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Developing Intercultural Capability in Business Faculty Members and their Students

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COMMON GROUND

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Abstract: Internationalisation at Home, a work-in-progress priority project funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, aims to internationalize the learning and teaching practices of Business higher education through intercultural capacity building of faculty, students, and the curricula. The initial phase of this participatory action research project involved consulting stakeholder groups (business professionals, faculty members, domestic students, and international students) to assess needs for sociocultural competence development in Business classes and workplaces. The integration of the stakeholder-generated critical incident scenarios with an internationally recognised intercultural training resource (the EXCELL Program) led to the design and delivery of a professional development workshop offered to Business faculty members at two Australian universities. Afterwards, senior faculty members established learning circle meetings to support colleagues to adapt workshop resources and embed cultural diversity awareness and intercultural competence development in the Business courses they teach. In this paper, the authors report and discuss the processes and outcomes of the professional development workshop and the learning circle meetings, including the curriculum renovation actions initiated by participating faculty members. We will discuss the project findings to date in the context of preparing university graduates to be effective crosscultural communicators in workplaces and society.

Keywords: Business, Higher Education, Crosscultural Communication, Cultural Competence, Cultural Diversity, Internationalization

E thnic and cultural diversity in Business classes, fuelled by a rapid growth of international student enrolments in recent years, has become the norm in Australian universities. Between the years 1985 and 2006, international student enrolments grew by a factor of 12 in Australian higher education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). In 2010, 28 per cent of higher education students in Australia were from overseas, and over half of these were enrolled in Management and Commerce programs (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011).

Clearly, there are potential benefits of actively using cultural diversity in Business classes to help students expand their world view and prepare them for work in increasingly multicultural and globalized business environments. However, research has suggested that owing to diversity in learning and communication styles, multicultural classes are often challenging for teachers and students alike (Ho, Holmes, & Cooper, 2004). As students often prefer to socialize within their own cultural groups, intercultural learning does not necessarily occur in culturally mixed educational environments (Volet & Ang, 2012). The levels of meaningful social interactions between Australian domestic and international students could be disappointingly low unless faculty members undertake suitable professional development courses that can prepare them

to engage their culturally diverse classes and include intercultural competency development in their teaching and curriculum design (Leask, 2009; Mak, 2010).

In this article, we outline and discuss the processes and outcomes of a work-in-progress project titled "Internationalisation at Home", designed to enhance the capability of Australian university teachers to incorporate intercultural competency development in Business curriculum design and delivery, in order to improve the intercultural capability of both international and home (that is, domestic) students. A two-year priority project funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (now Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching), the Internationalisation at Home Project aims to internationalize the learning and teaching practices of Business higher education through intercultural capacity building of university faculty members. This project builds on the approach and outcomes of two recently completed teaching projects—the Internationalising the Student Experience Project (ISEP) at the University of Canberra as reported in Mak and Kennedy (2012) and a national project on developing intercultural competence in Business students by Freeman and colleagues (2009).

ISEP was devised and piloted as a teaching innovation to improve the intercultural awareness of university instructors and subsequently that of their domestic and international students (Mak & Kennedy, 2012). ISEP outcomes indicated that preparing and supporting instructors in the use of the Alliance Building and Cultural Mapping tools of the EXCELL (Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership) Program outlined by its developers in Mak, Westwood, Barker, and Ishiyama (1998), could provide a base for institutionalized support for embedding intercultural skills development in the curriculum. Mak and Kennedy (2012) reported that seven instructors had adopted at least one EXCELL tool to introduce new culturally responsive practices in nine courses by the end of the first year of the ISEP.

The EXCELL Alliance Building tool aims to build safety in groups and encourage participation and sharing of experiences and observations (Mak et al., 1998). Cultural Validation, an important component of Alliance Building in multicultural groups, is a group facilitation technique that encourages students from diverse backgrounds to explain how certain behaviours are enacted in their original cultures (for example, expressing disagreement), thus acknowledging their individual cultural backgrounds and identities.

The EXCELL Cultural Mapping tool offers a schematic framework for breaking down complex social interactions into more manageable phases (see Mak et al., 1998, p. 35 for an illustration of a Cultural Map). A Cultural Map is a clear and succinct description of one effective and culturally appropriate way of behaving—both verbal and nonverbal—in a social context or a specified social scenario. Cultural maps can also include the social values underlying why certain behaviours are preferred in a particular culture (for example, maintaining eye contact when speaking to one's superior shows respect in the Australian context). Cultural Mapping makes explicit the unwritten social rules for commonly occurring social encounters, so newcomers can be more confident and effective in interacting with cultural others.

Freeman and colleagues' (2009) Australian Learning and Teaching Council project, titled "Embedding the Development of Intercultural Competence in Business Education", advocated a distributed leadership and communities of practice approach in driving sustainable organizational change for embedding the development of intercultural competence conceived as involving knowledge, attitudes, and skills. According to Freeman and colleagues, effective curricular renovation requires strong institutional support and involves program leaders working together with a small community of faculty sharing their understanding of and good practices in incorporating intercultural knowledge, awareness, and skills in their teaching methods and curriculum design.

Relating Stakeholder-generated Critical Incident Scenarios to Generic Competencies

The initial phase of the Internationalisation at Home Project involved consulting stakeholder groups (Business professionals, faculty members, and students) to assess needs for sociocultural competence development in Business classes and workplaces. The consultations aimed to identify challenging intercultural social scenarios (or critical incident scenarios) for use in the design of training materials for a professional development workshop for Business faculty at two Australian universities–University of Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory and Griffith University in Queensland. This project phase involved holding a focus group with six Business industry professionals in Brisbane, Queensland. Three additional focus groups were held in the Faculty of Business and Government in Canberra with nine faculty members, eight domestic students, and 12 international students. Focus group participants were asked to provide and discuss examples of a challenging intercultural social scenario in a classroom or a professional work setting, based on their observations or personal experiences. Facilitators used an audio recording device to capture the focus group discussion, which was subsequently professionally transcribed. Facilitators also took notes of the group discussion, as well as their own observations and reflections post-meeting.

   Detailed analyses of the transcripts of the stakeholders' perceptions of intercultural social challenges are a separate research activity and not part of the scope of the current article. However, preliminary analysis of the stakeholders' group discussion has shown recurrent critical incident scenarios in intercultural social interactions that can largely be addressed by improved cultural knowledge and generic social competencies that underpin effective intercultural communication. The first column in Table 1 lists some of the common scenarios that can be challenging in multicultural classes, especially for international students. One such example is an international student having difficulty understanding domestic students who speak too fast and use colloquialisms. The corresponding entry in the second column of the same table shows a relevant generic social competency–seeking help or information. An international student who is competent (such as through intercultural training) in requesting information from fast-speaking, colloquial-using Australian students, will be more equipped to deal with similar types of challenging scenarios involving seeking help or information in future encounters.

Table 1: Examples of Common Critical Incident Social Scenarios in Multicultural Classes, Listed Against Relevant Social Competencies

Scenarios	Relevant Social Competency
1. International student has problem understanding domestic students who speak too fast and use colloquialisms	Seeking help or information
2. How to engage with culturally different fellow students in class	Making social contact
3. International student trying to speak up in class	Participation in a group
4. Student wants to challenge the teacher about a discriminatory comment made in a class	Expressing disagreement
5. Fellow student asks to see completed essay prior to his submission	Refusing a request
6. Student feels disadvantaged because class discussion/assignments are only focussed on Australian/European examples	Giving feedback

The generic social competencies listed in Table 1 are from the EXCELL (Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership) Sociocultural Competencies Training Program (Mak et al., 1998), components of which were incorporated into the pilot Internationalising the Student Experience Project at the University of Canberra (Mak & Kennedy, 2012) on which the current cross-institutional Internationalisation at Home Project is based. The EXCELL social competencies include three access competencies–seeking help or information, making social contact, and participation in a group, and three negotiation competencies–expressing disagreement, refusing a request, and giving feedback. The access competencies are vital for engagement with diverse cultures, whereas the negotiation competencies are important for dealing with and asserting different views and practices, which are often intensified in the context of intercultural relations. Learning about and practising social competencies can provide students in diverse classrooms with an effective problem-focussed coping strategy in challenging social encounters. As Otten (2003, p. 15) reminds us, "intercultural encounters do not automatically increase the intercultural competence of students". Barker, Hibbins, and Farrelly (2011, p. 61) emphasized that "without engaging in an intercultural learning process, students cannot be expected to gain the competencies to interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds".

It follows that careful attention needs to be given to designing content and processes for Business faculty's professional development on intercultural competency. Clearly, professional development programs need to include real-life examples of intercultural challenges and how they could be addressed by students. Such programs aim to improve faculty members' capability for developing learning activities and designing curriculum that will in turn better prepare their domestic as well as international students for engagement in and beyond their multicultural classrooms.

Workshop on Building Intercultural Competencies and its Evaluation

The integration of the stakeholder-generated critical incident scenarios with an established intercultural training resource–the EXCELL Program–led to the design and delivery of a one-day professional development workshop, known as the Building Intercultural Competencies Workshop offered to Business faculty members at two universities in the current action research project. Workshop design also incorporated the most effective active learning segments of the two-day Curriculum Development course trialled for the Internationalising the Student Experience Project (see Mak & Kennedy, 2012).

The program outline of the Building Intercultural Competencies Workshop began with a statement of its learning goals. First, participating faculty would demonstrate how to use EXCELL tools, including Alliance Building, Cultural Validation and Cultural Mapping, to engage students in the multicultural classroom. Second, faculty members would start to develop an implementation plan about how to embed intercultural competency development in their curricula and classroom practices. The third goal was to form a Business faculty-based Learning Circle in Intercultural Skills to support faculty in the implementation and review of curricular development plans for embedding intercultural competency development. Program contents included segments on the background of the Internationalisation at Home Project, the rationale for cultivating intercultural capability, the relevance of competencies in the classroom and the workplace, EXCELL's history, basis, and process, experiential learning of Alliance Building, Cultural Mapping practice linked to relevant scenarios, its use as a teaching tool, individual faculty members' implementing plan, and the formation of a faculty-based Learning Circle in Intercultural Skills.

Workshop participants were recruited via announcements in Business faculty board meetings, e-mail advertisements, and existing professional networks of faculty members interested in innovative learning and teaching practices. Ten Business faculty members attended the workshop held on the Logan Campus of Griffith University, whereas the University of Canberra

workshop attracted 18 faculty members. Their disciplinary backgrounds included accounting, economics, international business, management studies, and tourism studies. The attendees were mainly tutors, lecturers, and senior lecturers, but also included academic developers in Business education. While the faculty members were mostly Australian-born with many from Anglo-Australian cultural backgrounds, at least 20 per cent incidentally identified themselves to be immigrants born in Asia or Europe in the workshop.

Workshop Ratings

All of the 23 faculty members who stayed for the entire workshop consented to participate in an anonymous and confidential brief evaluation questionnaire at the end of a day-long course. The first section of the survey requested participants to rate various aspects of the workshop and also the workshop overall, on 5-point rating scales, where 1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, and 5 = Excellent.

Table 2: Business Faculty Members' Ratings of the Building Intercultural Competencies Workshop in Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD)

Aspect of Workshop	Griffith University (N = 10)		U of Canberra (N = 13)		Combined (N = 23)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Organisation of workshop	4.20	0.63	4.46	0.52	4.35	0.57
Workshop activities	4.20	0.42	4.38	0.51	4.30	0.47
Course material	4.56	0.53	4.42	0.67	4.48	0.60
Relevance to classroom teaching	4.60	0.52	4.31	0.75	4.42	0.66
Relevance to practicum placements	4.30	0.48	4.25	0.71	4.28	0.57
Value of workshop to your professional work	4.70	0.48	4.36	0.67	4.52	0.60
Degree of enjoyment of the workshop	4.50	0.53	4.31	0.48	4.39	0.50
Overall evaluation of the workshop	4.50	0.53	4.38	0.51	4.43	0.51

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of the Business faculty members' workshop ratings, at each of two locations (with 10 and 13 participants, respectively) and also as a combined sample. All aspects of the workshop attracted favourable mean ratings ranging from 4.20 to 4.70. Workshop participants at each gave positive ratings of the organization of the workshop, workshop activities, course material, relevance to classroom teaching, relevance to practicum placements, value of workshop to their professional work, and degree of enjoyment of the workshop. The overall evaluation of the workshop in the combined sample was clearly positive, with a mean rating of 4.43.

Workshop Learning on Intercultural Competence

The workshop evaluation form included an open-ended question inviting faculty members to identify one learning on intercultural competence that they would take away from the workshop. Eleven respondents commented on increased awareness about diversity and intercultural competence development. These included greater awareness of the diverse cultural backgrounds of colleagues and students (even those they assumed were "Western"), and the importance of patience and sensitivity in intercultural competence development, which would also require lifelong learning. Specifically, three respondents commented on increased awareness of students'

needs for intercultural competence development. There were mentions that internationalization should be for both international and domestic students, and that students would need to build their intercultural skills gradually over the course of their degrees, and of the importance of cultural mapping techniques for students. Another respondent became aware that his/her previous assumption that more colleagues would have already implemented intercultural skills development in the curriculum, was incorrect.

Ten respondents described their workshop learning in terms of practical knowledge and skills. Some respondents mentioned the importance of incorporating icebreaker and experiential activities in classes, use of group discussion/activities (especially peer and cooperative learning) in tutorials, applications of the Cultural Validation and Cultural Mapping tools, and the social competencies of making social contact and giving feedback.

Strategies for Engaging Culturally Diverse Classes

Another open-ended question in the workshop evaluation questionnaire was about one strategy that faculty members intended to apply to engage culturally diverse classes. A number of respondents commented on the importance of encouraging group participation, facilitating social interaction, and creating opportunities for mixed ethnic group work. One respondent highlighted the benefit of early intervention, stating an intention to use "group work with deliberately mixed groups including domestic students …to avoid clustering according to nationalities from the beginning of semester".

Several respondents considered the Cultural Mapping process to be a useful strategy for engaging culturally diverse classes, a tool that they intended to use in their teaching practices and dealing with student issues. Other strategies included the use of Alliance Building activeties, especially early in the semester and in setting the scene for negotiating appropriate and effective learning behaviours.

Additional responses included the suggestion that students and instructors should speak slower and "work harder" to encourage student participation. Others suggested specific teaching methods such as culturally based icebreakers and using music to engage and build alliances among students. Another strategy for intended application was to "demonstrate clearly the relevance of intercultural competency for professional use".

Learning Circle to Facilitate Curricular Changes Incorporating Intercultural Skills

As a follow up to the Building Intercultural Competencies Workshop, the Associate Dean of Education of the Faculty of Business and Government at the University of Canberra (UC) set up a Learning Circle in Intercultural Skills, to support workshop participants and other colleagues to adapt aspects of the workshop for embedding cultural diversity awareness and intercultural competence development in the Business courses they teach. Within six months of the conduct of the professional development workshop, the Associate Dean at UC has held five Learning Circle meetings with a small community of Business faculty members (analogous to Freeman et al. 2009's "community of practice") to (1) support each other in the process of embedding intercultural skills development in the curriculum, and (2) disseminate inclusive teaching practices and intercultural resource development strategies to other interested colleagues who have not had the professional development opportunity. A similar group was established at Griffith University; this group met three times over the same time period.

These Learning Circle meetings have facilitated informal discussions on a range of topics on the cultural mix of students and the Business curriculum. In Canberra, one meeting featured a talk on internationalization in the British context by a visiting academic–the Discipline Lead of Business and Management from the Higher Education Academy of the United Kingdom.

Some of the meetings had a particular focus of discussion, for example, on how to use learning journals and case studies to promote student reflections on their learning of the subject matter, and on learning from multicultural group work in particular. In December 2011, members of the Canberra Learning Circle and other faculty members were invited to present their teaching innovations in a special meeting-a Teaching in a Multicultural Classroom Workshop opened by the Dean of the Faculty. There were five presentations on a range of topics including the use of learning journals, the promotion of intercultural groups in tutorials, using wikis for group work, and dealing with plagiarism.

Overall, the Learning Circle meetings at both universities have proved very useful in promoting an exchange of ideas among colleagues and encouraging faculty to adopt innovative practices in building alliances among students in multicultural classes. The meetings have helped promote discussion on pedagogical issues in Business higher education.

Curricular Changes: Multicultural Group Work in Business Classes

Two members of the Learning Circle in Intercultural Skills at the Faculty of Business and government at UC were inspired by the Building Intercultural Competencies professional development workshop to make some changes to the way they taught courses in accounting and building management. They decided to collaborate and introduce similar changes to these courses in Semester 2, 2011. The accounting courses, particularly at the postgraduate level, had a very high proportion of international students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The building management students were mainly second generation Australians from European backgrounds. Both faculty members used some of the icebreaking activities from the professional development workshop to begin the semester. The accounting students were required to work in culturally mixed groups in the tutorials and were given an assignment topic with an international perspective. They received marks for their group answers in the tutorials and were invited to reflect on their learning experiences in their learning journal, a graded assessment item. In the management course, the assessment task was shifted to incorporate a more international perspective. While the students had time in their tutorials to discuss their learning journals and were expected to submit them, they were not graded.

Instructors' observations suggest that these changes have improved the learning experience for the students involved. The mixed cultural groups have proved successful in promoting class discussion and encouraging students to move out of their own ethnic groups. The Australian academic year finishes at the end of the calendar year so further analysis of the impact of these changes on student experience will be undertaken later in 2012. This will involve the analysis of the learning journals and an end-of-semester survey on students' intercultural and educational experiences, including their perceptions of cultural competence development through participating in the renovated courses. In the second year of the project, this survey will be conducted across a number of courses in the Faculty of Business and Government allowing some comparisons of results between courses. In addition, there is a university-wide survey of student satisfaction covering all courses that will provide further evidence of any outcomes from these changes.

At Griffith University, a small team of faculty members and tutors of an introductory management course worked together to trial the incorporation of EXCELL Alliance Building and Cultural Validation activities in a discussion-based tutorial program with a case study focus. This course is compulsory for Business and Commerce students and is the largest course offering in Griffith University with around 800 student enrolments across two campuses in each semester. Positive student experiences were reflected in high student attendance in the tutorial program and very high ratings by students in the standard end-of-semester course evaluations. In the second year of the project, faculty members will initiate further changes to the curriculum by

adding Cultural Mapping activities. This Griffith student cohort will also be invited to participate in the same end-of-semester survey on students' intercultural experiences as students in Canberra.

Discussion

"Internationalisation at Home" is an action research project aimed at internationalizing the learning and teaching practices of Business higher education and has extended the teaching projects of Mak and Kennedy's (2012) and Freeman and colleagues (2009) in four important ways by the end of the first year. First, we followed best practice in training and development by conducting needs analysis focus groups with key stakeholders in Business higher education-students, faculty, and Business industry professionals. Each group generated critical incident intercultural scenarios that were challenging in the classroom and the workplace.

Second, we designed a professional development workshop for Business faculty members that integrated the stakeholder-generated challenging intercultural scenarios with an existing training resource-the EXCELL framework of Sociocultural Competencies.

Third, we devised learning goals for the professional development course which required participants to (1) demonstrate and reflect on their own learning of intercultural competencies, and (2) explore strategies for embedding intercultural competency development and alliance building in their culturally diverse Business classrooms and curricula. Pleasingly, participating Business faculty demonstrated that they were able to (1) generate more challenging scenarios using each of the six key EXCELL social competencies, and (2) produce an EXCELL Cultural Map for dealing with a scenario that many of their students would find challenging.

Finally, we adapted a participatory action approach by engaging Business faculty in small learning circles or "communities of practice" to apply the learning outcomes from the workshop and to research and evaluate the implementation of relevant teaching strategies. Faculty members and tutors were engaged in peer mentoring in designing and implementing curricular changes, and evaluating their impact on students in culturally diverse classes. Interestingly, many faculty members who participated in stakeholder consultations in the needs analysis phase also attended the subsequent Building Intercultural Competencies Workshop.

Implications for Future Work

At half-way through the Internationalisation at Home Project, it has become evident that this action research project has made dual contributions to knowledge and practice in diversity education. While conducting several stakeholder focus groups has been time consuming, the project leaders are more confident that the resulting professional development workshop materials are grounded in the experience of relevant stakeholders. Further, there are encouraging indications that concentrating on engaging selected faculty members in the various phases of the project is more beneficial than trying to ensure the on-going commitment of large numbers of faculty.

Nevertheless, establishing a common understanding of what internationalization in higher education entails and following through on action plans to embed workshop resources on intercultural competency development in the curricula is challenging for individual faculty and project champions alike. It is emerging that individual follow-up with faculty members beyond learning circle meetings is necessary in terms of peer support and encouraging implementation and review. These lessons will be tested in the next phase of the project which involves building on processes and outcomes achieved while working with Business faculty and extending them to Health faculty across the partner universities.

Professional development in the area of teaching culturally diverse classes and internationalization of the curriculum is exciting and complex (Mak, 2010). Barker, Hibbins, and Farrelly (2011, p. 64) noted that "in order for professional development to (a) meet the actual needs

of academic staff, (b) be accepted by staff as something worthwhile, and (c) lead to observable transformations in teaching, and thus in the learning of students, it is necessary to engage in meaningful discussion with staff at grassroots levels in the formation of its design and implementation." The development of graduates who are interculturally capable global citizens demands that university faculty do nothing less.

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