Nationality	Cultures Identified With	Cities lived in for more than a year and duration
A	Senior	India	Saudi Arabian Emirati (UAE) Indian	Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (1997-2012) In between have lived in Dubai, Singapore, and Paris India (2012-2014)
B	Sophomore	USA Colombia	Colombian American	Bogota, Colombia (1998-2003) Moscow, Russia (2003-2006) Jakarta, Indonesia (2006-2009) Muscat, Oman (2009-2012) Houston, TX (2012-2016)
C	Sophomore	Australia	Australian Chinese	Beijing, China (1998-2007) Shanghai, China (2007-2016)
D	First year student	USA	Hong Kongese Sri Lankan American Indian German	Munich, Germany (1999-2005) Dusseldorf, Germany (2005-2008) Hong Kong, China (2008-2017)
E	Senior	Philippines	Filipina	Manila, Philippines (1997-2001) Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (2001-2007) Doha, Qatar (2007-2014)
F	Junior	USA	American Singaporean	Plano, Texas (1997- 2000) Wheaton, Illinois (2000- 2016) Singapore (2016-present) *was referred to by an administrator and was self-identified as a third culture student but her journey started while in college
G	Senior	India	Indian Middle Eastern British	Mumbai, India (1996-2003) London, England (2003-2004) Mumbai, India (2004-2005) Singapore (2005-2006) Mumbai, India (2006-2008) Doha, Qatar (2008-2013)
H	Junior	South Korea	Chinese Korean	Seoul, Korea (1995-1998) Beijing, China (1998-1999)

				Shanghai, China (1999-2003) Seoul, Korea from (2003-2010) Guangzhou, China (2010- 2014)
I	Senior	USA	Chinese	San Francisco, CA (born-2010) Shanghai, China (2010-2014)
J	Junior	Singapore	Indian Singaporean American	Mumbai, India (1995-1999) London, United Kingdom (8 Months) Singapore (2000-2016)
K	Junior	USA	Middle Eastern	Saudi Arabia (1997-2015)

When asked which cultures they affiliate with, all but two participants named at least two cultures. Four participants named at least three cultures they affiliated with. Three participants only named one culture that they affiliated with and surprisingly, two are Americans that did not mention the American culture. The three that mentioned only one cultural affiliation named the culture of their family’s ethnic background. When asked how many cities they have lived in until the age of 18, one participant listed one city, three participants listed two cities, four participants listed three cities, two participants listed four cities, and one participant listed five cities. Figure A also provides an overview of who the third culture students are.

Literature and online resources have pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of being a third culture student. I wanted to directly hear from participants what their thoughts were. The survey asks, “Briefly name the advantages and disadvantages of having lived away from your passport country and or having lived in various countries.” I used the individual interview opportunities to follow up on each participant’s response. Survey responses were coded into themes. The themes that appeared for advantages of being a third culture student are: adaptability, open-mindedness, and excellent communication. The top two themes identified as disadvantages of being a third culture student are: rootlessness and loss of relationships.

Perceived Advantages & Disadvantages

There are many positive qualities about third culture students and the three key qualities that sets them apart from others are their adaptability, open-mindedness, and excellent communication. As third culture students have had to leave their environment and start over at a new one several times, they have built the ability to quickly adapt to new environments. As they are exposed to people of different cultures at school and where they live, they believe that their lifestyle has helped them to become open-minded and excellent communicators. Third culture students have learned new languages and cultural norms wherever they move to. As they move, they are put in situations where they must re-establish their social networks and as a result, have become strong communicators who are able to express themselves according to the culture they live in and can understand others more easily even if they do not come from the same culture. Participant A expressed that being a third culture student means to “immerse yourself in a completely different yet challenging experience [and] to grow tremendously from it, mentally and emotionally. It gives you the skill of communicating in efficient ways.” Participants elaborated how their lifestyle is a compromise that comes with both advantages and disadvantages. As they spend more time away from their passport country and assimilate into a diverse community, participants have shared that they often feel an emotional pull to many different cultures but cannot fully claim any one as their own. The feeling of rootlessness has caused participants to suffer emotionally because while a majority of their non-third culture student peers are able to confidently say where they are from, the participants often do not know how to say where they are from or do not want to divulge in their complex history. As the participants have lived in highly dynamic environments where their fellow peers come and go frequently, they also struggle with frequently losing relationships and fearing to make new

relationships in case they might have to bid farewell again soon. As college students, participants are now able to positively reflect on experiences and share their stories with a smile on their face. Yet, we cannot forget the emotional pain and struggle they endured in the road to becoming an internationally-minded student.

Due to their exposure to a dynamic environment, third culture students grow accustomed to not only meeting people of various cultures but living among a diverse population. In the survey, participant B mentioned that, “having moved from country to country and having had to start new truly made me become a very adaptable person to any environment I am placed in.” Participant G also added that, “it’s made it very easy for me to settle in regardless of where I am.” It seems that wherever the participants go, they can adapt quickly and move forward with their life smoothly. Third culture students are sometimes called *global nomads* or *cultural chameleons* because of their capacity to adapt to new cultures easily and even changing the way they present or express themselves to others depending on the context. Like nomads, student participants have expressed that not one place but the whole world is their home. They regularly get an itch to travel and are curious to see what other places have to offer. They also cannot pinpoint a place they call home because they have multiple places that they call home. Therefore, students who identify as a third culture student dread the seemingly-simple ice-breaker question, *Where are you from?* or *Where is home?* Student participants have also expressed the depending on who they talk to, their responses to these two question changes. Students assess the cultural background of who they are talking to, how much time they have, and if follow-up questions or curiosity arises within the person they are talking to. For example, Participants G and J expressed that their accent changes depending on who they talk to. Participant K also mentioned that her accent changes according to the situation but she

mentioned that the way she dresses has changed as well. Interestingly, Participant C mentioned that she used to speak with an American accent when she was in an American school in China so that people would “leave her alone” but upon reflecting on why she had to do that, she decided that it was unnecessary to hide her true self. Even though Participant C was attending an international school where her classmates were from different countries, she mentioned that she experienced a phase where she was confused as to who she was and how she should behave. Since many of her peers and teachers were of American nationality, even though coming from different ethnic cultures, she felt that she had to conform to the norm to blend in, like a chameleon. The participant no longer changes the way she acts or speaks depending on who she talks with, being able to accept other cultures and assimilating into the environment still makes her chameleon-like.

Another aspect of the chameleon-like quality that third culture students express is possessing excellent communication skills. In addition to having the opportunity to learn a different language while living abroad, participants have expressed their ability to understand others and express themselves according to the cultural norms and person has heightened. For example, their ability to make new friends and establish connection with others has strengthened as well. Participant B connected her heightened communication skills to maturity, describing that, “having to meet new people in every country helped me develop communication skills and, in a way, made me become mature from an early age.” Participant F also mentioned that creating “personal connection with people from different countries [fosters] acceptance of different types of people and understanding of [myself].” Maturity in this sense, is seen as having the ability to communicate and establishing relationships with peers who are from different countries. Third culture students have been placed in a diverse environment since they

were a child, encouraging them to form positive values and beliefs of the world and people. They develop curiosity towards other cultures and people from a young age and as college students now, a majority of third culture students have mentioned that they feel more mature than their peers because they are able to not only see past differences but also yearn to be in diverse environments. Communication skills not only refer to the ability to articulate and understand, but also the ability to empathize. For example, Participant C described a situation on the USD tram where she overheard two non-international students speaking about Chinese girls that were sitting in the tram. One of the students said that one of the Chinese students used to be her roommate and her friend asked her how she knows that it was her old roommate when all Chinese students look the same. Participant C, who left for China at three-weeks old with her Australian parents, identifies deeply with the Chinese culture. She was extremely aggravated when she heard students generalizing Chinese students and laughing about it. While the participant is not ethnically Chinese or of the Asian race, she has spoken numerous times about knowing more about China than Australia. She speaks Mandarin fluently and has always thought of China as home. At the same time, she did not feel that she was in the position to judge them for it because they may not have had the experience to travel extensively like her and have never been in a situation where they were a minority. Other participants agreed during the focus group that they were not in the position to judge other students for thinking the way they think. Student participants acknowledged that their lifestyle was a privileged one and considered themselves open-minded because they were exposed to different cultures since they were a child.

The advantages of living in a different country surmounts the disadvantages of moving around and not living in the country that one was born in or where the parents are from. No student participant has expressed wanting to trade their lifestyle for a different style. However, a

lifestyle of high mobility comes with disadvantages that student participants have experienced, still struggle with, and may continue to experience. Often, student participants have expressed that disadvantages of being a third culture student stems from not knowing who they are. Simple questions like, *Where are you from?*, can be a sensitive question to third culture students who want to give multiple answers but are expected to only give one. In survey responses and during the individual interviews, student participants expressed feeling out of place especially when their peers expect them to behave in a certain way or know certain things because of their ethnicity or cultural background. During focus groups, participants discussed situations where they encountered that were frustrating and confusing at USD and have expressed enjoying gathering with other third culture students occasionally to ease their stress from not being understood by non-third culture student peers.

Third culture students can put themselves in other's shoes while they feel that others are not able to do the same for them. Participant J mentioned that "third culture students are good at being empathetic, but others have not been empathetic towards them." Participant J also said, "Sometimes I feel out of place from mainland Indians because I never grew up there. I switched out of local school in Singapore and went to international schools, and thus am slightly disconnected with the other local Singaporeans. Despite going to an American school, I am not American either and sometimes feel out of place with the American friends I have here." Participant D also shared that "I don't have a full understanding of the significance of my ethnic identity that is prescribed my people who share the same identity as I lack experience with them." On top of struggling with their identity, students have shared frustrating moments at USD when others were not able to understand what they were going through and make ignorant remarks of other cultures.

Perspectives on Diversity & Inclusivity

As one participant put it best, “third culture students are not taught diversity, they live in diversity.” Third culture students can think from other perspectives and are not quick to judge others, making them open-minded individuals. On the contrary, they have encountered situations where their non-third culture student peers, often domestic students who do not have much traveling experience and do not live in diverse communities, have asked ignorant questions, and made inappropriate remarks about certain cultures. For example, Participant I, stopped telling her peers that she was from Shanghai, China because her peers would ask her if “people wore shoes in China.” Participant K, who is half Arabic and half American, was strongly persuaded by her parents to not tell her peers that she spent most of her life in Saudi Arabia and that she was of Arabic descent because of negative stereotypes that Americans may have on Arabic people. Participant B also said that even though she spent her high school years in Texas, as a half Colombian, she would introduce herself as Colombian. However, as English is her first language, many of her peers thought she was from Columbia, New York and not associate her with her Colombian heritage. Simultaneously, she has also received criticism for her peers for being “too open and close” with male peers as they did not understand that in the Colombian culture, it is normal for men and women to develop close friendship and openly express their appreciation for each other. In her first year, Participant I also felt frustrated when her peers asked questions about Chinese people that she considered to be inappropriate like, “Do people in China wear shoes?” While participants have experienced moments of frustration many times, they understood that it was because some of their peers did not have the opportunity to travel to other countries and be immersed in different cultures. They understood that their open-mindedness and adaptability to new cultures and environments were results of their lifestyle.

While third culture students did not choose to become third culture students, they understood it to be a lifestyle of privilege. Thus, during the focus group, participants have expressed that they are not in the position to judge others on their lack of knowledge of other cultures, but they were in the position to educate their peers on other cultures.

As third culture students understand that their lifestyle is a privileged lifestyle that opened doors to high quality education, travelling, and more, it was not surprising that some participants expressed reluctance to others about their life story. Participant D expressed an interesting insight about not telling others why he is international. He shared that people who consider themselves to be international can come across being superior to others because he believes that international people see themselves as having achieved an equilibrium. When I asked him to elaborate, he said that international students see themselves as being on the optimum point of cultural experiences. Since most third culture students had the opportunity to travel and be exposed to diverse populations, he believes that non-third cultures students who did not have the same opportunity would see themselves as inferior to international students. Another participant said that they did not want to appear arrogant about their experiences traveling and living abroad. This may explain why third culture students consider themselves to be international and that they enjoy being with international students because even though not all international students understand the third culture student experience, third culture students can talk to international students about their countries, their travel plans, and assimilating in USD.

When approaching the end of the focus group, many participants thanked me for this opportunity to gather with other third culture students at USD and allowing them to share their stories. Participants also expressed that they would never trade their life for anything despite experiencing challenges that comes with being a third culture student. I had expected

participants to ask for more opportunities to interact with other third culture students and had conducted the research with the belief that establishing a support group for third culture students would be beneficial. However, none of the participants had indicated a desire for structured opportunities like mentorship or counseling. Rather, they expressed their gratitude towards me for wanting to understand them more and that they hoped that more people could exercise compassion towards their complex identity and lifestyle. It made me realize the importance of becoming a higher education practitioner who can encourage students to exercise self-authorship independently. I also realized that I had an assumption that third culture students needed my help. This research empowered me to provide guidance and a listening ear to students as they make meaning of their experiences, when they need me, and letting go of the idea that third culture students are constantly in a place of struggle.

Reflections, Discussions, Implications

There is much to learn from the experiences of third culture students at USD and their insights about cultural diversity. I wanted to share the experiences of third culture students to the general USD community and their worldviews because I believe that many, if not all of us, have sense of feeling in between. Whether it is competing values and beliefs one has with their family, coming from a biracial family, or currently going through a transition, I believe that we can all learn how third culture students have coped with frequent transitions and how they self-author their story. Hidden diversity can be understood in various ways. With third culture students, we can understand hidden diversity to be a quality they possess that comes from having experience living abroad, creating values and beliefs of themselves and the world differently from individuals who do not have similar experiences. Hidden diversity differs among individuals depending on their personality, experience, skills, and other qualities that cannot be

easily seen or sometimes, understood. Throughout this action research, I have not only increased by understanding how third culture students understand their hidden diversity and share their stories, but also learned the importance of facilitating that understanding and sharing. In this section, I will talk about how I have seen the experiences of third culture students using Magolda's Self-Authorship Theory and Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Moreover, I will discuss ways that I believe higher education practitioners can address hidden diversity not just in third culture students but in various groups of students.

According to Schlossberg, transition is not stagnant, and the impact of each transition is different based on three different factors: perception of the particular transition, characteristics of pre-transition and post-transition environment, and characteristics of the individual. The adaptation process participants of this research have experienced at least two transitions throughout their developmental years. Schlossberg also stated that the "ease of adaptation to a transition depends on one's perceived and/or actual balance of resources to deficits in terms of the transition itself, the pre-post environment and the individual's sense of competency, well-being and health" (p.7). My findings suggest that third culture students that I have researched at the University of San Diego are highly adaptable people. Even though transitions can happen at any moment in the future, no matter what their perception of the transition, characteristics of pre-post transition environments, and the characteristics of the individual, it is my belief that third culture students will experience a smooth transition and adapt to their new environment relatively quickly. This means that when third culture students experience transitions in the future, they will have a healthy balance of resources in contrast to the deficit of the transition, have a high sense of competency and will be in good health. It must be noted that third culture students who participated in this research are considered highly adaptable individuals at their

current point in life. I cannot assume that the participants have always had an easy transition into their new environments, and I cannot speak about other third culture students who did not participate in this study. While this research did not focus on participants' transition and adaptation before coming to college, literature, and informal conversation with third culture students that I have had in the past have alluded to difficulties being accepted or feeling a sense of belonging in the communities they adapt to.

Another important take away from this research is that the current ability of participants to adapt to new environments comes from participants' ability to take ownership of their experiences. Third culture students see their past experiences in a positive light, helping them to understand the advantages of being a third culture student while acknowledging the challenges that come with it. Magolda's theory of self-authorship helps us explain how third culture students are now resilient, adaptable, and open-minded individuals. Reflecting, third culture students can recognize the reality they have lived in and their internal voice. Their internal voices refer to their genuine understanding and feelings towards their situation. This internal voice, in my belief, also refers to the ability to see certain things as a blessing in disguise. For example, participants have expressed frustration of feeling rootless; feeling like they belong to the world and in many places, but not in any one place. Participants have described this feeling as confusion and wish for more empathy from their peers who do not struggle with this type of identity crisis. At the same time, they have "consciously set about creating a philosophy and framework to guide their reactions to reality," helping them to see their situation positively (Magolda, 2008, p.280). They build an internal foundation by commitment to positive values and beliefs of their life and cross over to living them, resulting in a secure internal commitment.

Higher education institutions have always talked about the importance of diversity on

campus. A way universities practice diversity is opening its doors to foreign students. By inviting students from all over the world to take advantage of American higher education, institutions need to understand that foreign students contribute to diversity but most importantly, there is as much diversity within the international student populations as there is in the American student population. Moreover, does being an international student only refer to students who enter America on a student visa? What about American students who spent a significant number of years away from the country? Who does the identity work for international students who hail from all the regions (Africa, Asia, Latin America and so forth) many multicultural centers address within the American population? From what I know of USD and other institutions, no one does.

Looking into the lives of third culture students before they arrived at USD and now at USD has confirmed my belief that it is necessary to acknowledge that the international student body is diverse. I believe that self-authorship helps students articulate their experience in ways that they understand themselves better. Transition can happen unannounced and often has lasting effects on an individual, whether positively or negatively. It is apparent that third culture students regard their experiences as life-changing and meaningful. Throughout individual interviews, most students have expressed their intention to seek careers that would allow them to work in a multicultural setting and involve traveling. Meeting new people from different cultures and even the possibility of living among a culturally diverse community seemed to be factors that influence participants' future career aspirations.

Significance of Results

The intention to study third culture students at USD stemmed from an ambitious attempt to expand the notion of being an international student. As a graduate assistant at the Office of

International Students and Scholars and being an international student myself, I connected with the international community from the very first day. As time passed, I was beginning to feel uneasy with studying identity and hearing my peers talking about identity work with their students for a couple of reasons. One, I felt that the literature I was reading about student development was written in the context of being American. Personally, I could not even encourage my students to attend programs at the United Front Multicultural Center because I could not convince myself to go either. I began to realize that being international was not truly encompassed in multiculturalism in America. This brings me to the next point. What does it mean to be an international student?

Being an international student in the American context means being a foreign individual who has entered the country on a student visa. Is this meaning of being an international student associated with the diversity that international students bring to America? In my opinion, no. International students are often, boxed into one category of being full-paying students, whose first language is not English, and are pursuing high quality education in America as an alternative to what is being offered back home. Moreover, because most campuses have a dedicated office that supports international students, I have felt that I have not been able to interest myself in programs provided by other offices that promote diversity and inclusion. I have talked to many international undergraduates and graduate students about my sentiments and received similar feedback about not being understood by the American community or feeling isolated. However, there exists several American students who consider themselves international because they have had the experience of living abroad for a significant number of years. Where are these students and why have I not seen them in spaces and times when a large group of international students gather like the ISO Coffee Hour?

Findings from this research did not give me the answer to what should be done, and I am grateful for that because this is a topic that needs to be explored further. As the international community at USD and other institutions increase, the question of how the institution can support this community becomes important. I believe that through collaboration, we can address the needs of the international community and its diverse student body.

Limitations

If I could conduct this action research again, there are some things that I would have done differently. Due to the difficulty in arranging times for individual interviews, by the time we were able to meet for a focus group, it was already December. I had overestimated how many focus group sessions I could arrange before winter break. I believe that I gained valuable data during the session so to schedule one or two more sessions, it may have been useful to schedule one after the winter break. Moreover, because I relied on self-identification of third culture students or referrals, I trusted in people's judgements about what it meant to be a third culture student. One American participant who is currently a junior was referred to me by an administrator that travelled with the student on a study abroad program. The administrator did mention that she was not entirely aware of the background of the student but recalls that her family now lives in Singapore. I had not realized that her family moved away from America when the student was already studying at USD until she signed the consent and completed the survey. While she has become a third culture student now, what she may experience from now on, is what all other participants have experienced since childhood. I proceeded with a follow-up interview with the participant, but she eventually did not respond when I invited her to the focus group session to meet other third culture students. If I can conduct this research again and recruit participants using snowball method, I will make sure to gain more background information about

participants and determine whether they fit the definition of my target participants so that data is not skewed.

Recommendations

The smoothness of the transition period into college sets the tone for the remaining time a student must complete their degree. Just as it is important for any one, it is important that third culture students at USD, whether classified as international or not, to be welcomed into the international community. This starts with outreach from the admissions side and the OISS. For several semesters, the Undergraduate Admissions Office has been providing the I-Team with a list of admitted American students who applied from outside of the U.S. to contact regarding orientation events and early move-in days. Early move-in days are particularly useful for students who are coming directly from outside of the U.S. because it gives them more time to recover from their jet-lag and get comfortable in an unfamiliar environment before orientation. A group of students that we are not identifying are students who returned to the U.S. for high school. Participant B was a student who expressed that she almost transferred out of USD because she could not find a sense of belonging. She was classified as American but did not identify as solely American because of her Colombian background and having lived in multiple cities before she returned to Texas for high school. She also did not know about the ISO and the international community until she met Participant G at a networking event. They immediately connected with each other when they spoke about where they had lived before. Participant B was then recruited by Participant G who was one of student leaders for the I-Team for fall semester in 2017. Since then, I have seen Participant B at more ISO Coffee Hours and events like the ISO International Expo & Cultural Fashion Show. I know that she has been much happier here at USD since serving an I-Team member because she now has established strong

friendships in both the American and international community. There are two ways that may address this problem.

First, admitted American students should have the opportunity to self-identify as international when sent detailed orientation information. If there are students who want to be connected to the international community from the very beginning, they should have the option to notify either the Undergraduate Admissions Office or the Office of International Students and Scholars for more information. Second, the ISO Executive Board and OISS can consider having a bigger presence in post-orientation efforts in other spaces like in residential life. I have always believed that it is more effective for staff and student leaders to go where students are and not ask students to come where we are. Rather than inviting students to events and sending them emails about resources that are available to them, I believe that staff and student leaders should be physically present where students gather, for outreach to be more effective. Currently, most of our outreach during orientation is through email communication. It is highly likely that students do not read all their emails or do not remember all the information they are given prior to school starting. I believe if there are students who identify as international and are either not invited or are not aware of international orientation events that they can benefit from, ISO E-Board members and OISS staff can be asked to be places that govern student activities and wellness. I recommend that this task be a top responsibility for future GAs at the OISS. This will empower the GA to establish positive relationships with other GAs on campus, staff, and faculty that support students' transition into college and academic and social success throughout their time USD.

There are two spaces that I can think of that serve the whole undergraduate population, especially first-year students. The first one is Ole week and the second is Residential Life. Even

if it is not possible to use these spaces to reach out to students directly, it could be beneficial to participate in trainings of student leaders. One thing that is agreeable across the board among third culture students is not knowing how to best answer the questions, *Where are you from?* Many students can answer this easily, but third culture students cannot because they consider multiple places home. Participants of this research have also expressed that they understand that being able to experience multiple cultures is considered a privilege, so they did not want to appear arrogant by sharing where they have lived and what their family background is to people who have not lived a similar lifestyle. I believe that residential assistants (RA) and orientation student leaders are in the best position to facilitate understanding of cultural diversity among students. I would be grateful for the opportunity to help facilitate cultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity among student leaders like RAs and Scholastic Assistants from an international student standpoint by participating in their trainings and meetings.

In summary, the following is a list of recommendations to address the needs of third culture students:

- Having the option to self-identify as an international student during the enrollment process, regardless of a student's status.
- The International Student Organization (ISO) to have a bigger presence in post-orientation events and in student life spaces such as in the residence halls to promote the international community.
- Empowering students to develop self-authorship through activities and advising sessions
- For individuals to be more mindful of seemingly simple questions like, *Where are you from?* and their reactions to students' responses.

Conclusion

This action research has made me realize that my initial thought about creating a formalized support group for third culture students would be unnecessary. I was envisioning possibilities like a mentorship program between third culture students and staff or faculty that were third culture students or facilitating monthly third culture student discussions about their college life, identity, and other relevant topics. However, as a participant has put it best, “we are very good at being compassionate to others, but many people are not compassionate to us.” The greatest gift to third culture students and perhaps one of the biggest challenges of humankind is to practice compassion and be inclusive of all kinds of diversity.

The term hidden diversity encompasses uniqueness within us that cannot be seen physically. One would never be able to tell if someone is a third culture student until time is spent understanding their life experiences. Most of my participants, thought half of them were international students, in my opinion, have what is called an American accent or no accent. Even more fascinating is the ability of participants to change accents or mannerisms according to who they are talking to. Third culture students notice cultural nuances, norms, and trends very quickly. This is an adaptation skill they have learned from all the transitional experiences they have had since childhood. But this cannot be mistaken for feeling a sense of belonging in a culture. It only means that they can change the way they act according to the society they are in at the time, but it does not mean society understands who they are and what they have experienced. Third culture students are called third culture students because they do not completely identify with the first and second culture as defined (Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock, 2007, p.17). They relate to others who have had similar experiences and may feel the same way. I am almost certain that this is a natural feeling that we get when we feel out of place and meet

someone that does not have the exact same background but has similar experiences. The feeling is amplified when you cannot see the diversity. For example, in the case of transfer students, a transfer student cannot tell if another is a transfer student or not just by looking. Two transfer students of different ethnicity and gender would not know that they are both transfer students until they spend time knowing each other. Although they may not look the same, their experience of being transfer students at USD overlooks their differences. The same can be said for third culture students.

To know that they do not feel ownership of any culture and yet feel a part of many cultures, to have had to say goodbye to many friends and to teachers, and to have felt the need to quickly assimilate into new environments every few years, is what brings third culture students together. All these characteristics of third culture students cannot be seen by the naked eye. I could have mistaken many of my participants for American students had I only taken their seemingly perfect American accent or non-accent into consideration. This research reminds me every day to serve as an ally to myself and to everyone else who feels judged by how they look and act. I believe that there is more hidden diversity among us that has not been explored. As a higher education practitioner and human being, I am grateful for this opportunity to embark on a personal and professional journey to exploring hidden diversity among internationally-minded students through third culture students.

Appendix A

Focus Group Activity: “When I Think of (A), I think of (B)” participant responses

Word (A)	Responses (B)
Culture	Diversity Language Countries Customs Furniture Principles Parents Friends Relationships Differences Holidays Traditions
Traveling	Airports Time Planes Key monuments Opening up to new experiences TSA (Transportation Security Administration) Long flights Passports Getting home Adventure Maybe losing passport
Home	Pet Comfort Family China Colombia Qatar Change Multiple homes Dog Oppression Super cool experience Excitement & Love Routines in high school Parents Brother Ease Dank food

	House and room Grandparents 711 at every corner of the streets Being an adult at 18 High school Memories
Acceptance	Friends Big cities Looking past differences Background Love Awareness
Awareness	Education Experiences Learning Open-mindedness Travel Current political climate Not being scared of differences
Open-Mindedness	Acceptance Education Putting our differences aside Education yourself No hypocrisy

Appendix B
Survey to Students

1. Country(s) of citizenship
2. Year of Study
3. Please describe the cultures that you identify or have an affiliation with (for example: Japanese and Chinese, Singaporean and Indian)
4. What student organizations have you been or are currently involved with? Please describe your involvement.
5. Please name the cities/countries you have lived in and when you were there (for example: Texas from 1994 to 2000, Tokyo from 2000 to 2005, Madrid from 2005 to 2015, San Diego from 2015 to current).
6. What does it mean to be a Third Culture Student and how do you identify with this term?
7. Briefly name some of the advantages of having lived away from your passport country and or having lived in various cultures.
8. Briefly name some of the disadvantages of having lived away from your passport country and or having lived in various cultures.
9. What does it mean to you to be international?
10. How has/has not the USD community been supportive of your identity as a third culture student?

Appendix C

Interview Guide for Students

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. The purpose of this interview is for me to collect data by reviewing your survey responses in detail and discuss further about what this research will entail.

Please do not hesitate to stop me any time to ask questions. Please note that all of your responses are confidential. Before we end our interview, I would also like to take some time to explain the methodology of this research.

1. Please elaborate on how you identify with the cultures you listed and how it has shaped your experience at USD?
2. Please elaborate on the advantages and disadvantages of being a third culture student.
3. Do you think you are international? If yes/no, why do you think so and what does it mean to be international?
4. What do you appreciate about the international community at USD?
5. Is there anything you think we can improve on in addressing the needs of third culture students?

Thank you very much for taking the time to share your experiences and insights with me. The research method I will be using is called Appreciative Inquiry, which has four stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. The last two questions during the interview that I asked about what you appreciate and what can be improved are core elements of what Appreciative Inquiry is. Appreciative Inquiry strives on identifying what has worked well so far and what can be improved. Another key element of Appreciative Inquiry is that it requires collaborative work. I believe that change is best initiated when different groups come together to form an alliance for a cause. This is also why I hope to collect data using different methods like surveys, interview, and focus group sessions.

Please let me know if you have any questions now about the research or if there is anything else you would like to add to your interview.

Appendix D

Focus Group Script

Hello! Thank you very much for taking the time to be here today and being an important part in my research about third culture students and what it means to be international. The purpose of the focus group sessions are for me to collect data on your experiences at USD as a third culture student and explore the meaning of being international. Before we begin, let's take a moment to discuss any questions you have and know that you can ask questions any time during the sessions.

This session (the first session), as well the following two focus group sessions, will take approximately an hour each. Since time is of essence and I want to be mindful of everyone's time, please refrain from using your phone and laptop during the sessions so we can be in the moment.

During our interview session, I briefly talked about the research model that I am using, called Appreciative Inquiry. Now that everyone is here in one place today, let me explain further why I chose this model and how it will guide us through the focus group sessions.

The Appreciative Inquiry research model emphasizes the active participation of stakeholders and is grounded on four propositions (Copperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008):

1. Inquiry into the "art of the possible" in organizational life should begin with appreciation.
2. Inquiry into what is possible should yield information that is applicable.
3. Inquiry into what is possible should be provocative.
4. Inquiry into the human potential of organizational life should be collaborative (p.4).

Appreciative Inquiry consists of four stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Each stage in the 4-D cycle serves a specific purpose. The Discovery stage revolves around identifying and appreciating what has been done well. Participants share stories of positive experiences and discuss the capacity to achieve more. The Dream phase envisions change by acknowledging the strengths of the organization and challenging the status quo. Participants discuss the potential of the organization and necessary changes. In the Design phase, participants create the organization's new structure "by generating provocative propositions (also known as possibility statements or design principles) that embody the organizational dream in the ongoing activities" (Copperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p.45). Lastly, the Destiny phase is a time of "continuous learning, adjustment, and improvisation.....all in the service of shared ideals" (p.46). It is not the finish line but rather an ongoing stage that eventually will lead the organization back to the Discovery cycle for newer improvements.

Today (first session), we are at the Discovery stage and I hope to move towards to Dream, Design, and Destiny for the second session. We will invite OISS advisors in the third session to go through a cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny again.

Questions to discuss:

1. What does it mean to be international?
2. What has USD done well to address the diversity of the international population and what can be improved?
3. What can USD do to address the growing diversity and complexity of international student identities?

Appendix E
Interview Guide for Office of International Students and Scholars Advisors

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. The purpose of this interview is for me to collect data regarding the organization and talk to you about why I am doing this research using Appreciative Inquiry.

Please note that all of your responses are confidential and that you are welcome to ask me questions any time.

1. What is the purpose of the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS)?
2. What is your role in the OISS?
3. Please provide the history and purpose of the International Student Organization (ISO) and the International Orientation Team (I-Team).
4. What do you think are the strengths of the OISS, ISO, and I-Team?
5. What do you think can be improved?
6. What would you describe as being a peak experience or high point in your life - personal or professional at the OISS?
7. What do you value most about yourself? Your work? Your organization?
8. What is the core factor that gives life to your organization?
9. Describe your vision of the future for the organization and your world?
10. In what ways do you see the GA playing a role in the international community?

Thank you very much for taking the time to share your experiences and insights with me. The research method I will be using is called Appreciative Inquiry, which has four stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Some of the questions I ask during the interview pertained to the strengths of the organization and what can be improved. Appreciative Inquiry strives on identifying what has worked well so far and envisioning change. Another key element of Appreciative Inquiry is that it requires collaborative work. I believe that change is best initiated when different groups come together to form an alliance for a cause. This is also why I hope to collect data using different methods like surveys, interview, and focus group sessions with different groups.

Please let me know if you have any questions now about the research or if there is anything else you would like to add to your interview.

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