

Culture in Medicine or Medicine in Culture?

Imagine in your studies to becoming a successful doctor, your program begins with the Yin/Yang balance in nature even before basic human anatomy; yet that is how Chinese doctors begin their studies. In *The Web That Has No Weaver*, Ted Kaptchuk while writing about the basic understanding of Chinese medicine describes his initial experience of staying with a family in China and his studies. What doctors and researchers have found, according to Kaptchuk, is that both methods are able to effectively treat diseases, syndromes, allergies, etc. proving that there is no “One Best Way” (Kaptchuk 22-23). Clearly China has been able to treat billions of patients and for more than two thousand years (Kaptchuk 23).

Western vs. Chinese medicine is a perfect example of education becoming engrained in the culture’s mind. Learning to accept both methods is most ideal medically, yet very difficult as they have very opposing concepts on how to even start investigating the patient’s complaint. For example, Chinese medicine focuses on the imbalance in the body and how to correct that imbalance while Western medicine focuses on the cause of the complaint and how to treat it (Kaptchuk 115-118). Kaptchuk explains further that there are ailments that Western medicine can treat and Chinese cannot and vice versa (Kaptchuk 250-254).

Barbara Rogoff explains that the idea of “One Best Way” derives from the culture’s assumptions and values in *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Both medical systems were developed based on best practices within their cultures. Rogoff uses an excellent quote from Octavio Paz (1967) “The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us.”... (Rogoff 349). What if there only existed Chinese medicine or what if there was only Western? Both have a lot to offer their cultures and their “outsiders”.

While looking at the education of medicine in cultures, one can also find a hidden knowledge in the culture’s language, similar to what Rogoff describes in the situation of the aboriginal who wanted his children to be taught the “secret English”, what parents of the culture teach their children and for the

following example, what doctors teach their patients. The spouse of Ted Kaptchuk's home-stay announced that she had a "head Wind" (Kaptchuk 115) which is an actual diagnosis in China, not to be confused with a "head wind" affecting an airplane as used in English. Clearly the vocabulary and culture in China is affected by their medical system. How much more is the Western medical system entwined into the American culture and we do not notice it? Both medical sides bring with them their history of accepted theories and ideas which then bleed into the entire culture in an unspoken education, or the "secret" language within the culture (Kaptchuk 247-249).

Barbara Rogoff presents many new ideas on education from various cultures. As she explains "differences in values among communities help to illuminate the cultural systems that otherwise are often taken for granted..." (Rogoff 347). Instead of omitting Chinese medical studies in Western medicine, it should become a part of it and vice versa. Blending the education systems allows for the transmission of the "secret" language into both cultures.

Bibliography

Kaptchuk, Ted J. *The Web That Has No Weaver*. 1983. NY: Congdon & Week. Print.

Rogoff, Barbara. *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. 2003. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Print.