Cultural Dimensions of Authenticity in Teaching  
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The phenomenon of modern man has become wholly appearance; he is not visible in what he represents but rather concealed by it.  
Nietzsche (1873/1997), *Untimely Meditations*

**Abstract**: With an increasing international student body in universities all over the world, there is a rising tension of misunderstanding along with growing contact and appreciation between teachers and students from different cultures. The tension raises questions such as how teachers and students relate to one another authentically and how we recognize, distinguish, understand and challenge issues beneath the surface. Pursuing answers to such questions requires continuous examination, reflection and transformation of the changing self, others, and contexts.

**Introduction**
The purpose of this chapter is to weave some important considerations of the cultural dimensions of authenticity into an integrated approach to various aspects of authentic teaching in higher and adult education. I attempt to bring implicit, assumptive, and embedded cultural issues to a more conscious and explicit level in order that they may be examined and discussed in the light of teacher authenticity. Rapidly evolving technologies that act as globalizing agents help to shrink the world, bring far to near, and create new challenges for today’s teachers and learners. Often times, values are similar across cultures but are prioritized differently. This challenges decision making or leads to misunderstanding and conflict. Compressed into smaller non-homogeneous groups, the changing prioritization of our values often points to the need for reflection and cross-examination on who we are as an authentic person and teacher, what teaching and learning mean, how we communicate with and understand each other, what makes our lives and work meaningful for ourselves and others, and why.
I first discuss some perceptions of authenticity in different cultures. I then examine the values or priorities of values that are behind the perceptions of authenticity in teaching. I use the key concepts highlighted by Cranton and Carusetta (2004) – self, other, relationship, context, and living a critical life – as a framework for my discussion. In preparation for writing this chapter, I interviewed fifteen individuals who were from China studying as graduate students in American universities. I quote from their comments throughout the chapter. I also want to add that while discussing the dimensions of authenticity in different cultures, I am aware of the fact that such discussions may be interpreted differently from what I intend, and thus may facilitate further stereotyping people from different cultures. Therefore, I would like to emphasize the complexity of the issue rather separating and categorizing the fast-changing Chinese and American value systems. My goal is to help achieve a flexible understanding of authenticity in teaching.

**Perceptions of authenticity in different cultures and contexts**

A behavior that is perceived as authentic in one culture may not be perceived so in another. For instance, standing or speaking up for oneself is considered as authentic in one culture but it may be seen as egotistical or shameful in another. By the same token, holding back one’s own thoughts to avoid temporary conflicts or for the benefit of a community is considered gracious and altruistic in one culture, but cowardly or even deceitful in another. A self-sacrificing and altruistic behavior towards a common good in one culture may be perceived as lacking in personality, non-critical, non-authentic, or mediocre in another culture.
The subtleties and clues of our intentions and actions are sometimes miscommunicated or misinterpreted because different customs, beliefs, and privacy concerns lead us to judge or misjudge the other’s authenticity. For instance, it is a common practice in China that when a patient is diagnosed with a terminal disease the doctor will discuss the probability or eventuality of death with the patient’s family but not with the patient himself. The rationale may be that the dying patient can live more happily (and longer) without knowing about his or her own pending death, and that the focus of attention is on life rather than the possibility of death. Yet, in the U.S., doctors do inform their patients of their situations possibly because of the legal system and of the belief that “honesty is the best policy.” In case one believes that this example depicts a particular trend towards cultural honesty, there are other examples that illustrate the opposite. In the U.S., people usually respond to “How are you” with “I’m fine” (whether they are fine or not) because “how are you” is merely a greeting rather than a question to be answered. In China, when one is asked a similar question, one may spend quite some time explaining why he or she is or is not fine and what has happened. Just responding with “I’m fine” may be interpreted as impolite or dishonest. We not only disclose or guard information based on what is considered as a cultural norm but also on what privacy means to us. In China, asking someone’s salary is a common conversation topic; yet, in the U.S., people do not ask others how much they make unless they are close friends. Holding back a response to an open question or probing into another’s privacy may be considered secretive or rude, but one first needs to know what is culturally seen as private information.
Our interpretation of authenticity is based on our values and cultural expectations. We have frames of reference or habits of mind (Mezirow, 1991) about authenticity. In other words, authenticity is a relative term – being authentic to whose values or purposes of being or living. Do I share the values of my community, or to what extent am I compliant, reflective, critical, or rebellious to those values? An individual can be a member of different communities simultaneously: a family (families), a workplace(s), and a nation(s). The micro value systems for each community, for instance, being authentic in the family and being authentic in the workplace, can be different, although often built on principles that are believed to work or benefit the individual and the community. Such referential dilemmas cause disorienting moments of judgments on what is authentic.

Self, other and relationship in authentic teaching

Teaching is a communicative act. To teach means that one is to contact, connect and build a relationship with another person or a group of people. Being aware of oneself and of others are both important in a relationship, yet the emphasis on one over the other presents different priorities in our value systems, which can dramatically change how we see and act in the world.

Awareness of self and others

The discussions on the relationships between self and other can lead to sociological, psychological, and philosophical discussions on the nature of human beings. In this paper, however, I focus on how the relationship between self and other affects how we perceive authenticity in teaching.
The following two quotes are from one interviewee who praised one professor as authentic and criticized another as inauthentic in a Chinese college setting:

Martin, who taught my senior year in college, is a teacher I recall as an authentic teacher. He demonstrated a strong desire to learn about the students and their culture by courageously challenging the institutional rules and authority that set boundaries for foreigners not to cross. For example, he wanted to eat together the same food with students in their dining hall. It threatened the policy of face saving and “privacy” protection of the local authorities… he eventually managed to eat with students but not for long. He also worked hard to introduce American literature and lives to us students – some of the books he gave us to read are even controversial in his own culture – it showed both his courage to work for the benefit of his students’ learning by taking risks and also his belief of being an educator…

A contrasting example was another young professor teaching us drama in our postgraduate program. He came to classroom without teaching anything useful or substantial and turned students into remembering some terminologies that we did not understand for the final exam. He purchased and wore silk Chinese traditional clothes to make him look like he likes the culture he was teaching within and had a well-known affair with an undergraduate young girl in the university and had a lot of controversies with the university authority. Although he successfully put on a play he worked hard to create for the entire university to view, he was not an authentic teacher to his students or the department he worked for.

Several values undergird the appreciation for the first professor. The professor was seen as taking risks in order to know and teach his students, trusting his students’ intelligence by introducing controversies even from within his own culture, and setting a good model by being an altruistic, caring, and trusting educator.

Similar values also contribute to the criticism of the second professor. The professor was seen as being interested in his own benefits but not caring about his students. He passed on information that was not understood. Having an affair with a student not only broke the rule, but also upset members of a culture that had its set of moral judgments, boundaries, limitations, and taboos. Wearing silk Chinese clothes was
perceived as being ostentatious rather than as demonstrating an interest in getting to know the people.

Yet, observing the situation as an outsider, one can also interpret the second professor’s behavior as authentic from his own stand: he taught his subject area in the way he knew best, worked hard to do what he considered as a contribution to the school by putting on a successful play, and showed his interest in the people by wearing the traditional Chinese clothes. He might be consistent and authentic in his own beliefs and behaviors. Yet, he was judged harshly as an inauthentic teacher by his Chinese students because of his lack of situational awareness of the cultural values and local needs.

One important aspect to highlight is that both professors demonstrated their qualities to challenge the authorities (or take risks); however, one was seen as authentic and honorable because his actions were perceived as being for the benefit of the students, while the other was seen as inauthentic because his actions were perceived as fulfilling his self interest. In a culture where altruism is highly regarded and a teacher is expected to set the example, the judgment can be instantaneous and harsh. It is clear here that authenticity is a shared concept – a person can be himself or herself, but if his or her behavior is not understood, it is probably not seen as authentic.

This raises a series of questions. For instance, who judges authenticity? Or who can? Was the second professor authentic if he saw himself as so but his students did not? It is obvious in the case of the second professor that his actions undermined his students’ trust in him. When the learner does not understand the teacher, or when the connections between the subject matter and what is taught are unclear, the learner starts to question the teacher’s credibility and motives. When the priority of the sets of values is called into
question, the learner sees the teacher as inconsistent or inauthentic, and accordingly, dismisses the teacher as a credible or good teacher. Given this, how can the teacher and the student build trust and achieve a mutually shared understanding of authenticity? How can both the teacher and the student take on the responsibilities to help one another understand nuances of values, question seemingly authentic or unauthentic behaviors, and challenge actions and judgments based on their own values? Inclusive change and transformation start with awareness of and consideration for the impact of the context, and continue with sustained dialogue and interaction between the teacher and the student in the process of unpacking the issues, assumptions, priorities and dependencies.

**Internal and external strengths**

The traditional Chinese values emphasize humility and altruistic behavior. Two famous Chinese sayings come to mind: “a hero is silent about his glories” and “a good wine is known in all corners” (meaning that if it’s a good deed, it will be eventually recognized). Children are taught to put the common good first and self second. Related to this issue, there’s an emphasis on respecting other people, especially elders’ and teachers’ opinions and knowledge. In addition, Chinese tradition since ancient times, including the three major ancient philosophies, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism all emphasize harmony and holism (Allen et al, 2005; Hanh et al, 1999; Tzu, 2003; Yao, 2003). When a conflict arises, it is one’s responsibility to listen to the others’ perspectives and modify one’s own view to reach a balanced resolution to the conflict. Disagreeing with others head-on, in an open and confrontational manner is discouraged. There is a strong emphasis placed on taking the middle path, assuming a position of balance and peace, while not dwelling on who is right or wrong, or who is better.
My experience in the U.S. sometimes presents an opposite expectation. I find myself reminded constantly that I should speak up for myself and tell people what I do, or otherwise, no one will know what I do, and thus the value of my work is automatically unappreciated. Presenting, articulating, and arguing for one’s ideas, talents and achievements are important skills to master in the American culture. If one does not do so, one is seen as less confident, competent, or capable, (and somewhat disabled). I find many of my colleagues spending more time figuring out ways to present what they do than really doing it, and proudly claiming what is presented or imagined (not what is really done) as fact. Confusing and dishonest sometimes as this seems to me, such a behavior is often celebrated as being smart, capable, joyful, charismatic, and visionary, and held as an important leadership skill. Meanwhile, those who do tremendous amounts of quality work may be neglected or ignored because they pay less attention to effective presentation of their work. Looking into the matter, this phenomenon is to a degree related to the traditional American culture as a capitalistic society, in which prevail the spirit of presentation, adventure, consumption, commercialization and the enduring pursuit of individual success. Illustrated by Orvell (1989), “The world of the ads was a paradise in which things were more real than in our everyday world, yet that ‘reality’ had to be guaranteed over and over again … It was as if there were some defect in everyday reality that had to be remedied by the more authentic reality of the object to be consumed” (pp. 144-145). Crouch (2001) further pointed out, “Ours is a technological era that often defines itself and achieves commercial success by continuing to do a better job at making the unreal seem true” (p. 3). In order to achieve recognition, wealth and
success, an individual is urged to constantly originate and promote one’s ideas and products (Bellah, 1985).

As a result, different values, which are deeply rooted in the cultures and social constructions of societies, set the foundation for the different priorities and strengths. When certain values are placed higher on the personal scale, more time is invested and often asymptotic growth happens in those areas, while other areas may be neglected or ignored. This leads to differences between instant results and long-term quality or lasting outcomes, between achieving high efficiency and a peaceful state, and between what is presented as content and what is hidden as content. The Chinese emphasis on medium, balance and humility can present a state that is hierarchical, authoritative, cowardly, and oppressive. The balance can bury and even twist an individual’s originality, creativity, and authenticity. In contrast, the American emphasis on individualism, competition, and commercialization can also blur the line between reality and fabrication or imagination. Neither the Chinese nor the American ways of presentations, when uncritically embraced, are authentic. The values and expectations on individuals from both cultures shape individuals to conform to certain ways of being: to oppress who they are or to present themselves differently from whom they are. The authentic being is concealed or misrepresented in appearances to achieve a socially expected image or persona; consequently, the gap of understanding between people increases.

This gap is reflected in teaching and learning expectations. It is not uncommon to see Chinese students remaining quiet in the classrooms. Sometimes such quietness is interpreted as lack of skills, or not having one’s own original, independent or critical thoughts. A professor once mentioned to me a paradox he saw between being responsive
and risk-taking in many Asian students, especially female students. He observed that on the one hand, it is courageous for the students to leave their homes and study alone in a different culture; on the other hand, it seems difficult for the same students to take risks and be responsible for their own learning. The students seem to agree easily (and very responsively) to what the professors say, but seldom express what they think themselves, nor do they make claims of what they want to do with their learning.

As an Asian female student, I shall speak from my own perspective as to why I seldom speak up in classroom settings: 1) I’m used to listening rather than speaking due to my past school experiences; 2) I’m more interested in hearing what the professor and the other colleagues have to say than expressing my own views; 3) I like to be more thoughtful in what I say so that I don’t waste others’ time; 4) I want to make sure that I really understand what I hear before responding or making judgments; 5) I tend to give the benefit of doubt to the other’s opinions so I naturally hold back my critiques; 6) I do not like to go to extremes and I prefer to take a balanced approach to the issues at hand; 7) I don’t want to be confrontational with my colleagues unless it is absolutely necessary.

These are only a few considerations and habits, but it is easy to notice from this list that the issue is likely related to one’s personality, habit, or value system more than an inability to speak up or a reluctance to take on risks. When a balanced approach is taken and when more attention is paid to what others think, the person is nearly invisible and her voice is often inaudible. Consequently, the personal risks, together with the possible new ideas or innovations, are minimized or they disappear altogether.

With these different and dynamic frameworks, the questions remain: How does a teacher relate to a student authentically? How does a teacher see beyond his or her own
frame of references, and recognize, distinguish, and understand the real issue underneath the silence of a student from a different culture? How does a teacher recognize the capability and talents in the quiet student, provide the student with similar challenges and opportunities, and encourage independent thinking and risk-taking in learning? How does a student relate to a teacher authentically? How does a student understand him or herself in the new environments? How does a student understand the new situations and expectations, and critically challenge, adapt, and transform him or herself and the environments he or she is in?

Pursuing answers to these questions requires a continuous, life-long effort to examine, understand, challenge, adopt, and re-examine the changing self, others, and contexts. Hassen (2001) recommended “tenacious humility” as a stance with which teachers (and students) might strive to approach their work. Making oneself a better person and teacher and promoting the same in one's students, Hansen says, is an ongoing journey: "It is an image of determination allied with openness, of a commitment to think and to question wedded to action . . . an increased attunement to other people and their individuality. . . . Tenacious humility creates conditions for teacher learning, for a 'deeper knowledge' of the 'necessities' entailed in 'good practice'" (p. 172). Following this path of thinking, I discuss two important aspects of authenticity in teaching: the influence of context and living a critical life.

**The influence of context on authenticity in teaching**

Many factors, for instance, the culture, class, gender, age, generation, background, profession and race, shape a context. We judge (or misjudge) a person’s authenticity
based on what we think is a socially appropriate behavior. In the following, I discuss teaching authenticity in the context of student and profession.

One interviewee offered the following two incidents to describe the moments when she felt authentic and inauthentic while studying in an American university:

[I feel a strong moment of authenticity] when I come to appreciate the fact that as an international student, I am creating a new self identify by staying longer in another culture, but in a marginalized way. A moment of authenticity is to be truthful to the fact of this marginality: yes, this is the way I live, being marginalized or not. I come to appreciate that my values and how I view the world are products of this unique marginality, the reality of my world that I cannot escape…

An occasion when I felt forced into unauthentic behavior is when I was caught in having to speak strongly for the traits of my native people or country in their defense when those traits were challenged by ignorance of their context and complicated reality. I was made to think it was unauthentic because on those occasions, I would tend to defend for the traits, both the good and bad parts – that is, a desire to put them in the best light, while I was aware this was not entirely true…

It is not a simple coincidence that a sense of situated existence vividly came through these two incidents. The discussions of authenticity often appear in works associated with existentialist philosophy by writers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre (Kaufmann, 1972) and Maxine Green (1967, 1973, 1988). For these writers, the conscious self is seen as coming to terms with being in a material world and with encountering external forces and influences which are very different from itself; authenticity is one way in which the self acts and changes in response to these pressures.

The descriptions above present the criticality of the influence of one’s contextual reality. For the person I interviewed, there were at least three different contexts working simultaneously: 1) the context of her growing up in China, 2) the context of the American graduate school she attended, and 3) the dynamic context of herself in her marginalized
yet transforming reality. She not only struggled internally and made difficult decisions between the different conflicting values that she had become acquainted with, but also fought against and compromised with external expectations, prejudices, and pressures that had been put on her in the physical context.

With the ever increasing international student body in universities all over the world, there is more frequent contact between people of different cultures and consequently more opportunities for understanding as well as misunderstanding of one another. A crisis emerges when one relocates from a culture which has traditionally been concerned with “moral considerations of the consequences of social interactions…and has extended greater respect to the ‘common good’ and/or ‘group benefit’” (Gu and Zhu, 2000, p. 13) to a culture whose underlying premise is to think for and advance oneself (Bellah, 1985). The individual suddenly experiences an ontological breakdown based on a personally assumed responsibility. A similar crisis exists for one going in the opposite direction, as in the case of the drama professor who was criticized as inauthentic and self-serving. “The tension between morality and self-realization is always tragic since there is no way to reconcile the conflicting demands” (Heckle, 1991, p. 2). When the individual realities and social expectations are not shared, it does not work for the one who is out of step. To survive and grow in the new situation, the individual must re-examine his or her previous belief structures, re-adjust and change the self, other and context.

The above example is unique in that the student is an international student and thus possibly undertakes additional obstacles; yet, the sense of powerlessness and feeling of being excluded or marginalized exist in all students (and teachers) at different levels. In the adult education literature, a lot has been written about empowering students so that
they are included in the process of their own learning (citation). However, a teacher needs to know what causes the sense of powerlessness in order to empower or to help the students find their power if we believe that power is prevalent and is in the hands of every individual (Foucault, 1980).

The feeling of being marginalized or alienated is not a place in which anyone wants to put him or herself; however, this is the first step in examining one’s familiar framework in order to learn and grow. Lifton (1993) articulated this well when he wrote, “Individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something in them to alienate. That ‘something’ has to do with authenticity, with meanings and human associations that, over the course of a life, one experiences as genuine. The protean quest, however flawed, enhances that authenticity” (p. 232). While the situation may appear to be hopeless and the individual feels powerless, there are unique opportunities that the person (as someone from outside the culture) has to expand her circle of influence (Convey, 1989) and to positively influence the thoughts and actions of others. Different from the fish which is “the last to know she is in the water,” the outsider is able to see the differences in values and actions that the people from the inside of the culture may not be able to see. The “disorienting moments” (Mezirow, 1991) are teaching and learning moments for both the outsiders and the insiders of a culture. In these situations, the individuals must reflect critically on the situation and decide how to communicate, approach, and solve problems with or without others, and help themselves and others to examine their individual assumptions authentically.

It is important to note that being aware of and adapting oneself to a context does not mean that one must follow the norm and rules. On the contrary, one needs to be
careful of the dangerous group thinking or crowd mentality (LeBon, 1971) which is more difficult to break through. Although it may be a slow process, the individual can empower and enable authenticity in himself and others through his daily commitments and authentic being with others (Buber, 1958; Freire, 1970). In an academic setting, a teacher can play a significant role in helping the student undergo a transformative learning experience and find his own voice and power by relating to the student in her authentic way of being.

With different professions, we carry and are expected to carry with us certain persona or professional codes. The teacher as a professional is viewed as the “engineer” or “doctor” of the soul, and is held to a higher standard than is the general public in many cultures. This high standard can include having more knowledge, being more intelligent, being a better person, having the ability to inspire others, or/and having tremendous courage. Good teachers are often depicted in the movies as heroes or heroines (Dalton, 1999). In many cases, these heroic teachers are misunderstood, act in ways that are opposed to a social norm, and forced to leave the schools where they taught (Conrack, 1974; Dead Poets Society, 1989; Educating Rita, 1983; Mona Lisa Smile, 2003). In other cases, these heroic teachers are finally recognized, accepted and celebrated after struggling and finally saving the students and the schools (Mr. Holland’s Opus, 1996; Lean on me, 1989; Sister Act, 1992). The Chinese students I interviewed described an authentic teacher as being altruistic, objective, understanding, honest, sincere, responsible, knowledgeable, resourceful, truthful, passionate, loving, caring, fair, listening to the students, encouraging students’ thinking, respecting students as equals;
willing to change, and relating to students as a whole person. The opposite of the above was described as inauthentic.

These social, cultural, and individual expectations of a teacher lead to the question as to whether a teacher should meet all these expectations. Is it even possible? Where does a teacher’s personal authenticity fit in with all these “shoulds” and “should nots,” especially given that they are often in conflict with one another in perception and action? In the following, I discuss various aspects of living a critical life through a culture lens.

**Living a critical life**

We make decisions and judgments based on what we think are true and authentic. When interacting with others, we look for trends, search for patterns, and frequently check the motives of others, consciously or subconsciously. In a wholly uncritical and flowing fashion we may not necessarily look at our own underlying assumptions, many of which are part of our “*a priori*” knowledge or proprioception (Bohm, 1996). When these assumptions are not examined, parallel meanings often emerge, where an individual develops an understanding which is thought to be commonly shared but is evolving along a different set of values. It is only through frequent dialogue that we discover our divergences and unearth each other’s presumptions. A critical life assumes a certain level of critical thought. Critical thought usually means looking both at the underlying assumptions that are present in any argument and going back to the original or basic requirements of a thing and its intended purpose. Culture and language are so closely aligned or embedded that it is often nearly impossible to extricate the underlying assumptions. Even within the same community one person’s “inexpensive” is another person’s “cheap,” one person’s “hybrid” is another person’s “aberration,” one person’s
“will to power” is another person’s “shameful egocentrism.” Being reflective of our own languages is probably the most difficult but important task to assume with a critical life.

Authenticity is not something that we can see or comprehend easily. Rousseau sees the problem of authenticity as the problem of the relationship between being and appearance (Heckle, 1991). An immediate paradox arises when we look at human beings as socially constructed individuals. An individual’s authentic being and ways of being are shaped by and evolving with both natural and environmental forces when he or she relates to and negotiates in the world in the process of survival and growth.

Across cultures one thing that seems to endure is a basic sense of survival. We often make choices that ensure our survival, yet even this basic human need is sought after differently by individuals: one person’s need for survival may be another person’s luxury. Further, this need is sometimes supplanted with an overarching or higher-placed value of performing to community standards, patriotism, political ideas, or desire to change the direction or timing of events. We see daily examples of people willingly giving up their lives to serve the preservation of a concept, ideology or some type of “ism.” What is at stake is a fair judgment or a fine discrimination between nobility and ethical allure on the one hand, and the self destructiveness, self-flattening, and demeaning tendencies, on the other (Taylor, 1992). Survival of a particular individual often means that the individual, due to culture, context, environment, religion, or beliefs, must escape an intolerable habitat. In the new environment this action is seen as courage, but in the departure environment this action can be seen as cowardly.

A tension exists in one’s ongoing progress of being and becoming authentic, a process that involves becoming more aware of self, other, relationship to others, and
one’s context. On the one hand, authenticity means that an individual is genuine and true to herself and others, her actions congruent with her values, and is critical of social norms. It is a process of individuation (Cranton, 1994). On the other hand, being an authentic teacher implies that one is to communicate and relate to students, aware of the students’ perceptions and perspectives, and willing to be critical of and to transform her own and the students’ values and actions. This is a process of becoming a responsible member of a society or culture. The dilemma emerges when the process of becoming an autonomous individual does not join the process of becoming a moral and responsible person in a far-from-perfect society. To be a moral and free person, Rousseau chose to “withdraw into himself and became a friendless wanderer because he felt that he alone was just, authentic, truly alive; that history and society would betray him if he abandoned his solitude” (Heckle, 1991, p. 7). However, the teacher can not withdraw.

In a postmodern and information technology era buffeted by the winds of change, many authors have written about the concepts of an individual’s self identity, virtual identity, protean self and multiple identities (Lipton, 1993; Turtle, 1995). Individuals have conflicting desires and needs to maintain a self identity and to change oneself at the same time. Rousseau indicates, as quoted by Heckle (1991), “Nothing is so different from me as myself, and that is why it would be useless to try to define me in any other way than by that singular variety… In one word, a Proteus, a chameleon, … It is this irregularity itself which makes up the essence of my character” (p. 16). An individual struggles between maintaining an authentic identity and growing that identity through internal reflections and external interactions with the world.
Time, as it turns out, is an important element in the concept of authenticity, for our values must be consistent enough over periods of time. If we constantly change, no one knows who we are or what we stand for. A person is only appraised as an authentic person when he or she is consistently perceived as being so. It is not that the person does not make any mistakes; on the contrary, the person is seen as real and thus fallible. One interviewee well articulated what she sees as the drive for the growth of one’s authenticity:

Authenticity and personal growth are closely related. I believe that authenticity comes from people who purposefully make meaning from the lives we live, the work we do, and the people we meet in the reality of an unfair or not at all perfect world. It comes with experience especially the experience that has twists and turns that constantly push us for the question of the meaning and worth of existence…

The complexity of the dynamics comes when we look to see to what extent we still keep certain traits we are born with, and to what extent we are different as we grow, and why. Being authentic implies being simple and sophisticated, stable and resilient, independent and interdependent, and moral and critical.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is to help expose the assumptions and perceptions we have about authenticity in teaching across cultures. The culture and the language hold the context for these assumptions and they are often very difficult to discover, especially when they have become seamlessly incorporated and unquestioned over hundreds or thousands of years. For the people working continuously inside the same culture, many of these issues or questions may never arise. Because of different social constructs, individual authenticity is usually less easily perceived, understood or shared, explicitly
and implicitly outside a community, culture or society than from within. To achieve a better understanding of one another across cultures, one needs to step out of his or her culture and see from the others’ perspectives. Once we start working cross-culturally in a global environment, these differences are unmasked. This causes us to question who we are and what we are teaching and learning.

References


