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Bridging Cultural Binaries through Pedagogical Practices

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Bridging Cultural Binaries through Pedagogical Practices to Prepare All Students for Global Citizenship

Abstract

In internationalising the curriculum, the move away from polarising domestic and international students to focus on preparing *all* students for global citizenship is promising. However, the adoption of a cultural framework that values diversity requires more than a semantic shift. Tools that complement and support the curriculum in creating cultural change are critical to achieving an internationalised university curricula.

This paper focuses on pedagogy, framed by cultural theory that challenges static notions of cultural identity, to encourage the development of intercultural competence as a key to shaping global citizens.

INTRODUCTION

The economic significance of international education is well known. In Australia, for example, two decades of active recruitment of international students has resulted in education being the third largest source of export revenue (Trounson & Kerr, 2010), or more recently, the fourth largest export after iron, coal and gold (Maslen, 2012). This has led to a student composition consisting of 25 per cent of international students (Barthel, 2011). The resulting highly diverse student cohort creates the second most internationalised higher education system in the world (Fozdar & Volet, 2010) within an already complex multicultural Australia. This diversity, if well harnessed, is a gold mine for building intercultural competence which is defined as 'a dynamic, ongoing, interactive self-reflective learning process that transforms attitudes, skills and knowledge for effective and appropriate communication and interaction across cultures' (Freeman et al., 2009, p. 13).

There are many advantages that can be gleaned from this gold mine. In the educational context, intercultural groups produce superior work compared to homogenous groups (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Summers & Volet, 2008), as members of diverse groups can learn to generate alternatives and approach problems in multiple ways (Watson, Kumar, and Michaelsen, cited in Summers & Volet, 2008). Intercultural interactions can also develop soft skills that contribute to the students' employability and mobility, given the increasingly mobile and multicultural workforce (Summers & Volet, 2008). In the employment context, intercultural groups can promote positive attitudes by encouraging a perception of equal status and cooperation towards a common goal (Summers & Volet, 2008).

In addition to the above contexts, diverse group interactions also develop students' intercultural competence by creating opportunities for becoming more aware of one's

culture as it is juxtaposed against other cultures. The reflective metacognitive skills gained from understanding one's culture are critical to the development of intercultural competence (Louie, 2005), and are manifest in graduate attributes such as a global perspective, critical thinking and social interaction, all of which are invaluable lifelong skills. The ability to interact interculturally, thus, is key to global citizenship.

Despite the diverse student population and benefits of interacting in such a rich context, there is usually little engagement among the diverse student cohorts (Arkoudis, et al., 2010; Chang, 2008; Harrison & Peacock, 2010). In the Australian context, the lack of interaction between domestic and international students was described as 'one of the most disturbing aspects of the internationalisation of Australian university campuses' (Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 5). More than ten years since that assertion, Leask and Carroll (2011) argue that little has happened to address this issue in the intervening period and assert that 'it is time to develop new and effective approaches and interventions to ensure campus and classroom culture motivates and rewards interaction across cultures for all students' (p. 657).

This paper responds to these concerns by questioning how we can better hone our delivery of educational outcomes to best prepare *all* students as global citizens who are interculturally competent. It posits that despite policies of inclusion, 'curriculum and pedagogic assumptions still view cultural groups in rather static or homogenised frames' (Meerwald, 2000), and proposes some principles for pedagogical practices that are informed by a theoretical framework to help shift those views. The need for pedagogy that is informed by cultural theory is critical to frame how we can rethink internationalisation of higher education towards innovation and curriculum reform (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2010; Leask, 2008).

BRIDGING THE BINARIES

Defining culture as 'a set of shared perceptions about beliefs, values and norms which affects the behaviours of a relatively large group of people' (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 126) implies its evolving and fluid nature, as captured by Freeman et al.'s (2009, p. 13) notion of intercultural competence. To refine this definition, the adoption of the concept of liminality further disrupts the static view of culture (Bhabha, 1994; Meerwald, 2002). Meerwald (2001) describes the liminal space as an in-between space one 'where people juggle multiple histories, positions and politics, [which may be incompatible, in sites that are] beyond notions of nation states, geographical boundaries and political powers' (pp. 388-389).

The mapping of geographical space into political nations has created the idea that cultural identity is tied to a specific location (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Liminality annuls the intermarriage between identity and space, and bridges the binaries to propose that one can be multiply positioned culturally to be Australian, Chinese or Malaysian all at once or at different times according to contexts (Meerwald, 2001). Therefore, this 'relatively large group of people' (Scollon & Scollon, 1995) may not necessarily share a geographical history or nationality despite their shared perceptions or behavior, on the one hand, and on the other, those who have similar geographical roots or nationality or family backgrounds may not have shared beliefs or behaviour. The liminal concept can thus be used to blur the space between the culturally assigned position of 'international' or 'domestic'. It is an imagined cultural space where the self and other are collapsed to create a moment of double-consciousness (Yancy, 2010). This moment is where one adopts another position to critique the tacit cultural positions one holds (Meerwald, 2010) as we confront our perceptions of the 'other'.

This conceptual framework is helpful to articulate a more sophisticated notion of culture

in the complex intercultural context where one's understanding of one's own culture may be challenged. Intercultural competence 'ultimately means understanding the ways that cultural differences, power, and privilege create different lived experiences for people in a variety of geographic and political systems' (Sample, 2013, p. 2), and this requires the confidence to question one's own position first. While diversity can raise our awareness of our own culture (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003), on the one hand, McLaughlin and Liddicoat (2005) argue that we need to learn about our own culture first before we can learn about other cultures. Hence, this requires teaching staff to have the skills to help students develop an 'awareness of self in relation to the "other"' (Killick, 2003, p. 3). Additionally, if we want students to develop intercultural competence, it is absolutely essential that their teachers are aware of the impact of culture on their own behaviour (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Louie (2005) states that competence is 'possibly best attained when the teacher is also engaged in critically examining his/her own culture' (p. 18) and, I add, in accordance with the liminal framework above. That teacher can then be a key agent in the process of internationalisation that transforms the individual's global perspectives (Harrison & Peacock, 2010).

This cultural awareness may help staff question the value of 'brief, straightforward [generalised] information' (Louie, 2005, p. 17) about their student cohort which is what one would tend to do if one has a fixed and static understanding of culture. As Louie (2005) shows, generalised cultural knowledge produces an oversimplified, stereotypical representation of students that erases their individuality, specific skills and needs. More importantly, assumptions based on such 'facts' may prove to be inaccurate for some students. For example, Hofstede (2001) states that students from China are more inclined to work together due to their collectivist culture. However, Osmond and Roed (2010) found that some Chinese students are not familiar with

group work, nor do they have the skills for negotiating group dynamics.

It can be said that generalised notions of student groups have a double impact. First, it can marginalise international students according to assumptions made about them while migrant students, who look like international students, may be mistakenly 'over-serviced'. On the other hand, it privileges international students over others which may then create resentment towards the 'other' in a dualistic '"them-and-us' mindset" (Spiro & Henderson, 2007). In both instances, student learning needs become measured according to ethnic identity or nationality instead of other factors that impact on learning and teaching. International students become viewed as only requiring upskilling while other students who need assistance are overlooked. Such generalisations promote a deficit view and negative staff dispositions towards international students. Trahar (2010), citing Otten, states that 'tolerance to otherness and different styles can dwindle quickly when teaching and learning demand more time, energy and patience' (p. 143). Generalised perceptions do not reduce such deeply entrenched attitudes in staff. Chang (2008) warns against the risks of stereotyping and argues that student group heterogeneity needs to be exposed. This exposure will benefit *all* students.

Liminality helps to explore the notion that the cultural space in the classroom context is uncertain and shifting. Apart from ethnicity and country of origin, other sociopolitical factors such as gender, socioeconomic class, age, education, religion, or political upbringing influence one's cultural makeup. Pedagogy that includes group work encouraging a process of negotiation is needed to adapt to a context of constant flux. Dynamic beings in shifting spaces do not fit neatly into generalised packages. Instead, a series of scaffolded interactive activities can be used to lead to a conducive setting for questioning cultural assumptions made about the perceived self and others. In this

shared space, participants may be coaxed to negotiate barriers towards a better awareness and understanding of who they are in relation to others – between student and student, and student and staff. It is hoped that as participants begin to 'doubt the superiority of their own cultural values' (Selby, 2008, p. 6), they will be more willing to find a common ground to explore the heterogeneous cultural groups to accept others' knowledges and ways of learning, which is a valued outcome of intercultural interactions.

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

The liminal configuration of culture calls for a reassessment of best practice or 'structural change' (Fozdar & Volet, 2010) or 'more inventive approaches . . . in now more multicultural classrooms' (Marginson and Eijkman, cited in Chang, 2008). Pedagogical practices should therefore encourage ways of learning about the self and others that factor in flux and fluidity. Thus, this paper focuses more on pedagogy than the actual content of the curriculum. As Chang (2008) argues, 'curriculum is as much about the process as it is about the content of the subject.'

The focus on pedagogy also has the benefit of addressing staff reluctance to internationalise the curriculum. A pedagogical approach to internationalising the curriculum enables staff to 'internationalise' any unit at any level in any course, including 'universal' disciplines and courses that are heavily prescribed by professional bodies. It helps busy staff and those who struggle with knowing *how* to internationalise their curriculum, as many will find that they are already incorporating the pedagogical principles in their teaching. A pedagogical focus to encourage research into how pedagogy can be further refined is thus timely to complement research that focuses on using international material in unit content (Chang, 2008), or that which examines the role of disciplines in the internationalisation of the curriculum (Agnew, 2012).

The focus on pedagogy is also critical as, without intervention, the most obvious resource for internationalising the curriculum, the diverse student body, is the 'least utilised' (Jones & Killick, 2007, p. 113) due to the lack of intercultural interaction. Students tend to choose for group work members who are most familiar or culturally similar to themselves (Chang, 2008). Chang (2008) states that in internationalising the curriculum, it is important to recognise that the diverse student cohort is a rich source of learning. However, diversity within the higher education context is a key resource only if there is positive proactive engagement (Le Roux, cited in Harrison & Peacock, 2010). As Fozdar and Volet (2012) assert, 'specific interventions may be appropriate [for] positive intercultural encounters' (p. 376).

PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES

The principal pedagogical method is to work with the content in an existing unit, to minimise change to the curriculum. Thus, a unit is examined to identify elements that lend themselves to interactivity. Content that can be used for group work is identified to set up activities within a framework that encourages group members to interact positively as they negotiate cultural differences and gain insights from different perspectives. These activities may follow a continuum that begins with ice-breakers (Arkoudis, et al., 2010; Freeman, et al., 2009), especially those that generate laughter (an area that warrants further research – see Hill & Fitzgerald, 2002; Reimann, 2010), which is conducive to more positive intercultural group formations (Arkoudis, et al., 2010; Fozdar & Volet, 2010). This should then be followed by critical group work that encourages multiple perspectives (Arkoudis, et al., 2010) and the adoption of opposing positions towards negotiated meanings (Antal & Friedman, 2008; Arkoudis, et al., 2010).

Here are some key principles that can be explored in a pedagogical approach which aims to engage students interculturally.

Rapport

The use of culturally-mixed groups is necessary to facilitate students building rapport. However, Volet and Ang (cited in Trahar, 2010) found that students in multicultural tertiary settings are reluctant to move out of their comfort zones to interact with each other, possibly due to the fear of being perceived as rejecting one's cultural group (Fozdar & Volet, 2010). Fozdar and Volet (2012) also found that although students acknowledged the advantages for learning associated with culturally-mixed group work, pragmatically they preferred sameness over difference, as it enabled them to work more 'easily' as group members are already on the 'same page' (Fozdar & Volet, 2012, p. 374). These students viewed cultural difference as an additional layer of difficulties presented in the already mammoth task of working together. Otten's (2003) study further found that students preferred homogenous groups or working alone to avoid the struggles that come with different languages and learning styles. This may be associated with a commonly held perception that culturally-mixed group work leads to lower grades (Barron, 2006; Ledwith & Seymour, 2001), although this is disputed by De Vita (2002; in Summers & Volet, 2008) who reported that groups consisting of three to four various nationalities attained higher marks in certain assignments when compared to homogenous groups. These higher attainments come through longer-term assessments that have enabled such culturally-mixed groups to interact more competently to glean the benefits of such intellectual exchanges (see Watson, Kumar, and Michaelsen, cited in Summers & Volet, 2008).

Thus, as students generally do not choose to mix outside their own groups, teachers need to use intentionally culturally-mixed group work to facilitate students' intercultural

interactions that may lead to the development of their intercultural competence (Fozdar & Volet, 2010; Summers & Volet, 2008). Group membership should be established according to different nationalities. This may facilitate the realisation that sameness and difference are not necessarily tied to nationality but are informed by other factors as defined by the notion of culture in this paper. Although this is how group membership will be determined, for the purposes of our discussion, the term 'culturally-mixed' will be used.

Antal and Friedman (2008) suggest that these culturally-mixed groups can be self-selected for optimal intercultural learning as self-selection provides psychological security. The compulsory use of culturally-mixed groups places students on a 'level playing field' (Fozdar & Volet, 2012, p. 374) so that students do not feel disadvantaged (see Turner, 2009). Further, teachers need to be informed of the benefits of such intercultural mixing, as highlighted by Watson, Kumar, and Michaelsen (cited in Summers & Volet, 2008) and Chang and Astin (cited in Otten, 2003) so that these learning gains can be conveyed explicitly to students.

Rapport is built through the early introduction of culturally-mixed groups. The use of mixed groups in first-year units, for example, cements intercultural interactions into the student's experience as 'past intercultural experience begets future intercultural collaboration' (Summers & Volet, 2008, p. 367) in later years if the interactions are successful or perceived to be so by the students. Further, Summers and Volet (2008) assert that intervention in the early years at university are more critical for the development of skills and willingness to engage in intercultural group work.

In addition to the rapport developed among students, the rapport between teacher and student is equally important in providing the scaffolding needed to develop confidence

in the students for taking risks. Fozdar and Volet (2010) argue that confidence trumps competence in students' ability to navigate intercultural interactions successfully. It is therefore essential that teachers are provided with cultural training so that they develop the 'critical cultural awareness' (Fozdar & Volet, 2010, p. 4) necessary to foster a safe environment that encourages *risky behavior* (see below) in socialising culturally. Otten (2003) explains that this scaffolded and safe setting is crucial to minimise negative outcomes in culturally-mixed group work. It is thus necessary for staff to be well supported and professionally developed to encourage students to interact more sophisticatedly and confidently in intercultural settings (Turner, 2009).

Risks

One critical aim in promoting intercultural competence pedagogically, once a safe and scaffolded context has been established, is to engineer learning contexts that challenge students to take risks, so that they 'act and think outside their comfort zone' (Thom, 2010, p. 156).

The use of a collaborative learning experience is critical to this process (Chang, 2008) as participants have to engage and negotiate, not simply meet to put their individual independently composed parts together in their assigned task, as in cooperative group work. Instead, collaboration challenges participants to be risk-takers, as engagement and negotiation can be confronting and 'psychologically intense' (Paige, cited in Freeman, et al., 2009). Further, collaborative group work forces members to consider different ideas, attitudes and values. Thinking from multiple and opposing perspectives will challenge students' tacit assumptions and attitudes (for an example of how this may be incorporated into the group task, see Antal & Friedman, 2008), and staff need to consider how these attributes can be assessed.

The practice of negotiation can be used to structure the collaborative work, to encourage a deeper level of cultural critique. Borrowing from Antal and Friedman (2008), 'negotiation' in the sense of 'conferring with others so as to arrive at the settlement of some matter' (p. 364) considers the unique and complex contexts that culturally-mixed group work presents. The approach encourages students to become aware of how one thinks and acts, how this many differ from others, as well as to experiment with alternatives. Antal and Friedman (2008) state that 'trying out new ways of seeing and doing things feels risky' (p. 365). A safe environment and a longer period of interaction within the same group, as elaborated earlier, are thus helpful. Group membership should remain consistent for as many group tasks as possible to enable members to build trust. This may confirm Watson, Kumar, and Michaelsen's study (cited in Summers & Volet, 2008) that longer-term groups gain better academic results.

The process of negotiation also encourages one to consider alternative ways of finding solutions or how approaches can be modified for different contexts (Chang, 2008). Such a critical approach to negotiating one's cultural reality encourages a reflective process to expose one's preferred way of problem-solving and how one's preference may be informed by one's attitudes and perceptions. For this to work effectively, staff need to be prepared to be challenged in their own awareness of processes and to be willing to unlearn those that do not foster positive intercultural mixing (Antal & Friedman, 2008). One such example is the generalised notions of student groups according to their cultural backgrounds, as discussed earlier. Being sensitive to the heterogeneity within culturally-mixed groups will enable staff to be reminded that their students are complex beings with different learning styles and needs. Such cultural sensitivity will encourage the development of a wider repertoire of pedagogical tools in teacher training that will enable staff to reach and engage their students more effectively (Otten, 2003). This in itself will ensure that the learning environment is a

safer one to facilitate students in taking risks that lead to positive outcomes. This cultural sensitivity is essential, according to Otten (2003), for staff to hone their pedagogic skills.

<u>Reflection</u>

Students should be taught how to reflect on their intercultural development as reflexivity helps them to realise their 'multiple locations [which] can open them to the complexities in the lived realities and experiences of others' (Weber, 1998, p. 29). Freeman et al. (2009) cite the importance of self-awareness and reflection for both staff and students. Staff and students need to be provided with opportunities to alter their knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and identities to develop the necessary awareness and confidence (Fozdar & Volet, 2010). The process will help to develop their metacultural awareness, or awareness of one's culture (Louie, 2005). Louie (2005) argues metacultural awareness is the best method for successful culture work as 'it is one's attitude and empathy towards the whole idea of cultural difference that matters' (p. 17).

The ability to compare and reflect on cultural perspectives (Leask, cited in Harrison & Peacock, 2010) is the platform to help participants unpack the 'complex nature of perception and the rich web of relationships that exist and defy simple categorisation and understanding' (Harrison & Peacock, 2010, p. 129). This ability is enhanced when staff and students are in a diverse context as it becomes more apparent that there is no clear frame of reference for cultural generalisations (Antal & Friedman, 2008). Harrison and Peacock (2010), however, noted that domestic students find it hard to develop metacultural awareness. Being part of the privileged majority culture blinds them to their own culture until they are confronted by difference (Hammer, et al., 2003). Encouraging *all* students to reflect on their intercultural experience will heighten

their cultural awareness. Sample (2013) asserts that without reflection, intercultural experience alone is insufficient and has short-term value.

A simple way to encourage reflection is to ask students to write reflectively and critically about how their awareness of cultural difference has grown through guided questions that focus on considerations of their own and others' cultural identity (Antal & Friedman, 2008), their understanding of how intercultural factors impact on their interactions, and how their skills have developed to enable them to competently and confidently negotiate culturally-mixed contexts (Fozdar & Volet, 2010). It is useful for students to also reflect on the barriers that have hindered their intercultural development (Antal & Friedman, 2008). Thinking critically about a scenario from an intercultural perspective, for example, can be used as a supervised assessment, where students write a summative critical reflection on the group process, their interactions and whether they incorporated and negotiated multiple perspectives as a group (Arkoudis, et al., 2010). Staff can be supported (2010) in how these tasks can be assessed through marking guides. Other staff may prefer not to include these reflective pieces in the formal assessment or may choose to encourage reflections through blogs or journals. Kaufman (2013) outlines an adaptable writing exercise for teaching reflexivity that can be implemented as a single lesson.

The act of reflection is critical to the students' rearticulation as global citizens. As participants become open to negotiating their cultural interpretations or assumptions, they may begin to see themselves as 'works-in-progress' (Trinh, 1991), just as the development of intercultural competence is a 'continuous cycle in which new challenges must constantly be overcome' (Freeman, et al., 2009, p. 14). The end goal is the idea of the self and one's culture as a progressive or on-going work, that is, that one has not 'arrived' but is open to rearticulate a different position according to the

different contexts that one experiences (Meerwald, 2001). In being open to the adoption of different positions and ideas, one may then be encouraged to critique the taken-for-granted cultural attitudes and practices that we absorb unquestioningly (Anzaldúa, 1987). It may also mean that one is more prepared to adapt and to adopt multiple and more global perspectives as one becomes aware of one's engrained way of thinking or responding to situations (Antal & Friedman, 2008).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper has argued that to better prepare *all* students as citizens who are interculturally competent for the global context, a theoretical framework that promotes a fluid notion of culture is necessary. A liminal position for negotiating cultural difference echoes Freeman et al.'s (2009) definition of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is dynamic and ongoing because the participants themselves are not static but works-in-progress.

In addition to this conceptualization of culture, a pedagogy that reflects cultural fluidity and heterogeneity is critical. The process of negotiation as articulated in this paper activates this cultural framework as the act of conferring interactively with others embraces flux and fluidity. Scaffolding in the early stages of group work helps students and staff build rapport to provide a secure setting for risk-taking in confronting and challenging their own positions while considering the perspectives of others towards a more successful outcome for the negotiations that take place. Intercultural competence is a self-reflective learning process but for it to be so, participants must be encouraged to reflect on their existing shifting cultural positions and, in so doing, become exposed to their preconceived perceptions of the self and others. With this reflective awareness of the array of factors contributing to sameness and difference in that liminal shared space, the students may then engage more deeply towards the transformative

definition of intercultural competence this paper prescribes which includes a sustainable change in attitudes, skills and knowledge. The skills developed will equip students to negotiate these dynamic and changing cultural spaces, to operate effectively in such arenas to increase their global employability and mobility. A pedagogical focus within a liminal theoretical framework is thus timely to complement other work towards the development of all students' intercultural competence.

It is worth commenting, however, that though teaching staff all know how to use interactive group tasks, its use for developing intercultural competence seems considerably challenging (Turner, 2009). The structures and institutional culture necessary for promoting inclusivity may be still lacking (Turner, 2009). Institutional systemic change is thus critical to provide support to staff with a suitable environment for developing appropriate skills and knowledge that move students beyond short-term tokenistic experiences to lasting and meaningful interaction.

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