

Small Group Dynamics in Cross-Cultural Collaborative Field Research: Voices from the Field

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Karen A. Freeman
Athanase Gahungu
Chicago State University

The purpose of this study was to examine (a) factors that influence effective cross-cultural collaboration, and (b) challenges and issues that face researchers in cross-cultural collaboration. During the summer of 2010, 20 researchers and student interns from Ghana Education Service, Chicago State University (CSU-USA), Winneba University of Education, and Cape Coast University took part in a collaborative field study to assess the extent of use and impact of CSU Teaching and Learning Materials Program (TLMP) in Ghana. In small, mixed teams of up to five Ghanaian and US researchers, they were sent to different schools, in all 10 regions, covering up to four school districts per team, in all 14 school districts where the program's teaching and learning materials had been distributed. In teams, they conducted research activities together—observing classroom teaching, interviewing parents and teachers, and collecting end-of-year assessments. They also conducted social activities together—visiting landmarks, shopping, eating, etc. Their collaborative experiences were collected through a review of daily journals that all had to keep, a review of the program assessment reports, and telephone and email interviews with researchers. The factors that influenced positive and harmonious group dynamics in cross-cultural collaboration included (a) respect for the host community, (b) balance in team composition, and (c) reliance on the paramount role of the host country researchers. Challenges and issues that researchers faced included (a) language differences, (b) conflicting research methodology styles, (c) limited knowledge of the host country's social protocol.

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Introduction

Research collaboration is a complex activity, whose success depends on many factors. Ales, Rodrigues, Snyder and Conklin (2011) advocated that the factors for successful collaboration include presence in the community, quality of the collaborative membership, relevant procedures and structures, consistent communication, realistic goals, and leadership with organizational and communication skills. In collaborative research activities involving different cultures, these factors are amplified. Those issues included communication (O'Brien, Alfano, & Magnusson, 2007; Lin, Chen, & Chiu, 2012; Oetzel, 2002), ethical issues in research design and data collection (Marshall & Batten, 2003), group dynamics (Peterson, 2002) and reflexivity/flexibility (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999). Reflexivity/flexibility is important because of the need to combine perspectives. Marshall and Batten (2003) state that issues will arise with cross-cultural research on the problems of power and politics within the cross-cultural management research teams, and when conceptions of research differ between countries that do not have a common cultural and academic heritage. The concept of reflexivity became important, because it was reflection along with considering implications and changes to practice.

When interaction factors such as communication are not adequately implemented, the success of a collaborative endeavor may be jeopardized. For example, an English word in one culture may not have the same meaning it has in the other. Some English words in "British" English will have a different meaning than the same words in the English spoken in the United States. Phrases may have different connotative meanings, as well. In conducting research inter-culturally and collaboratively, collaborators need instruction in the rhetoric of the cultures with whom they are working so that there is understanding (O'Brien et al, 2007). There are also concerns of ethical implementation and practice, acknowledgement status and authority, and acknowledgement of cultural practices that may be exacerbated when members exhibit a wide variety of diversity, such as differential social ranks, age, etc. (DeLucia-Waack & Donigian, 2004). These may also be connected to communication differences, hindering the productivity of the research. Credence is given to O'Brien, Alfano, and Magnusson (2007) for their impetus in developing programs that will "improve international relations, social relations and political understanding and trust in educational and cultural exchanges" (p. 1) through cross-cultural training.

There have also been many studies examining cross cultural group actions and interactions during the process of conducting research (Marshall & Batten, 2003; Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999; Lin, Chen, & Chiu, 2012). Lin, Chen and Chiu state that, as a result of the world becoming a global village, more fields of study are international and more research is becoming borderless. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the number of research instruments and tests questionnaires that are translated from English into other languages around the world with the presumed expectancy that there may be satisfactory liability and the validity (Yi-Hsiu et al, 2012). Therefore, many interactions and collaborative ventures in the field of research have resulted in more interest in cross-cultural and international research (Sireci & Berberoghu, 2000).

Easterby-Smith and Malina (1999) emphasized the importance of flexibility. According to them, “researchers must prepare strategies for dealing with the unexpected, and these critically depend on the quality of the relationships among the actors involved” (p. 82). Here, again, building positive relationships and communication was emphasized. Further, Yi-Hsiu et al (2012) discussed issues and guidelines for cross-cultural research. They specifically mentioned construct bias, method bias and item bias. Construct bias (Yi-Hsiu et al, 2012) appeared when an item was measured and there was a discrepancy between the two cultures involved. Method bias (Yi-Hsiu et al, 2012) included the administration procedure, the physical conditions under which the instrument was administered and the administrators and the respondents’ familiarity with the instrument. They stated that item bias might be a concern because of wording or item content due to cultural differences.

DeLucia-Waack and Donigian (2004) published a text that was written primarily for the purpose of helping those who lead multicultural groups learn how to do so effectively. They listed self-observations one should take into consideration before becoming a member or a leader of a multicultural group’s work. These observations included evaluating individual multicultural issues, identifying how one’s ethnic and cultural background might influence one’s actions and responses as a member of the multicultural group and identifying how one’s background contributed to one’s view of how groups work.

A number of researchers (e.g., Geisinger, 1994; Van de Vijver & Hambleton, 1996) listed several suggestions for conducting cross-cultural research. Their recommendations included:

- attempting to minimize method and item bias as much as possible;
- avoiding slang, jargon and colloquialism in the writing of the items;
- making sure that the accuracy of the instrument and the equivalence of all of the language used is carefully examined;
- tailoring the physical environment for the instrument administration so that the venues are as similar as possible;
- interpreting outcomes and responses objectively; and
- providing documentation regarding how to use the assessment device and to collect reactions and feedback from the users, participants and respondents.

In addition, Easterby-Smith and Malina (1999) cautioned that conducting cross-cultural research has methodological and philosophical implications, which need to be carefully explored. They emphasized that, in conducting cross cultural studies, there needed to be flexibility along with careful management of the research team’s relationships. In particular, the authors argued that the members of the teams must be conscious of power differences of the individuals, the contrasting views about research and the effect that these influences would have on the research. Finally, they pointed to “reflexivity as a valuable component of cross-cultural management research, especially when there was a need to combine insider and outsider perspectives” (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999, p. 76).

While the studies above described factors that influenced collaboration in research, in general, and collaboration in cross-cultural settings, in particular, there

appeared to be a scarcity of research that examined group dynamics in cross-cultural research collaboration. Issues of differences that were approached and addressed in executing research procedures and learning to live together in prolonged times seemed to be under-reported. Notably, under-reported were studies that explored differences between collaborators from low-context and high-context cultures. The present study reported researchers' accounts of small teams of Ghanaian and American students and researchers who spent two summer months of field research in all 10 regions of Ghana. The two groups could be broadly described as representing a high-context culture (African) and a low-context culture (Western). As McSwine (2010; citing Hall, 1976) clarified,

Most Western cultures which use mono-chronic time are low context, i.e. cultures who view time in a linear manner and communicate internally by placing more emphasis on the literal meanings of words; while on the other hand High Context cultures which use time in a non-linear manner, place more emphasis on symbolic meaning and non-verbal communication through the use (...). This is particularly true of African and Native American culture. (p. 272)

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer two main questions:

1. What are the factors that influence effective cross-cultural collaboration?
2. What are challenges and issues that face researchers in cross-cultural collaboration?

Methodology

This report is primarily based on researchers' journal entries and interviews conducted with the researchers at the conclusion of the project. Journals were completed, both during the project and after the project. Prior to the combined project, during the Spring semester, at Chicago State University, six students from different colleges and departments registered for a 3-credit-hour orientation course in which they were taught to appreciate the Ghanaian culture. The instructor, also a member of the research team, taught the students about life in Africa, in general, and such do's and don'ts about what was going to be expected of them as how to effectively communicate, what to wear, what to eat, etc. Three weeks before departing, the six Chicago State University students and five CSU researchers spent nine days learning how to conduct field research. They learned and practiced interview and observation techniques. At the end of the training, the group was tested on the research skills and techniques, as well as, on the cross-cultural elements learned.

Once in Ghana, the lead researcher conducted a five-day combined orientation to field research for four Ghanaian students, three Ghanaian researchers, and all 11-member groups from CSU. During the orientation, students and researchers were given note pads in which they kept a journal of what they were doing and learning. Each evening, while conducting the two-month field research in all 10 regions and 14 districts of Ghana, teams had a telephone conference in which groups debriefed other groups about how

their research was progressing. Difficulties encountered, whether methodological or cultural, were discussed. There were five teams. Each team consisted of both Ghanaian and American students and researchers. At the end of the project, team leaders summarized the reflections of their team members. In addition, open-ended questions were emailed to all students and researchers asking them to reflect on (a) differences and similarities between American and Ghanaian researchers in data collection procedures and communication, (b) cross-cultural problems they faced, and (c) thoughts about what should be done if the project was organized and implemented again. Telephone calls followed the questions.

The present report summarizes the reflections in students and researchers' journals, together with the responses to emailed questions during the Spring semester. Student researchers at Chicago State University took an orientation course whose purpose was to help all the members of the teams and they were asked to respond to questions, ponder and think about their experiences and then to share them. Team members were asked to respond to the questions and could respond verbally or in writing.

Results of the Study

This case study attempted to examine (a) factors that influence effective cross-cultural collaboration and (b) challenges and issues that face researchers in cross-cultural collaboration. The findings below represent information shared by researchers in (a) a video recording of their experiences entitled "I see me in you," (b) a pamphlet entitled "I see me in you," (c) telephone interviews, (d) responses to questions posed via email, and (e) fieldwork reflections. Table 1 summarizes the number of responses by data collection method.

Table 1
Number of Responses by Data Collection Method, Site, and Period

| Method/Instrument | # Participants | Site and Period |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---|
| "I See Me in You" Student Video | 13 | After field work, Chicago and Ghana |
| "I see Me in You" Pamphlet | 20 | After field work, Chicago and Ghana |
| Responses to Email Questions | 6 | After field work, Chicago and Ghana |
| Telephone Interview | 1 | After field work, Chicago and Ghana |
| Field Reflections | 18 | During Field, Ghana, June-July, 2010. Each team met to share experiences of the day. |
| Researchers' Post-Field Forum | 20 | Ghana. At the completion of the field work and the submission of the reports, the students had a day of post-field discussion and presentation forum. |

Factors that Influenced Productive Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Based on respondents' perceptions, several factors contributed to the success of collaborative work between the host and visiting teams. To the extent possible, entries from researchers' journal are highlighted to stress their perspectives.

Clarity of Research Procedures

Two views about the task assignments emerged from the information collected. The first view was that the procedures were clear enough for all team members to execute them. Thus, researcher 5 thought that the interview protocol was excellent and also stated, “We were well trained before going out into the field”, and researcher 2 stated, “We were all university students and they all followed the same procedure.” The other view, which seemed shared by many team members, was that field work was successful because it was divided. Although the research coordinator trained all participants to be equally conversant in all aspects of field work, it appeared that most teams chose to restrict their members to some tasks. For instance, in Team 2,

The duties of collecting the information were divided such that we each performed the same duties at each of the sites. Group two, as a unit, discussed and decided on the procedure and format to follow in visiting the schools. There was group consensus and group ownership of the procedures to follow. The group’s decision was as follows: One of the Ghanaian members, due to language concerns, was exclusively assigned to interview the parents only and document the results. Therefore, that one person was the only one interviewing parents. The same person was assigned to stay with the children during the interview of the teacher. In this way, each group member became an “expert” in performing his/her assignments and the group was able to gather the data in an expedient manner. Everyone took notes on their portion of the data collection.

Similarly, researchers 3 and 4 expressed that each team member had a designated task. The same person always performed the same task. Researcher 3 shared, “a Ghanaian student was assigned the task of interviewing the parents.” This assessment was echoed by researchers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 that “the duties of collecting the information were divided such that we each performed the same duties at each of the sites.” Work assignments seemed to come from team leaders. As researcher 1 observed,

We had someone assigned to do the teacher interviews. This person did all of the parent interviews. This was the same for the other assignments. Someone was assigned to do the parent interviews. Someone was assigned to do the administrator interviews and two people to do the class observation.

In the discussion section, an attempt will be made to interpret the implications for restricting work assignments to some individuals. Whether such arrangements enhanced or diminished collaboration will be discussed in the conclusions section. As an example, while all researchers seemed to enjoy the division of tasks, others sounded rather disappointed. Thus, researcher 2 reflected, “No, I would not make different expectations for the Ghanaians and the U.S. researchers, because each team member was expected to be responsible for their part of this project.”

Respect for the Host Community

All researchers who submitted reflections commented that the members of their teams, both visitors and hosts, were very respectful of the staff, parents and children with whom they spoke or interacted. From the orientation meetings and debriefings prior to or after road trips, researchers reflected the necessity to obey host communities' customs. The awareness reflected the three months of cultural and sensitivity training the US students received, during which they learned some of the history, culture and customs. Researcher 8 stated,

I am overwhelmed by the way our team leaders and CSU researchers related with us, the Ghanaian counterparts . . . We had a shared interest, the children, and a shared experience, Ghana.

Researcher 5 stated,

As a researcher, I was most impressed with the care and the attention given to the ethical issues related to teachers and the parents during the interview process.

Others, such as Researchers 6, 9, 10, 12 and 15 discussed the impact of learning about and living in another culture. Learning about and living with another culture changed them by giving them a better understanding of others and themselves.

Team Building Activities

All reflections mentioned team leaders' emphasis on researchers creating a symbiotic relationship between host and visitors, and both with the communities in which they were conducting research. Researchers took the time to know one another. The members spent time socializing with one another at the end of the day and on weekends. At the end of the day, after visiting the schools, team members went sightseeing together and one group took a short trip in to the Ivory Coast. On the weekends, the student members socialized and went shopping together. Student members befriended and communicated, by telephone and email, with the members of the other teams, regardless of their individual cultures, on an almost daily basis. Notably, the student researchers from Team 2 had long conversations with members of Team 4 on a daily basis, reflected Team 3 leader. The conversations inquired of the other team's locations and experiences. Pictures of their locations and experiences were exchanged via their telephones. Researchers 1, 3 and 4 believed that the fact that the groups included both cultures increased the productivity of the group in the data gathering. The Ghanaians were also able to share and educate the U.S. members to help the latter gain a better understanding of the Ghanaian culture. Researchers 1, 3, and 4 stated that their members were hardworking and accommodating of the individual personalities and cultural differences within their group.

Balance in Team Composition

To the extent that it was possible, the research coordinator ensured that all teams had an equal number of researchers from the host and visiting countries. Team composition also took into consideration whether somebody on the team could understand the language(s) of the site communities. It also considered the balance of seasoned researchers and students on teams, as well as having male and female researchers. As teams 2 and 3 leaders articulated,

Having the males on the team was very helpful in negotiating prices for hotel rooms. The male team members were more familiar with prices and were able to communicate in non-English languages. The male team members seemed to be respected more in negotiating prices for hotel rooms. Even in cases where women seemed to be in charge, they seemed to gravitate to the male members and preferred to speak with them. Therefore, the male team members negotiated prices for hotel rooms. So, I think that males, regardless of the country in which the research is conducted should be a part of the team.

Thus, researchers 1, 2 and 3 were on teams that were evenly matched between Ghanaian and U.S. research members. The Ghanaians on each team were assigned to interview all of the parents so that the parents could understand. The parents usually did not speak English. Sometimes when the host country researchers did not understand the parent's language, the drivers assisted. Researchers stated that, as we collected the information, everyone was serious. In the evenings, when we discussed our findings, everyone was sincere and serious about the process and what needed to be done. Researchers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12 and 20 stated that the experiences were very rewarding. Team two also consisted of two male and two female researchers.

Planned Research and Cross-Cultural Training

As the research coordinator shared, conducting a nationwide assessment of such a nationwide program as the Chicago State University's Teaching and Learning Materials Program (TLMP) required more manpower than the team of researchers assigned to the project in Ghana and Chicago. The materials had been distributed in all 10 regions and 14 selected districts of Ghana. Because the work involved an educational initiative, it appeared that future users of the materials introduced would enhance the impact on the community. However, as the coordinator remarked, the inclusion of college American and Ghanaian students meant investing in preparing them for participation in the assessment. Thus, training became the center piece of the assessment. Researcher 7 summed up this necessity as follows,

The breadth of the work necessitated the inclusion of Ghanaian and American students in research and field work activities. As a result, 10 of the 20 researchers with limited research background, or had little exposure to field research methodologies, including interview, field notes, and observations, joined the assessment team.

Researchers 3, 4, 5 and 12 thought that the training they received was very helpful in their field work. Students and seasoned researchers practiced such techniques as being participant and non-participant observers, note taking, asking introducing questions, probing questions, echoing, letting people talk, silence, etc. Team leaders learned how to manage teams, debrief team members, build team camaraderie, establish communication structures, communicate with authorities, manage funds, etc. Providing uniform training in field work methodologies, managing teams, respecting the cultures of communities visited, etc., became instrumental for the success of the project. Researchers particularly appreciated the training with regard to cultural differences to expect in the different parts of the country.

Flexibility

Working with mixed groups with different research and education backgrounds, on sites that even members of the host community may not have seen before, and using methodologies that may be different from field methodologies familiar to researchers, team leaders must consistently adapt their leadership strategies. Success in those conditions requires flexibility. Team 2 and 3 leaders summed flexibility as follows:

Initially, research tasks for a given day were given hours before we were to have our first meeting. After meeting with my team, the Ghanaian members of my team asked me to think about the language barrier that might occur even though the Ghanaian teachers and parents spoke English. Therefore, in collaborating with my team, assignments were changed. One of the Ghanaian members was assigned to interview all of the parents. The other Ghanaian member who recorded the number of TLMP books and materials that were being used was given time to perform that duty, so that he could assist the U.S. person who was assigned to interview the teachers.

Paramount Role of Host Country Researchers

Data gathering would have been extremely difficult if not impossible (especially with the parents) had there not been Ghanaian members on the team. However, being Ghanaian was not always enough; often, the driver seemed to be the ultimate go-to person on the team. “There were many times when the only Ghanaian on our team needed to translate the English language in the native tongue of the interviewee or reword the sentence to make it easier to understand in interviewing the teachers and parents was not one of the researchers. In those situations, we involved the driver,” shared Team 4 leader. The driver seemed to know the language and customs of the communities, and was very comfortable interacting with all the places visited. For all of the teams, the driver was more than just a driver. He was a tour guide and go-between. Whether it was purchasing items, explaining our research purposes to parents or teachers, cautioning researchers about custom expectations in the community, the driver was always there to help. Most importantly, as team 2 leader reflected, teams depended on the driver for directions. She explained,

Initially before the trip began, I explained to the driver that I preferred to go to the farthest most districts first and work our way back to Accra (the starting point). The driver then made all of the decisions as to which roads to take. Researchers' teams consisted of five members. Three of the members were from Ghana and two members were from the U.S. One of the Ghanaian members was the driver who was assigned to take them to the various schools.

Problems and Issues

Coordinating so many researchers with diverse research skills and backgrounds, diverse value skills, diverse nationalities, and diverse expectations of the project could not proceed without problems. During the post-field reflection forum, a whole-day discussion, presentation and celebration event that took place after teams finished transcribing their data; the student researchers teased one another, using humor, about the differences they exhibited during the two months of travelling together, living together in groups, depending on one another for support and comfort. The jokes told were further elaborated in daily field reflections and responses to questions posed by email. The following were concerns expressed in data collected.

Language Concerns

While communication may not have been seriously impeded among researchers or with research participants, some English language differences and nuances were noticeable. As researcher 2 observed, there was a number of differences. He explained that the communication difficulties were not because the leaders were not communicating well. It was because of the subtle differences between British English and U.S. English. For instance,

The faculty in Africa would refer to the entire college here. We would say the faculty of education, the faculty of pharmacy. When American researchers used the word faculty, they meant 'professor.'

Similarly, Ghanaian researchers were confused when their American partners used the word “students” to mean the children in elementary schools they were visiting, and then used the same word to mean people receiving an education at the college level. In Ghana, it was observed, “a student is someone in college. If they are not in college, they are called a pupil.” More importantly, researchers were intrigued by the spelling of some words both in the data collection instruments and the teaching materials. Thus, the interview protocols and observation checklist had words spelled in American English—program, enrollment, analyze, etc. By contrast, words written in pupils’ books had the British English spelling—colour, centre, practice, litre, etc.

Different Research Methodology Styles

Two of the non-negotiables during the training of researchers were that (a) they had to use a script to access the site and (b) had to conform to the interview and observation protocols. However, for several reasons, many researchers acknowledged that they did not follow the script or the protocols. Not using a script or following protocols might have worked for seasoned researchers. However, it could have made the field work rather confusing for the students. Indeed, the scripts, interview protocols and observation checklists were lengthy by design. They were designed to allow researchers to probe for different answers, nuances and perspectives.

Whatever the case, two issues emerged from the guidelines for data collection. The first concern was that, once teams were separated to go to their sites, there was no mechanism for ensuring that the data collection guidelines were uniformly followed. Thus, among those who were concerned by the length of the protocols was researcher 5 who observed, “The interview protocol was excellent; however, some of the questions were duplicated.”

Another issue that needed to be included in the researchers’ training in the uniform use of the protocols was that of incorporating researchers’ diverse research backgrounds, styles and skills, particularly with regards to interviewing and using observation checklists. When asked to reflect on differences and similarities between American and Ghanaian team members during field work, researcher 2 commented,

When questions were asked and the interviewees commented, the Ghanaian team member did not seem to use as many words to explain the question(s). The American researchers used long sentences and the Ghanaians did not.

Researcher 5 made the same observation.

Difficult Access to the Sites

Probably because each team had at least one Ghanaian researcher and a driver, there was a feeling that it was not necessary to devote a whole training session on the regions where researchers were assigned. However, several researchers observed that “more time should have been spent addressing the individual areas in which the groups were assigned” (Researcher 5). The assessment was echoed by team 2 leader, who noted,

Field researchers were concerned about going into certain areas. Communication needed to include more information about the different areas to acclimate the field researchers with what to expect.

Several researchers recommended that, on each team, there should always be team members who are familiar with the customs, culture and habits of those who live in that region. Teams need people who can watch and keep the other members from activities that might offend those who live there. As researchers 3 and 6 observed, “The U.S. members, although treated politely, were considered foreigners. Being in and being seen in a group with those who lived in Ghana gave our group more acceptance.”

Misinterpreting Group Dynamics

Researcher 5 expressed concern that training in group dynamics should have been integrated into the training. Training in group dynamics was needed to prepare the individual within the groups for hypothetical situations that might occur and with the cultural composition of the groups.

Inadequate Financial Support for Drivers

As reported earlier, the drivers, in addition to driving in very difficult, or unknown, terrains, were guides, interview interpreters, and go-betweens for interactions and transactions. They were an integral part of research teams. However, according to reflections, their heightened responsibilities did not seem to be commensurate with the living stipends they were given for the trip. Team 2 leader summed up the concern as follows,

There was much concern over the financial responsibilities for the driver. Teams were instructed that drivers were given all that they needed to pay for their food and lodging. However, the driver consistently stated that he did not have the funds to pay for lodging. Part of our orientation should have included XY (the owner of the company contracted to provide vehicles and drivers) speaking to all of us including the drivers, so we would have all been clear on our financial responsibilities. In this way, in a combined group, the team leaders and the drivers would be told our financial responsibility to avoid confusion.

Different Educational Background of Researchers

The assessment field work that teams of Ghanaian and American researchers conducted involved going into schools, interacting with teachers and classes in action, as well as administrations of education at the national, district and local level. While having an educational background was not a criterion in the selection of researchers, it soon appeared that a keen understanding of the schooling process was indispensable to collecting and interpreting assessment information. However, not all student researchers were education majors. Researcher 7 shared the concern in these terms,

Some of the students from the U.S. were students majoring in education. All of those participating who were from Ghana were students majoring in education, teachers and/or working in an area of education. The U.S. students were productive and cooperative, but we were conducting education research in schools. It seemed to show a lack of regard for the field to send people to observe classes and do the research who were not members of the field. I wonder if it sends a message that one's training does not matter when it comes to education, anyone can do whatever is necessary to complete the educational task.

Researcher 3 wrote a similar reflection.

Limited Knowledge of the Host Country's Social Protocol

Although U.S. researchers had had an orientation to the host country's culture prior to the field research project, it soon appeared that they were not prepared for all the customs and social protocols required for interacting with the host community, particularly their counterpart collaborators. Researcher 2 took extensive notes of the adjustments she had to make. In her reflections, she observed,

The Ghanaian society is a conservative, polite and formal society. There was obvious respect shown to people of authority, and older individuals. Women in authority, unless they have noted that they should be addressed otherwise, were referred to as 'aunt' or 'auntie' along with their first names (an example of this practice would be to be addressed as Auntie Cora). This practice was utilized also with those who were high ranking in the administration, whether older or younger. Older individuals were often called a 'mother' or a 'father and were addressed as such and seemingly treated with said respect. As a person with graying hair, I was many times affectionately addressed as 'mother.'

Team leaders from the U.S. also observed that there was differential treatment by gender. While travelling through the country, researchers 1 and 2 commented that there were times when it was much more practical to allow the males on the teams to become the leaders especially in areas where arrangements were needed which included money such as making hotel arrangements. This seems to have been the case in areas that were farther away from the large towns and cities.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that (a) influence effective cross-cultural collaboration and (b) challenges and issues that faced researchers in cross-cultural collaboration. During the summer of 2010, in small mixed groups, 20 researchers and student interns from Ghana Education Service, Chicago State University (CSU-USA), Winneba University of Education, and Cape Coast University took part in a collaborative field study to assess the extent of use and impact of CSU Teaching and Learning Materials Program (TLMP) in Ghana. Data were collected through (a) a video recording of researchers' experiences entitled "I see me in you," (b) a pamphlet entitled "I see me in you," (c) telephone interviews, (d) responses to questions posed via email, and (e) fieldwork reflections. Seven main factors were identified as influencing positive group dynamics in cross-cultural collaboration. They were:

- 1) Clarity of research procedures;
- 2) Respect for the host community;
- 3) Incorporation of team building activities;
- 4) Balance in team composition;
- 5) Planned research and cross-cultural training;

- 6) Flexibility; and
- 7) The paramount role of host country researchers.

Among the main challenges and issues faced by researchers, the following seven were identified:

- 1) Language concerns;
- 2) Conflicting research methodology styles;
- 3) Difficult access to the sites;
- 4) Understanding group dynamics;
- 5) Integration of drivers in research activities;
- 6) Different educational background of researchers; and
- 7) Limited knowledge of the host country's social protocol.

These self-accounts above do not translate all the interactions, self-doubts, discoveries, and mutual appreciations that the two groups of researchers experienced together. Indeed, careful preparation for the collaboration seemed to be rewarding. However, it was also very obvious that members of one culture cannot prepare for working with members of another culture just through an orientation. Most learning and knowledge came, not from the orientation sessions, but from the field trips. Mutual misconceptions of the ideas that some of the researchers had concerning the other culture did not dissipate until many days in the collaboration, or did not dissipate at all.

The U.S. student researchers attended an extensive in-service orientation course about the customs, mores and the educational system in Ghana. Of the six U.S. student researchers, four had never travelled out of the U.S. They were reminded that they were first and foremost representatives of Chicago State University (CSU) and visitors in someone else's domain. Upon arriving in Ghana, the CSU students met the Ghanaian students and together both groups attended a daily in service that met for a week. During this second orientation, the students learned about each other as individuals and about each other's country and culture. The researchers were learning to be good acquaintances and friends.

As in any collaborative endeavor, there were surprises and other issues for which the training had not prepared the researchers. Those issues included communication (O'Brien et al, 2007; Lin et al, 2012; Oetzel, 2002), ethical issues in research design and data collection (Marshall & Batten, 2003), group dynamics (Peterson, 2002) and reflexivity/flexibility (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999). Reflexivity/flexibility is important because of the need to combine perspectives. The differences in data collection procedures—the host researchers asking fewer questions than the protocols required, and the visitors attempting to go to the full length of protocols—could be one reflection of the high-context (African) and low-context (American) cultures that Hall (1976, as cited in McSwine, 2010) described. The issue may not lie in the effectiveness and complementariness of the different approaches, but in the extent to which either site can make use of the data collected once field work is finished.

As reported earlier, the same factors that influenced effective collaboration between the two groups of researchers were also areas that needed improvement. For instance, through team building activities, team members built camaraderie, which, in

turn, enhanced collaboration, trust, and productivity in the pursuance of gaining data and the confidence of respect from the team members and respect for all of those who were involved in the study (researchers, Chicago State University and Ghanaian educators, parents and children). At the same time, it soon appeared that some teams were not balanced to allow for the same number of host and visiting researchers, or had male researchers to be go-betweens when accessing sites or conducting transactions in host communities. Likewise, teams could have been balanced, but may not have had enough time to review linguistic differences that had been slipped into the data collection instruments.

More importantly, effective collaboration seemed to require a same commitment to the research and its significance. While all aspects of mental and academic preparation was done during separate and combined orientations, it could not allay for differences in educational backgrounds of the researchers, and help team leaders anticipate how to effectively include the *drivers* as indispensable research team members who would serve as guides, interpreters and go-betweens. On one hand, team leaders had to ensure that student researchers were receiving the field training they were seeking. On the other hand, team leaders had the added responsibility of ensuring that the two groups of researchers—host and visiting—collaborated, and did not put the burden on the other. Such an awareness would have helped team leaders in facilitating group dynamics in such a way that all would participate in all aspects of the data collection process—all asking questions, all taking notes, and all interpreting the data. As it turned out, some student researchers from the visiting group soon became uncertain and deferred the interviews to the host team members. Such an arrangement, as practical as it was, might have made it difficult to give an accurate interpretation of the data for the visiting teams, particularly in light of the above-referenced preference for the host-community research members for asking sparse questions or taking scarce notes.

One of the lessons from the collaborative experience is that the host community's culture and society were more formal than the broader American culture. For instance, in meetings, the use of the right hand as the only correct manner in which materials are transferred from person to person, was one of the customs taught at the orientation, but which had not sank in. Likewise, the formality in addressing one another, or the strict requirement that when travelling through the country, two female researchers were not allowed to sleep in the same hotel room, were some of those customs one never grasps until one is exposed to the culture.

One other lesson seems to be that communication and conscientious acknowledgement of cultural sensitivities are very important to effective collaboration. Although the teams seemed well synchronized, there were unintended snafus that needed to be addressed. Some pictures needed permission before taking them. Sometimes words and actions needed to be carefully thought about before using, because although both spoke English, the words and actions might not have the same meaning. These items were carefully noted, especially due to the high regard and friendliness that all team members felt toward each other.

Despite inevitable issues and concerns faced by researchers from both groups, there was exceptional cooperation among and within the teams. In the future, all should be done for the teams to be balanced. Four of the teams were evenly numerically coordinated, but not necessarily matched as far as the status of its members. There were

also persons, on teams, who were highly qualified and conducted research for their respective university. Roles and responsibilities within the teams were flexible and respected in order that any efforts were taken not to offend any of the team regardless of status of the person or the responsibilities that needed to be addressed. In conducting research with persons of various levels of status, part of the sensitivity training must include impressing upon the members the importance of not allowing their status or personality to interfere with the research. One of the primary objectives of any group collaborative research is to avoid “group communication pitfalls” (Burtis & Turman, 2006, 15). A group pitfall is anything that might reduce a group’s effectiveness or decrease its desired outcomes.

All in all, each team member needed the other to fulfill the objectives of the research. The Americans needed to learn the customs and mores that they would be expected to follow while in Ghana. While travelling through the countryside, the Ghanaian’s knowledge of the various languages and ability to speak and translate was essential in conducting many of the interviews. The American researchers, having completed an extra training session on the research methodology prior to going to Ghana, were more familiar with the assessment instruments and the process to follow in conducting the research. In the future, there appears to be a need to expand the training to both groups. That training should both provide technical skills and multicultural sensitivity.

Bowman (1996) modeled the multicultural training and stated that there are three levels of interpersonal awareness. They are to know yourself, know about others as far as their culture, and to know one’s own lifestyles and values. One needs to know how one relates to others. In other words, one needs to examine one’s own culture and ethnic values and racial identity to understand oneself as a person, examine one’s beliefs about group work and the inherent assumptions within the Eurocentric view about group work, learn about other cultures in terms of what they value and how it may affect group work; and develop a personal plan for group work that emphasizes and utilizes cultural diversity. Atkinson, Kim, and Caldwell (1998) stated, “misunderstandings that arise from variations in communication . . . may lead to alienation within the group . . .” (p. 203), an assessment that was echoed by Greeley, Garcia, Kessler, and Gilcrest (1992).

Conclusion

Cross-cultural studies will continue to attract the attention of researchers. In conducting this type of research, researchers need to be cognizant of the construct, method and item bias that could affect the results of the study (Lin et al., 2012). We examined the methodological and philosophical implications of cross-cultural management research, comparing a field study conducted collaboratively in the United Kingdom and China with Teagarden and colleagues’ survey-based international study (1995). Our findings confirm those authors’ calls for flexibility in cross-cultural research and for careful management of research team relationships, but also highlight the significant effects that power differences and contrasting views about research can have on the conduct of cross-cultural research.

There are times when the role of researcher is put aside and the researcher becomes a representative of third party entities which may be the financial authorities

supporting the research. Sometimes there are occasions where the goals and objectives of the research are changed to meet the requirements, which may not have been in the original proposal, of third party entities. The goals may then become more of a political nature. If pictures or videos are taken that may be used to pursue goals not a part of the originally approved research, care must be taken that the permission of all involved is given. There were areas of consideration in conducting the cross-cultural research that were not part of the original research thoughts and processes. Third party entities whose goals and objectives are also good and worthy may be infused into the project. Their goals and activities need to be handled separately in order to protect the integrity of the research project.

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