12 A COORDINATED FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING RESEARCHERS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

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INTRODUCTION: ACADEMIC MOBILITY

While the concept of the wandering scholar is not new, the speed and frequency of academic mobility have rapidly gained momentum in the 21st century (Kim 2009). Linked to the notion of the 'borderless' university (Cunningham *et al.* 1998; Hearn 2011; Watanabe 2011), scholars today expect to study and work in more than one country, to present their research at international conferences, and to collaborate with colleagues from all around the world. The result is a multicultural academic workforce in many universities for whom boundaries between national cultures are increasingly being erased and where all members require high levels of intercultural competence.

The contemporary version of cross-border, transnational academic mobility is marked by "interlocking relations of the spontaneity of mobile individuals; national and supranational policy frameworks; and institutional networks of universities in the global cyberspace of knowledge flows" (Kim 2009:400). The result is a complex picture of permanent and temporary relocations and continuing movement. These relocations are played out by individuals travelling to other countries for part or all of their undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral studies, in self-funded or government-organised programmes. The length of stay might be from permanent or long-term migration through to temporary stays for specific study programmes or post-doctoral fellowships, to brief sojourns abroad for research collaborations and conference attendance. For others, transnational campuses of universities require episodes of short-term, intensive teaching in other countries (Pherali 2011) alongside ongoing remote relationships with colleagues and students on those campuses.

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PART FIVE • **SUPERVISION ACROSS CULTURES**

Discourses around academic mobility in the past have described the 'brain drain' phenomenon, with permanent movements from some countries to others, notably from regions with developing economies or plagued by political unrest, and the associated 'brain gain' of the receiving nations. However, in recognition that this is not necessarily a single movement, 'brain circulation' acknowledges the exchange of knowledge that results from the diasporic research and academic networks established by these cross-border movements (Chen & Koyama 2012). Increasingly for scholars, 'home' might not be tied to a single nation-state or culture. Rather, "[h]ome needs to be understood … in terms of a plurality of places, institutions and epistemic communities; that is to say, more and more academics find themselves 'at home in motion'" (Fahey & Kenway 2010a:568). It is important for academic mobility to be understood not only as physical movement, but also as intellectual movement and flexibility.

In Australia, as elsewhere, the face of higher education has changed dramatically in the last decade owing to the forces of internationalisation and globalisation. Consequently, researchers need to be capable of operating effectively in intercultural milieux and of thinking in a 'worldly' way (Fahey & Kenway 2010b), that is, with an acute awareness of their social, historical and geographical situatedness. Any notion of 'assimilation' is outdated in these contexts, and even the concept of 'acculturation' can be fraught with ambivalence, as researchers seek the skills and outlooks required to work in an increasingly "flexible and fluid global world" (Chen & Koyama 2013:2). Even for researchers remaining relatively static in terms of place, interdisciplinary research work has resulted in a need for intellectual flexibility. This increasingly mobile, fluid research environment necessitates programmes that push the boundaries of postgraduate supervision and provide insight into interdisciplinarity and intercultural communication for both research students and their supervisors.

At the University of Adelaide we have responded to these changes by developing and implementing a framework for researcher development at all levels that includes the skills to conduct an 'ethnography' of personal and disciplinary academic practices. The framework includes a specific programme for international research students (the Integrated Bridging Program-Research (IBP-R)), mixed international and local thesis writing groups, and a supervisor development programme (Exploring Supervision Programme (ESP)) for both local and international staff. The latter programme looks explicitly at issues relating to the multicultural academy. In the next section we explain each of these programmes and the ways in which they work towards developing intercultural competency in researchers through explorations of boundaries around cultural diversity.

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CHAPTER 12 • A COORDINATED FRAMEWORK

INTEGRATED BRIDGING PROGRAM-RESEARCH

"You are the vanguard of internationalisation!" We always greet international research students in this way when they attend the induction session of the IBP-R and point out their importance to the University of Adelaide and the global academy. However, despite the fact that international students have high PhD completion rates in comparison to other students and are usually high-performing students who have often overcome significant odds to take up the challenges of studying abroad (Harman 2003), international students do not necessarily have the English language skills or intercultural competencies required. Likewise, local research students do not necessarily have the intercultural competencies to interact meaningfully with international students. For example, Clifford (2011) illustrates the significant challenges of developing intercultural competencies in local students who do not experience international exchanges.

A common approach to integrating international students is to appoint local mentors, and to provide international students with academic language and learning support. In contrast, at the University of Adelaide we provide all international research students with a concurrent programme that systematically develops two important aspects of intercultural competence: knowledge and skills (Deardorff 2010). The stated aim of the IBP-R is to explicitly unpack "the specific discipline-related expectations of academic writing and oral presentation" (IBP-R 2013).

The IBP-R focuses firstly on developing the academic and generic skills that have increasingly become part of what Nerad and Heggelund (2008:313-314) dub "the global PhD", including the socio-linguistic knowledge and skills of grammar, appropriate citation and attribution, and communication, which assist the student in presenting the required piece of original research in the form of a written thesis and/ or dissertation and in oral presentations. This explicit teaching of socio-linguistic knowledge (Deardorff 2010) empowers international students in their interactions with local supervisors and peers. The programme also explicitly develops self-awareness (Deardorff 2010) so that the student can interrogate his or her own discipline, assumptions and abilities and develop intra-cultural competence. Therefore, although the IBP-R pedagogy is characterised by explicit teaching of generic writing, language, citation and presentation skills, the programme focuses on helping students to unpack the conventions of their disciplines and become 'ethnographers or researchers' (Paltridge 2003) of their disciplines.

This is in line with work undertaken by disciplinary researchers such as Downey *et al.* (2006:107-110), who defined the "globally competent" engineer as someone who has the "knowledge, ability, and predisposition to work effectively with people

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PART FIVE • *SUPERVISION ACROSS CULTURES*

who define problems differently than they do". These 'differences' in thinking are defined very broadly by Downey *et al*. (2006) and the IBP-R. Consequently, IBP-R students are assisted in exploring differences and similarities between people of the same disciplines with varying experience, people of related disciplines, other disciplines, lay people versus academics, and so on. The combination of socio-linguistic knowledge and self-awareness assists students in the development of internal outcomes (including flexibility, adaptability, an ethnorelative perspective and empathy) and external outcomes (effective and appropriate communication in an intercultural situation) (Deardorff 2010:88-89).

Rather than placing the local student in the position of the 'knower' and the international student as the 'outsider', the aim is for the international student to develop confidence and skills in a collegial environment with other international students. The explicit development of skills and knowledge in a supportive environment allows the international student to model positive intercultural attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity and discovery) (Deardorff 2010:87) in their interactions with their supervisors and colleagues.

Although many international students have significant language and research challenges, and require systematic language and learning support, others may have few if any language issues and may even be widely published pre-enrolment at the university. Despite the variety of language needs and skill levels, all benefit from the development of intercultural competency in the programme as attested to in positive Student Experience of Learning and Teaching (SELT) surveys where the programme has received a consistent 90% or higher agreement on all measures over its 20 years of existence, and enthusiastic feedback from participants and their supervisors. Because of the variety of language needs and skill levels, the programme includes an initial diagnostic exercise, following which advice is given to students as to recommended participation options (full or negotiated participation) and the specific workshops which would best meet their individual needs. The diagnostic exercise and individualisation of advice and of the programme have developed as a result of student and supervisor requests for explicit advice in open-ended questions in student evaluations of the course and has increasingly been formalised in the formal candidature milestones as part of the movement towards a more structured PhD programme within Australian universities.

Full participation in the IBP-R means that, in the first semester of their candidature, each student attends all twelve of the broadly disciplinary seminars which focus on writing, presentation and intercultural communication skills, and at least eight out of the fifteen workshops that focus on generic research communication skills,

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CHAPTER 12 • A COORDINATED FRAMEWORK

language issues and candidature management. Each student also completes two drafts of the research proposal, receiving formal feedback from their supervisors and IBP-R lecturers, and does a practice run of the research proposal presentation, to be delivered at the six-month point in their home discipline. Negotiated participation means that the student attends just those seminars and workshops pertinent to their needs and completes one draft research proposal with feedback from the supervisor and IBP-R lecturer.

One of the explicit 'ethnographic' skills taught in the IBP-R is that of genre analysis, namely identifying the "routine and formulaic nature" of written and spoken texts including their audience, structure, content and language features (Fairclough 1995:86). IBP-R participants are provided with ethnographic tools such as the use of disciplinary and topic-specific corpora (large bodies of text) and concordancers (electronic search tools) in order to explore disciplinary language in its context. This helps them to understand the similarities and, conversely, the huge variety, between texts, both within and across disciplines.

As Deardorff (2010) notes, the development of intercultural competence is a process which requires explicit attention and ongoing development. The IBP-R is a first step in the process towards empowering international students as competent global scholars. On completion of the IBP-R, intercultural competency is further enhanced in structured peer interactions, such as the disciplinary thesis writing groups.

Thesis writing groups

Thesis writing groups can play an important role in facilitating international students' learning, not only in relation to English language skills, but also in relation to negotiating the academic culture in which they find themselves operating. The difficulties for English as an Additional Language (EAL) students of undertaking doctoral study and research publication in English are well documented (see, for example, Bitchener & Basturkmen 2006; Hirvela & Belcher 2001; Wang & Li 2008). Alongside this, much of the extant research indicates that universities are often not good at integrating local and international doctoral students (Cotterall 2011; Robinson-Pant 2009; Trice 2005). Writing groups can be used to respond to both of these concerns, while simultaneously influencing the formation of scholarly identities, creating communities of practice and developing collaborative research cultures (Aitchison & Lee 2006; Boud & Lee 2005; Parker 2009).

Writing groups create authentic situations for students to work and learn together. International doctoral candidates can employ the intercultural skills learnt in the IBP-R in their research community; local students in these groups also have opportunities

to develop their intercultural competency. By working together for mutual benefit, genuine collegial relationships develop, dissolving the boundaries of cultural difference and preparing individuals for careers in an internationalised, globalised academy; indeed, research on this topic indicates that cultural and disciplinary diversity can be integral to the success of thesis writing groups (Bastalich 2011; Cuthbert, Spark & Burke 2009; Guerin *et al*. 2012). In this section, the content covered in the thesis writing groups is outlined, then we reflect on how writing groups can enhance intercultural competency for both international and local doctoral students.

Structure of thesis writing groups

Periodically an email invitation is circulated to all research students, offering to help set up thesis writing groups. Interested students are asked to gather a group of peers (usually 8-12) and arrange a time and place to meet. These groups are intended to be student driven, with input from the Researcher Education team in only the first five sessions, becoming self-managing after that.

- **Session 1: Thinking ahead to the final product.** The first session of the writing group invites research students to consider the final thesis. Discussion focuses on the overall structure of the thesis, identifying differences between traditional format and theses by publication as relevant, as well as exploring issues related to formatting requirements and options.

- **Session 2: Effective writing strategies.** This workshop explores writing strategies to enhance coherence and cohesion at paragraph and sentence level. These exercises focus on topic sentences, paragraph and sentence structure, and ways to locate the reader in the context to ensure clear communication of ideas. Students use each other's writing for the exercises, thus taking the first steps towards sharing their writing and receiving feedback from peers (Aitchison & Lee 2006; Boud & Lee 2005).

- **Session 3: Introductions and conclusions.** This session draws participants' attention to three levels of introductions: to the whole thesis; to chapters or sections; and introductory or topic sentences at the paragraph level. The structure of introductions is examined, and the importance of matching introductions and conclusions is emphasised.

- **Session 4: Argument and voice.** The fourth session focuses on constructing persuasive arguments and common logical errors that can disrupt effective argumentation. It also explores notions of authorial voice, an issue that is generally underexplored in doctoral education, but which new research is suggesting might be a 'threshold concept' for many research students (Guerin & Green 2012).

- **Session 5: Providing feedback on writing by our peers.** In this session one or two group members submit current work for peer critique. Participants are invited to

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CHAPTER 12 • A COORDINATED FRAMEWORK

express opinions about what they admire and to offer suggestions for improvement; the authors are required to listen without interrupting to explain or defend their writing. The feedback is unstructured – participants can raise any issues that occur to them, from comments on structure, grammar and vocabulary, to queries relating to content and methodology, through to more general research topics such as software programs or publication procedures.

After this, the sessions are led by the students themselves. A programme is planned in advance so that participants know when to submit their writing for critique. Anyone unable to attend in person must provide written comments in advance.

Benefits in learning intercultural competency: Writing skills

As expected, thesis writing groups provide valuable opportunities for EAL students to develop their writing skills in English. Although many may be experienced writers in other languages, the conventions of academic writing in English pose new challenges (Hirvela & Belcher 2001). Group discussions are used to make disciplinary conventions explicit, articulate reasons for choices, and offer suitable alternatives. In airing a range of opinions, participants become aware of the acceptable possibilities available to them, continuing the ethnographic investigations of their discipline introduced in the IBP-R. Through ongoing peer critique, individuals receive constructive feedback on their writing during candidature, providing the extended time required for developing language skills at this high level.

It is interesting from the point of view of intercultural competency that this learning is a two-way process (Guerin *et al*. 2012). Unlike most local students, many EAL doctoral students have attended formal English lessons for extensive periods and possess a good understanding of grammar and the language to discuss it; this means they can articulate concepts of which local students sometimes have only shadowy knowledge. Conversely, local students begin to appreciate how to communicate effectively with linguistically and disciplinarily diverse readers, learning where misunderstanding can occur. Comprehending issues relating to language use is crucial in the contemporary academic world, where researchers hail from all corners of the globe; understanding the degree of academic mobility (Hoffman 2009; Pherali 2011) in the academy is essential for successful dissemination of research.

Benefits in learning intercultural competency: Academic culture

The broad range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds of staff and students at the University of Adelaide provides an ideal site in which to prepare doctoral students for the kind of intercultural interactions they can expect in their academic lives. By working closely together, both local and international students can start to appreciate the significance of different attitudes and behaviours created by cultural

diversity, and can be encouraged in writing groups to reflect on this diversity from an ethnographic perspective.

One important issue is the amount of 'air time' different members of the group may have in general discussions. Local students, confident and experienced at interacting in this particular academic environment, may tend to dominate the conversations; conversely, EAL speakers can feel that their voices are silenced (Guerin *et al.* 2012). It is also possible for EAL students to feel that their contributions are misunderstood or ignored – as we know, Australian universities are not always receptive to culturally different forms of knowledge (Singh & Meng 2011).

The skills of peer review are often new to both local and international doctoral candidates, and generally require explicit preparation and practice in a safe environment. Local and international students alike describe the learning curve of discovering the appropriate forms of critique and feedback in academic circles (Guerin *et al.* 2012). Some find it extremely uncomfortable to openly air criticism of another's work. Thesis writing groups can thus provide opportunities to learn to participate in peer review with sympathetic and like-minded colleagues. For those who are confident about operating in this way, the recognition that this is a culturally inflected aspect of academic life can encourage awareness of the importance of tact and compassion when offering feedback.

Cultural – and also disciplinary – diversity in thesis writing groups allows participants to discover the range of norms in different academic contexts and develop the skills required to negotiate those areas competently with a 'worldly' way of thinking encouraged by an ethnographic approach to their cultural context. Attitudes, knowledge and skills related to intercultural competency are all potentially enhanced in this environment, preparing doctoral students for careers as competent global scholars in the 'borderless university'.

The Exploring Supervision Programme

Background

For the best part of the last two decades, in keeping with the Australian university sector's increasing impetus towards internationalisation, cross-cultural training programmes have been prominent on the agendas of the country's higher education institutions. At the University of Adelaide, for example, the 'Exploring Supervision' programme – a series of three half-day workshops for research degree supervisors – has been running since 2001. For the first six years of the programme's existence, one full four-hour session was devoted entirely to international and cross-cultural

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CHAPTER 12 • A COORDINATED FRAMEWORK

issues. Called 'Working with International PhD students', this session ran through a range of policy and procedural issues related to international research students, worked through some supervisory case studies, summarised some cross-cultural communication theory (see, for example, Scollon & Scollon 2001) and suggested some rules of thumb for coping with cross-cultural situations in a research and communication context (as per Ting-Toomey & Chung 2005).

While we are not suggesting there was anything intrinsically wrong with that workshop, it became clear to us by 2007 that it was already somewhat out-dated, and that the internationalised, multicultural university had outgrown it. No longer could the focus be exclusively on the international, EAL research student, constructed as dealing with an Anglo supervisor; just as challenging were the problems faced by international supervisors, as they dealt with students, colleagues and research administrators with an array of linguistic and cultural backgrounds – a changing demographic by no means limited to the University of Adelaide (see, for example, Green & Myatt 2011; Jiang *et al*. 2010). At the same time, working cross-culturally was no longer considered unusual, but had rather become a routine, day-to-day matter; the potted anthropology that we had dispensed in the 'Working with International PhD students' workshop was no longer novel, but rather had become the conventional wisdom of most working supervisors. In addition, the majority of supervisors clearly felt that they had achieved an effective cosmopolitanism, in the sense of Sanderson (2008), in respect of their research students' working environment, with no cultural divides in the workplace once students had been settled in properly. The supervisors' sense of their own affirming cross-cultural experience left our original workshop looking like a very tired and passé offering indeed.

As a result we radically restructured the workshop, taking the spotlight away from cross-cultural research interactions *per se*, and giving it the simple, brief title 'People', promoting it as exploring "higher degree supervision from a 'people' perspective, asking supervisors to respond to the key interpersonal challenges that supervision presents, and addressing a range of communicative, social and cultural issues". The workshop now functions interactively, with an emphasis on small-group discussion, aiming to build from the collegially mediated experiences of our participant supervisors a systematic method for understanding the nature of person-to-person interaction, as grounded in sets of particular behavioural, conceptual and interpretational conventions. In other words, we try to facilitate supervisors' insights as ethnographers of their own research environments. Discussion of cross-cultural factors is designed to emerge naturally from these ethnographic considerations; at the same time, in this dialogic setting, transnational cross-cultural issues emerge

side-by-side with other parameters of diversity: gender and sexuality, age, indigeneity and ethnicity, class, sub-cultural affiliation, ideology, and so on. Indeed, these parameters often vie with the cross-cultural dimensions in their perceived relevance to and influence research degree supervision.

Collaborative critique

To achieve this ethnographic attitude we have developed a teaching approach that we are calling 'collaborative critique' — an approach that is collaborative in that participants work together to create meaning, and their combined efforts are directed at critically assessing and evaluating aspects of their shared environment.[1] Building on the 'reciprocal peer learning' framework for academic development advanced by Boud (1999), and sharing broad affinities with the reflective and experiential approaches to supervisor development espoused by Brew and Peseta (2009), Halse (2011) and Manathunga, Peseta and McCormack (2010), collaborative critique highlights the sharing of personal experience and collegial reflection, but privileges the learning gained from structured environments where critical discussion is embraced. However, while Boud (1999) advocates essentially teacherless collective learning by groups of academics, we continue to maintain a role for a facilitator, as someone with the responsibility to feed in data, questions, scenarios, and so on for the group to consider. The facilitator guides the collective direction for discussion and analysis, and challenges and provokes the group to confront uncomfortable issues. Unlike undergraduate versions of peer review, however, we encourage a collaborative, critical response to the materials under discussion.

We are not attempting to teach specific content; rather, the aim is to encourage supervisors to engage in a collegial critique of their own experiences, assumptions, actions, values and behaviours in their supervisory roles and relationships generally, and particularly in relation to cultural diversity. We provide some hypothesised circumstances, and together the workshop participants explore their responses to the situations. Given that our aim is to promote understanding of research cultures in an environment strongly influenced by high levels of academic mobility, and by increasing engagement in multi-disciplinary enquiry, diversity in attitudes and experiences within the group is welcomed. By responding to the scenarios presented and pooling their individual understandings and experiences, participants work together to formulate auto-ethnographies of their own workplaces (Anderson 2006).

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1   A more detailed description of this pedagogical approach can be found in Guerin and Green (2013).

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CHAPTER 12 • A COORDINATED FRAMEWORK

There are no 'correct answers' here; instead, the purpose is to examine the complexity surrounding issues such as multiculturalism in the workplace and develop more nuanced understandings of participants' contexts. The process of collaborative critique allows participants to consider the issues in relation to their own specific disciplinary contexts, which may vary significantly from other members of their workshop group. Through explanation and debate they construct strategies to negotiate this terrain, drawing on their own and each other's experiences to understand events, identifying issues that require attention, and establishing their own set of values and acceptable interpersonal behaviours. Schools and disciplines within a single university will probably always have their own particular research cultures, and we are not suggesting that collaborative critique seeks to resolve this into a unified, monocultural environment. Nevertheless, there are advantages in arriving at some broadly shared understandings of the basic principles of best practice in supervision, particularly given the increasing focus on interdisciplinary research in the contemporary academy that pushes at the boundaries of disciplinary conventions.

Many academics in this transnationally mobile community are reluctant to discuss problems regarding intercultural relations, preferring to present a smooth surface of cosmopolitan success to the rest of the academic community, apparently adopting the 'happiness' discourse critiqued by Ahmed (2012). Elsewhere we have examined the significance of this attitude in relation to notions of an imagined community of the global discipline, where it is assumed that shared disciplinary values and beliefs somehow confer an unproblematically cosmopolitan set of sociocultural beliefs and behaviours on members of that discipline (Guerin & Green forthcoming). While we laud the success of academics to work harmoniously together, we are concerned that this is sometimes at the cost of ignoring – even silencing – inconvenient differences rather than a celebration of diversity (Ahmed 2012). Sometimes workshop participants can find the discussions of cultural difference uncomfortable and unsettling. A major challenge for our 'People' workshop is to create a learning space in which participants are free to explore the meanings of a culturally and disciplinarily diverse population in their research environment in order to develop appropriate intercultural competency in supervisory practices (Bennett & Bennett 2004; Scollon & Scollon 2001).

The ethnography of supervision that is built through collaborative critique explores the tensions between disciplinary homogeneity and cultural diversity, and between learnt cultural behaviours and individual personalities in the research supervision relationship. Through this discovery process, supervisors are able to develop more nuanced strategies for negotiating effective relationships with a diverse range of

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PART FIVE • SUPERVISION ACROSS CULTURES

students. Thus far this approach has been positively received by the participants in the Programme and workshops on the whole, as attested to in formal programme evaluations and other forms of participant feedback. However, we will refine the Programme on an ongoing basis to ensure that it continues to encourage and support supervisors in crossing boundaries in their supervision practices.

CONCLUSION

Our programmes work across all levels of researcher education to provide a cohesive, coordinated framework for developing intercultural competency. A full semester course (the IBP-R) provides explicit opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills of intercultural competency for doctoral candidates new to the University of Adelaide. These competencies are then consolidated in thesis writing groups where international and local doctoral candidates work together, forming strong collegial relationships and promoting first-hand understanding of cultural (and disciplinary) diversity. Alongside this, the supervisor development programme (ESP) encourages academic staff to critique their own workplace in order to understand the intercultural competencies required in their specific situation. Thus, a systematic approach to developing intercultural competency is provided for the individuals who together make up this research environment marked by increasingly complex border crossings and mobility.

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CHAPTER 12 • A COORDINATED FRAMEWORK

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PART FIVE • SUPERVISION ACROSS CULTURES

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CHAPTER 12 • **A COORDINATED FRAMEWORK**

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