‘Everyone at every rank matters’: inclusive intercultural communication in higher education

March 2015

Doctorate of Cultural Research portfolio

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‘Everyone at every rank matters’: inclusive intercultural communication in higher education

Volume 1

Overarching statement, project reports and articles
Statement of authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Diana Collett (Signature)
Acknowledgements

This portfolio would not have been possible without sustained support, encouragement and emotional fortitude from many people. I would first like to thank Julie Diamond and Terry Davenport who, despite the difficulties, saw the worth in this work from the outset. Ien Ang and Bob Hodge, my supervisors on this long journey, thank you for patiently looking for gold through many a muddy draft; your insights and advice have been invaluable and your forbearance remarkable. Also, my heartfelt appreciation goes to Patricia Kelly for her enormous generosity, clarity and ongoing collaboration and to ‘eagle-eyes’ Monica Behrend, for her unswerving encouragement and magic editing wand. Thank you both for helping to bring this work to life.

I am extremely grateful to UniSA senior management and Brenton Dansie, Dean Teaching and Learning, Division of ITEE for supporting the philosophies and practices in this work. Without this support nothing could have been achieved. Also the continuing support and encouragement of the staff with whom I work has been tremendous. Time and again they have ventured into unknown territory, expanding their own intercultural understandings and sustaining the concepts and approaches with students, long after the ‘specialist teacher’ has disappeared from the classroom. Many thanks to long standing collaborators - Liz Smith, Elena Sitnikova, Mei Sim and Roopa Howard for trusting and telling it how it is; also to Anastasia Kuusk, Julie Mills, Mizanur Raman, John Fielke for taking risks and within the Learning and Teaching Unit – thank you to Phiona Stanley, Helen Johnston, Ben Kooyman, Judy Foord, and to Lyn Sowerby for all those walks and talks.

My family deserve much more than a thank you for tolerating 400 absent weekends, your love and tolerance has held us all together. Most of all I commend my husband, Milivoj, for sustaining his love/hate relationship with my doctorate. Every draft you responded honestly, every success you celebrated with glee.

Finally I dedicate this work to my mother, Peg Collett, who believe in and worked for equality in women’s education throughout her 93 years.
Abstract: ‘Everyone at every rank matters’: inclusive intercultural communication in higher education.

This portfolio is submitted in the context of a professional doctorate degree in Cultural Research. It comprises three work-based research projects serving both organisational interests and interdisciplinary fields of academic scholarship, via publication in peer reviewed journals. The candidate has approached this work from three vantage points. First, as a transdisciplinary psychotherapist trained in Process Oriented Psychology, second, as a Student Counsellor at the University of South Australia (UniSA), and third, as a Teaching and Learning Development Officer embedding globally relevant communication skills into undergraduate engineering courses and programs. The analysis is grounded in intercultural and Process Oriented theory and uses a range of methodologies. It has been conducted from the vantage of an embedded practitioner-researcher collaborating closely with both professional and academic staff in a range of university-wide contexts.

The portfolio develops a new, relational approach to enhancing intercultural communication centering on the concept of ‘Rank’, or personal power. Concepts about the effect of Rank in communication are introduced in the classroom to stimulate awareness of differing attitudes and behaviours within interactions. Understanding how power dynamics can either exclude or include people can act as a catalyst for incorporating alternative perspectives in intercultural communication. The analysis develops and evidences the argument that preparing graduates with the global competencies to work in cosmopolitan societies involves a shift in pedagogic practices to respect and incorporate the diversity of knowledges and experiences found within the students and staff.
This portfolio draws upon significant scholarly works to move beyond current thinking in intercultural education and develop a relational approach to intercultural competence that promotes interpersonal and contextual awareness. Each project explores, in various ways, the embedding of intercultural skill development into student learning at UniSA. Over the course of this doctorate an entirely new model for teaching intercultural competency has evolved, known as *Learning for Change (LFC)*. Classroom interventions developed through close cooperation with course educators, academic developers and substantial support from senior management. The three projects are:

**Project 1: Counselling concepts and intercultural learning** - details the vision and scope of the relational approach to intercultural competence, used by counsellors at UniSA. It explores how Student Counsellors can contribute significantly to enhancing intercultural communication in university contexts because of their training in intercultural communication and experience assisting students who have difficulties engaging with the university’s academic expectations.

**Project 2: Cultural understanding and inclusive communication** - contextualises notions of culture and intercultural dynamics within the contemporary landscape of intercultural communication theory. Contemporary discourse about ‘Third Space’ encounters and relevant Process Oriented Psychology concepts contribute valuable perspectives about respectful intercultural engagement. Coupled with insight from students’ campus experiences, these concepts inform the creation of classroom spaces where respectful encounters can occur.

**Project 3 Power and Rank in university classrooms** - explores the benefits and challenges of teaching students about Rank and communication as practiced in the *Learning for Change* model which is based on the premise that understanding common power dynamics provides a unifying conceptual framework for facilitating cultural inclusion.
# Portfolio overview

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1 Introduction

This portfolio of three projects is submitted in the context of a professional doctorate degree in Cultural Research (DCR) intended to serve both organisational interests and interdisciplinary fields of academic scholarship. This work benefits from the use of three vantage points. First, my long-standing interest in cultural studies and social change from a Process Oriented Psychology (Process Work Institute 2013) perspective has led me to researching intercultural engagement between students and introduce Process Oriented concepts about ‘Rank’, or personal power, and communication to enhance intercultural interactions. Second, my role as a Student Counsellor at the University of South Australia (UniSA) led to undertaking the first two projects. Third, in recent years I have been employed by the Division of Information Technology, Engineering & Environment (ITEE) as a Teaching and Learning Development Officer responsible for embedding teambuilding strategies into undergraduate courses and programs, which led to the third project.

My aim during this research has been to assist students in moving beyond their comfort zones, engaging together across cultural differences and developing intercultural competence. Throughout this work, Kramsch’s (2011) definition of intercultural competence has been used - namely, the ability to process differences in cultural understanding and come to a ‘Third place’, making new meanings that lie beyond the duality of differing perspectives (2011:355).

The three projects comprising this portfolio, and the reports and articles they have generated, explore the evolution of a relational approach to intercultural education that aims to develop both intercultural competency and globally relevant professional communication skills in university students. Central to this approach is increasing understanding about the role of power in intercultural relations. This work focusses on the use of personal power, referred to here as ‘Rank’ and defined as ‘a conscious or unconscious, social or personal ability or power …’ which organises much of our communication behaviour (Mindell 1992:45). Students and staff are introduced to concepts about the effect of Rank in communication to stimulate awareness of differing attitudes and behaviours within interactions. These concepts help students to recognise how Rank can be used to either exclude or include people, encouraging them to use their Rank respectfully. Understanding power dynamics in interactions can act as a
catalyst for students to engage inclusively in considering alternative perspectives during intercultural discussions. The perspectives of Process Oriented Psychology have been employed because they offer a means of viewing people and their behaviours that is not bound by culturally defined customs and considerations of ‘correctness’, but honours the deeper understandings and expressions that each person holds within (Mindell 1985:11). With extensive Process Oriented training and experience in hearing individuals on their own terms, I was keen to find or develop approaches to both research and classroom engagement that respect and incorporate the ‘deeper understandings and expressions’ of all students.

The portfolio draws on scholarly works about intercultural education, communication and cultural studies to develop interactive learning experiences for equipping and preparing graduates to collaborate in diverse work environments. This work spans more than ten years of researching, developing, implementing and evaluating interventions in a range of classroom contexts. The projects describe various elements of this work. They provide new understandings and alternative approaches for incorporating diverse cultural perspectives and experiences into the pedagogy of higher education.

The first project explores how counselling approaches to inclusive communication can support commencing students in their transition to university studies. The second project details classroom approaches to inclusive intercultural engagement and the theories and concepts that underpin them. The third project explores how introducing a conceptual framework about communication and Rank contributes to intercultural communication among students.

Each of the projects explores, in various ways, the embedding of intercultural skill development into student learning at University of South Australia (UniSA). Over the course of this doctorate an entirely new model for teaching intercultural competency has evolved, known as Learning for Change (LfC). The classroom interventions have emerged gradually through close cooperation with program coordinators, academic developers and course educators and with substantial support from senior management.

As a professional member of staff, I have been reliant on the good will of the Academic Staff who incorporate this material into their courses and training modules. Implementing this work in short bursts, alongside my substantive role as a student counsellor, may have protracted the doctoral process but has allowed time for growth,
development and the evolution of a sustainable model. Researching the doctorate sowed the seeds for the classroom interventions which, in turn, are reported on in this portfolio.

The analysis in this portfolio has been conducted from the vantage of an embedded researcher collaborating closely with both professional and academic staff in a range of university-wide contexts. Grounded in intercultural and Process Oriented theory and using a range of methodologies, the analysis develops and evidences the argument that preparing graduates with the global competencies to work in cosmopolitan societies involves a shift in pedagogic practices to respect and incorporate the diversity of knowledges and experiences found within the students and staff in a university community.

2 Background

‘Internationalisation’ is the term used in Higher Education for institutional responses to global shifts in social, technological and economic trends (Rizvi 2004). In Australia, attention to internationalising institutions increased around the mid 1990’s when large numbers of international students began coming here to study (Olsen, Dodd & Wright 2009). However, each institution defines their internationalisation practices differently, resulting in a broad range of practical interpretations (Crichton et al. 2004, Childress 2010, Anderson 2013). Australian and New Zealand internationalisation activities, largely determined by the economic necessity of attracting international students, have been driven by global economic forces and neo-liberal political agendas (Marginson et al. 2010a, Lewis 2011). One unfortunate consequence is that ‘Australian universities have struggled ‘… to recognise other important dimensions of international education’ (Rizvi 2004:33). The need to prepare students to meet the demands of widespread social change, the very forces that drive internationalisation has generally been overlooked (ibid).

Today’s graduates will benefit from developing the ‘intercultural awareness and cultural adaptability’ (Campbell 2000) to operate in societies that are shifting, through transnational mobility and internet connectivity, to a global focus (Lewis 2011) and cosmopolitan nature. In this social context, Huber (2012) maintains that developing intercultural awareness and global competencies:
… are more important than ever because they make it possible for us to address the root causes of some of the most virulent problems of today’s societies in the form of misunderstandings across cultural, socio-cultural, ethnic and other lines: discrimination, racism, hate speech and so on. (2012:5).

In an interconnected and globally-oriented world intercultural awareness and global competencies are important because individuals can respond in a range of ways to the cultural influences they encounter.

Many intercultural educators believe universities need to rethink current internationalisation practices for all students, to learn how to embrace the cosmopolitan realities of today’s society (Wächter 2009, Bergan 2009, Lewis 2011, Neuner, 2012). These cosmopolitan realities are reflected in the increasing cultural diversity among the student profile of Australian universities (Dunworth 2010). Promoting intercultural competencies within the curriculum therefore meets the needs of international students and accommodates the diversity within the local student profile (Olsen, Dodd & Wright 2009).

Wishing to address this concern, UniSA endorsed a comprehensive approach to internationalisation in the 2008 ‘New Horizons’ strategic plan (Høj 2008):

‘... Internationalisation also means providing opportunities for intercultural education on campus and offering international perspectives and opportunities for all our domestic students and staff’ (2008:18). To achieve this goal the spheres of international and intercultural education, largely seen as separate endeavours (Crichton et al. 2004), need to be brought together.

Cultivating international perspectives within graduates through intercultural education involves developing the globally relevant intercultural skills and attitudes, or global competencies, to support social harmony. In this portfolio, global competencies are the personal skills and attributes associated with learning to live together, as outlined by UNESCO (2007):

… developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence … in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding … peace and cultural diversity. In short, the learner needs to acquire knowledge, skills and values that contribute to the spirit of solidarity and cooperation among diverse individuals and groups in society (2007:20).

Graduates with the ability to foster cultural interdependence in their professional endeavours will have the flexibility to ‘understand and engage with different viewpoints and perspectives and engage in intercultural dialogue’ (Bourn 2011:560).
In the current internationalisation policy, outlined in the Global Engagement Framework (Lloyd 2013), UniSA has strengthened its commitment to developing globally competent graduates with specific reference to students enhancing their global capability by ‘… developing their internationally relevant skills within the curriculum’ (2013).

In response, a range of student-driven activities promoting intercultural interaction are offered through the Global Opportunities Website (http://www.unisa.edu.au/student-life/global-opportunities/). However these optional activities, such as ‘Your Culture, My Culture’ and ‘Global Experience’, are largely voluntary and extra-curricular.

Embedding ‘global capability’ into the curriculum across the university is having mixed success because equipping graduates with skills and attitudes to be adaptive and thrive in global societies is not a simple process. While students do learn skills associated with cultural adaptability through mixing regularly with people of other cultures (Rizvi 2005), intercultural interaction is not a natural tendency either in the classroom or around campus (De Vita 2007, Bergan 2009). Exposure alone is no guarantee for developing the necessary competencies for interacting across cultural differences (Sidanis et al. 2008).

Cultivating globally competent graduates involves developing interculturality as part of the scholarly activities of all students (Sarr 2009, Huber 2012, Anderson 2013). Interculturality is defined here as the ongoing interpretive practice of negotiating cultural meanings through social engagement (Otten 2009). Sustained and concerted efforts are required to incorporate into the curriculum the practical strategies that can develop intercultural competencies including a capacity in interculturality, intercultural understanding and inclusive communication skills.

This portfolio is my response to the challenge of reshaping internationalisation practices to equip graduates with globally relevant intercultural competencies at the UniSA. The work outlines a relational approach to intercultural education that incorporates understanding of power dynamics within interactions. This approach brings new perspectives and practical strategies to address the complex and difficult task of incorporating intercultural skill development into UniSA’s transition programs and the curriculum.
3 Towards a relational approach to intercultural education

This portfolio moves beyond current thinking in intercultural education by proposing a relational approach for developing intercultural competence. It has been developed because traditional approaches were seen as inadequate for meeting the complex needs of the contemporary global society.

For several decades intercultural communication research has focused on the interpretation of culturally determined social behaviours and attitudes and their impact on communication (Hall 1966, Hofstede 1983, 2001, Gudykunst 1983, Gu & Malley 2008, and more latterly Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 2000, and Lewis 2006). This traditional approach has been questioned by Chuang (2003) as its underlying premises tend to oversimplify cultures through ‘treating them as categorical variables’ that can be quantitatively manipulated to develop theoretical models (2003:29). Similar oversimplifications also occur in international education which tends to associate ‘intercultural’ with merely understanding, rather than engaging with, the human world in diverse cultural contexts (Crichton 2004:4). This argument is extended by Kalscheur who states the research assumes ‘all cultures are confronted with a number of common problems which are solved in a culturally specific way’ (Kalscheuer 2009:33).

Furthermore, the research is too simplistic because the contemporary world in which we now live is ‘more complex than the majority of intercultural communication theory assumes’ (Kalscheuer 2009:32). The crux of the issue is that variables used to determine cultural difference are commonly based on norms and values of the dominant culture, against which other cultures are judged (Shim 2014). These essentialist cultural assumptions are not interrogated, rather they are used to situate ‘… difference within the structures of domination …’ (Shim 2014:133). More recent cultural researchers favour acknowledging and including culturally differing voices on their own terms (Tanno & Yandt 1994, Shi-xu & Wilson 2001, Chuang 2003, Kalscheuer 2009).

This intermingling of cultural influences in cosmopolitan societies has lead Breininig and Lösch (2006) to believe no-one can be a ‘pure’ representation of their cultural background (2006:113). Consequently Kramsch (2011) states that notions of ‘culture’ are no longer based in collective representations and ideology. Instead contemporary notions of culture are rooted in each person’s subjective understandings and personal histories. Within universities, cultural diversity manifests through people from differing
ethic backgrounds who relate to academic expectations using a variety of cultural and social expressions (Chuang 2003). These differing perceptions and approaches influence intercultural interactions between students. Bringing into play the reciprocal influences of cultures (Kalscheuer 2009) can shift intercultural understanding among students and develop their capacity for interculturality along with the ‘modification or renewal of cultural patterns’ (2009:34).

Acknowledging the interplay of cultural influences in cosmopolitan societies and the need to include culturally differing voices on their own terms raised questions for me about the relevance of traditional approaches to intercultural education for developing intercultural competence in today’s society. Traditional forms are described by UNESCO (2007) as involving the delivery of either multicultural education (learning about other cultures) and/or intercultural education (creating opportunities for respect and dialogue between different cultural groups). The realities of an interconnected and globally oriented world require a shift in intercultural education but the highly personalised nature of cultural identity and intercultural competence currently being explored in the literature is yet to have a major influence on intercultural educational practices.

In my efforts to incorporate current scholarly trends into classroom pedagogy I was inspired by Deardorff (2009) who calls for a relational approach to intercultural communication to bridge the gap that exists at the intersection between communication and culturally differing viewpoints. The challenge in creating a relational approach was to find or develop educational principles and activities that were not based on fixed conceptualisations of culture and their static representations (Kalscheuer 2009). I asked myself: If each person interprets cultural influences in their own way, how can intercultural education adapt to serve the communication needs of today’s society?

Fortunately my experience as a Process Oriented therapist and Student Counsellor helped me explore this question.

Intercultural communication is complex. At its core is the ability to establish shared meaning and connection between people (Guirdham 2005) of differing culture, ethnicity, heritage or background. When educational activities only offer discrete skills and attitudes that facilitate communication, students are led to believe they are learning communication skills merely to achieve desired goals and objectives. But interactions
are also the vehicle for connecting more deeply and this level of interaction is intangible and fuzzy. Beyond the momentary goals and objectives aided by clear communication, lie many less explicit personal elements that help to build relationships like our dreams, aspirations and deeply felt emotions (Mindell 1992, 1995).

Making connections with people we don’t already know requires more than our capacity to listen well and speak clearly. Deep connection occurs in the moments when people share humour or understand each other’s feelings; times when they discuss insights about what is happening around and between them and recognise similarities in the experiences recounted by others. Deeper communication happens in the space between people, when something intangible and indescribable reaches across the differences and sparks understanding (Diamond and Jones 2004, Breinig and Lösch 2006).

On this premise, I see a relational approach to intercultural education as seeking to build within individuals the capacity to connect in spite and because of the differences between them. The relational approach explored in this work places connections between students at the heart of the learning experience. Based on student-centred (Vermunt & Verschaffel, 2000) and transformative (Mezirow, 1990) learning principles, students engage in interactive learning between culturally differing class members, which Spiro (2014) believes is ‘critical to the internationalisation mission’ (2014: 65).

For intercultural competence to develop from student discussions, individuals from all backgrounds must feel safe to contribute (Kelly 2008) on their own terms. A key component in creating this safety is recognising and acknowledging that each individual’s perspectives, beliefs, experiences and contributions are valid and important to the group encounter (Diamond and Jones, 2004).

The way safe environments are created is specific to each concrete context. However two elements are consistently adapted and applied in all contexts. Firstly students are provided with a conceptual framework of how Rank influences communication to identify their own experiences of group dynamics. These concepts explain how individuals have differing experiences within the same interaction, depending on their personal Rank. Journal entry feedback in Article 2 and Report 3 shows intercultural engagement and willingness to change are enhanced by students realising their attitudes and behaviours are commonplace and groups having a common language to discuss.
their communication. Many students continue using these concepts for reflecting on their group interactions.

The second essential element for creating safety involves carefully constructing opportunities for groups to conduct inclusive Third Space discussions. Third Space encounters emphasise the importance of negotiating cultural differences for achieving shared understanding (Bhabha 1994) See section 6.1. These introductory discussions are scaffolded with focusing questions, guiding participants to share personal information. This sharing ensures all participants are represented on their own terms and fosters meaningful connections based in similarities discovered and the needs of the group. The discussions also encourage individuals to practice inclusive communication strategies, moving them beyond their familiar comfort zones.

By focusing on interactive experiences, Third Space encounters within and between students in group activities become a platform for exploring new and innovative ways of engaging with and critically analysing their differences; developing the essential shared meanings for effective groupwork and developing their professional communication skills as outlined in Article 2 and Report 3.

These dedicated activities redefine traditional notions of intercultural engagement by creating awareness between students of the experiences of individuals within the group and encouraging the sensitivity to include all. Intercultural competence is enhanced by assisting students to engage in ‘Third Space’ thinking (Bhabha 1990) which occurs in ‘the articulation of cultural differences’ (Bhabha1994:2). This relational approach rethinks scholastic practices by comprehensively incorporating global perspectives and the use of Rank in developing skills and attitudes associated with interculturality and intercultural competence with all students (Marginson 2009, Neuner 2012).

In line with UniSA’s strategic plan (Høj 2008) global perspectives are built on the understanding that beyond our cultural differences we experience in common the processes of hybridity (Appadurai 2002) which form our personal cultural values, notions of who we are and how we relate to and with the world around us. However this portfolio proposes and presents a globally responsive approach that recognises intercultural competence as central to the development of peer relationships, not an adjunct task about cultural awareness.
The projects outlined in the following section have implemented this relational approach through the use of bespoke activities as ‘formal learning spaces’ (Spiro 2014:81) where students interact with culturally differing peers in the equal exchange and contribution of knowledge and skills.

4 The projects

This portfolio has evolved in ways unimaginable since its beginnings. In response to changes in UniSA’s strategic direction, dictated by volatile market forces in the Higher Education sector (Marginson 2010a), the nature of projects undertaken has changed substantially. The driving motivation, however, has always been to turn current cultural theories into practice, namely marrying the pragmatic reality of communication dynamics with the need to honour cultural and personal differences to create deeper understandings between people. This highly practical approach is also comprehensive as it addresses motivation to change, and introduces the skills for interacting effectively and threshold concepts for shifting attitudes toward intercultural engagement.

These doctoral projects have contributed to developing intercultural understanding in three distinct areas at UniSA: the Counselling Team, university-wide Mentoring Programs and undergraduate programs in the Division of ITEE.

The reports and articles associated with each project are presented in Volume 1 of this portfolio while appendices for each report are presented in Volume 2. These appendices describe classroom activities, and the student handouts and background information related to them.

Table 1 summarises the three projects - their reports, journal articles and appendices.
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Submission to UniSA Transition to University Working Committee Professional Communication Skill Development website-Educators resource for professional development Background briefing on Learning for Change model for senior management and UniSA educators
**Project 1 Counselling concepts and intercultural learning**

This project details the vision and scope of the relational approach to intercultural practices, commonly used within the UniSA Counselling team. It explores how Student Counsellors can contribute significantly to enhancing intercultural communication in university contexts. Not only are counsellors trained and experienced in using intercultural communication techniques, but they are in the unique position of working with and learning from the students who have most difficulty engaging with the university’s academic expectations.

**Report 1** outlines how wellness-oriented intercultural group exercises were introduced in Orientation Workshops developed by the Counselling Team. This early work proposes the need to develop interculturality for all students at UniSA, using interactive orientation activities as a means of fostering ongoing interactions on campus. It argues that even small interventions encourage students to engage with diversity and can contribute to better intercultural relations. Recommendations are made for sustaining the inclusion of interactive learning experiences as part of the transition to university for commencing students.

**Article 1** discusses how the use of Rank to exclude can adversely affect the academic performance of international students who feel marginalised in the classroom. In response, it argues how the strengths-based perspectives (Murphy 1999) used by Counsellors can be employed more generally in academic settings to foster inclusion that respects cultural and personal differences. A strengths-based perspective builds confidence and understanding through incorporating the valuable attributes and capacities within each person. The article then explores contemporary group-based approaches for enhancing relationships in culturally mixed group work such as ‘Contact Zones’ (Pratt 1990) and ‘Deep Democracy’ (Diamond & Jones 2004:11).

**Project 2 Cultural understanding and inclusive communication**

Project 2 contextualises notions of culture and intercultural dynamics within the contemporary landscape of intercultural communication theory and student experience. Contemporary theorists such as Bhabha (1990), Putnam (2000), Mindell (2002), Breinig and Lösch, (2006), and Kramsch (2011) bring valuable perspectives about the conditions and spaces in which respectful intercultural engagement can occur. But how
can such spaces be created in the classroom? Both the report and the article explore and analyse active learning interventions and ‘Third Space’ encounters (Bhabha 1990) that promote intercultural understanding and experience.

**Report 2** analyses the lived experiences of intercultural engagement for eight UniSA students of mixed cultural backgrounds. The student interviews confirm Gudykunst’s (1998) finding that people communicate differently with people they perceive as culturally differing. These lived experiences are coupled with intercultural concepts to create interactive class activities for helping students explore and develop together their intercultural communication skills.

**Article 2** argues that Third Space pedagogy, coupled with understanding Rank use and power dynamics, can assist students to incorporate cultural differences within teamwork and concurrently develop the intercultural competencies of inclusivity and interculturality. It discusses how Third Space discourse has influenced the design of classroom activities where students interrogate personal perspectives about group dynamics and use of Rank. The data illustrates how in the space of one semester students developed insight into their own and other’s cultural differences and changed their approaches to intercultural collaboration.

**Project 3 Power and Rank in university classrooms**

Project 3 explores the benefits and challenges of teaching students the effects of Rank in classroom communication. It puts forward the premise that understanding common power dynamics provides a unifying conceptual framework for facilitating cultural inclusion beyond that found in common intercultural experiences.

**Report 3** Developing global competency requires changes in personal attitudes and behaviours that lie beyond the remit of most university classrooms. This report outlines how understanding power dynamics enables both students and staff to analyse the influence of Rank in their own relationships and shifts attitudes toward intercultural engagement. Concepts about Rank and communication are now a key component in teambuilding activities for engineering students at UniSA. The report outlines the conceptual underpinnings, implementation and evaluation of the *Learning for Change* model which embeds professional communication skills into undergraduate engineering courses.
**Article 3** discusses the relevance of Process Oriented concepts about power and communication (Mindell, 1992) to intercultural engagement in higher education. In particular it explores the role and impact of Rank in determining the dominant communication style and how certain behaviours reflect a person’s culturally defined understanding of Rank usage, along with their communication choices in interactions.

While the breadth of research areas in this portfolio has been extensive, the range has been important for portraying the complexity involved in creating a sustainable approach to developing intercultural competency that is applicable in a range of contexts. As reports and articles have been published at different stages of my research, they evidence evolutions of thinking and argument over time.

### 5 Key dimensions in developing the approach

In the time it has taken to complete this portfolio there has been significant development and progression of this relational approach to intercultural education. These projects illustrate how the approach has adapted to the needs of differing contexts and expanded in all aspects of the work. The contexts explored are:

- **Project 1** one-off classroom activities for commencing local and international students
- **Project 2** training student mentors to apply the principles of inclusive communication during informal intercultural conversations and while facilitating small groups
- **Project 3** strategically embedding these principles and practices into undergraduate courses, linking intercultural development to core learning outcomes across four year undergraduate engineering programs. This embedding involves both incrementally building student capacities and training and supporting the academic staff associated with each course.

Three key themes are woven throughout this work, expanding in scale and complexity across the three projects. The themes are honouring diversity, intercultural competence and inclusive use of Rank. Table 2 provides an overview of the contexts and ways in which themes have developed in this portfolio.
### Table 2 Key dimensions in developing the approach

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### 5.1 Honouring diversity

Incorporating the diverse cultural profiles found among Australian university students is important to this work for several reasons. Compared to a generation ago student populations are both more diverse and more compromised for time, now juggling competing interests and responsibilities with their study (Zimitat & Sebastion 2007).
With students spending less time on campus, there is less likelihood they will develop the university-based friendship groups that could assist them to informally develop intercultural competencies (Johnston, Collett & Kooymans 2013).

However, this student profile is an abundant source of social and cultural diversity that can potentially enrich the global competencies and professional skill development of all students (Meerwald 2013). Facilitating such development requires the creation of formal opportunities for culturally differing students to feel comfortable engaging together in interactive learning activities (Spiro 2014).

Moreover research indicates that culturally differing students gain different understandings from intercultural education (Kelly, Smith & Ford 2012). Factors that influence intercultural learnings are personal intercultural capacity, itself comprised of various aspects which develop at different stages within individuals (Neuner 2012) and the student’s Rank within interactions (Collett 2007 see also Mindell 1995 and Diamond 1996). One way of accommodating for the wide variation in intercultural competence in student cohorts is to embrace and explore in the classroom the diversity of perspectives present within each group (Spiro 2014).

The interactive learning activities in each project have been designed to create much needed opportunities for students to engage in ‘micro-level interactions’, exploring diversity and making meaningful connections (Anderson 2013). Students are encouraged to interact without the need for ‘… necessarily comfortable endpoints or uniform outcomes’ (2013:48). These experiences help to shape attitudes about difference and indicate the university expects students to learn from one another.

- **Project 1** creates opportunities for commencing students to learn about engaging with diversity during small group activities at the very beginning of their university experience.
- **Project 2** develops a culture of intercultural engagement on-campus through instructing student mentors in how to interact inclusively around campus and become inclusive small group facilitators.
- **Project 3** promotes a culture of inclusion among engineering students through promoting intercultural competence in team collaborations to complete course work over several weeks.
5.2 Intercultural competence

Promoting intercultural competence through interactive learning is a core theme throughout the portfolio. This theme responds to UniSA’s innovative internationalisation policies (Høj 2008 & Lloyd 2013) by providing access to intercultural education for all students to develop internationally relevant skills and global capabilities. Huber (2012) maintains that to achieve this level of intercultural competence requires both policy support and ‘… the everyday practice of developing the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge needed for mutual understanding …’ (2012:6).

This work is designed to incorporate intercultural education into the UniSA curriculum in ways that are relevant for each learning context. The level of intercultural understanding and associated skill development expands across the projects from personal awareness through to group understanding and finally team collaboration.

- **Project 1** enhances intercultural understanding through introducing commencing students to university expectations about inclusive engagement and providing opportunities for them to converse and gain deeper understanding among culturally diverse peers in safe environments.

- **Project 2** builds group understanding by incorporating student perspectives on intercultural communication into activities for developing inclusive communication skills. The students’ capacity for interculturality is also developed through group interactions in this project.

- **Project 3** extends these notions by embedding globally relevant competencies into courses in ways that are pertinent to the core course material. In this work comprehensive intercultural skill sets are created through interactive learning activities and interculturality is promoted using relevant conceptual frameworks, theoretical perspectives and inclusive strategies.

5.3 Inclusive use of power

To further enhance intercultural understanding the inclusive use of power, or Rank, is the third theme woven throughout this portfolio. This theme introduces and builds awareness about the effect of Rank on communication between students.
The notion is put forward that power is played out through interactions between people, as described by Diamond (1996):

... People's behaviour in ordinary conversation … reflects the social structures in which the momentary conversation takes place, as well as the nature of the participant’s relationship to each other. Behaviour not only constitutes but perpetuates the larger social structure. Each interaction … holding in place the individual's role, the statuses of the participants and the relationships between them (Diamond 1996:1).

This concept is an important inclusion to intercultural education because it addresses previously unexplained power dynamics within the Higher Education system. Despite Said (1978) describing the cultural politics of domination played out in educational institutions, power dynamics have remained largely accepted but unacknowledged forces shaping the way students engage with their studies and with the university as a whole.

As power is played out during interactions between students, methods of local cultural domination that inhibit intercultural inclusion are condoned within universities. Shi-xu and Wilson (2001) believe institutions of higher education that do not acknowledge the impact of differential access to power ‘legitimate, consolidate and perpetuate the existing hegemonic global order’ (2001:82).

Developing the global competencies to work in cosmopolitan societies, however, involves preparing students to understand ‘… how power dynamics influence our representations of and interactions with ‘others’, and encouraging ‘moral discourse about the need for the people of the world to live together in a more harmonious manner’ (Rizvi 2005: 339).

This work enhances understanding about power dynamics with ‘others’ through introducing the Process Oriented Psychology conceptualisation of power, or Rank, and communication (Mindell 1992). This perspective, until now missing from intercultural communication literature, shifts the debate about power in society from social theory to personal action.

Throughout the portfolio Process Oriented concepts form a foundation for understanding Rank use which is employed to encourage students to observe, reflect and have agency over their own use of power in interactions.
• **Project 1** introduces inclusive use of power modelled by the facilitators in orientation activities to respect all contributions. This strength-based approach addresses the erroneous assumption that all students can contribute freely using the local communication style. Intercultural inclusion of newcomers is fostered through encouraging and validating that all contributions have potential for learning, even if they are different in content and style.

• **Project 2** promotes understanding of how Rank influences communication between individuals and in groups. Awareness is developed during classroom activities that explore student observations about use of Rank by local students and intercultural marginalisation on campus. Deeper understanding of these power dynamics informs student attitudes toward their future intercultural engagements.

• **Project 3** builds on this understanding of power dynamics by encouraging students to know their own Rank and use it to include culturally differing team members who are often marginalised during team collaborations. Establishing awareness about and inclusive use of Rank acts as a catalyst for cultural inclusion in teams.

6 Conceptual principles

This section discusses the conceptual principles that have been applied in teaching methods and research. It largely speaks about the first vantage point from which I view this work – that of my long standing interest in cultural issues with over 20 years of experience as a Process Oriented Psychologist applying transdisciplinary perspectives in personal and professional development.

Difficulties with the traditional approach to intercultural research have already been discussed (see Section 3). In particular, I was concerned about the prevalence in traditional research of underlying assumptions that universalise problems, as noted by Kalscheuer (2009): ‘… all cultures are confronted with a number of common problems which are solved in a culturally specific way’ (2009:33). When researchers use their cultural perspectives to define the nature of problems, they also determine and prescribe how issues are viewed throughout the research (Kalscheuer 2009). Any differing cultural interpretations and representations held by the research subjects remain hidden (Tanno & Yandt 1994). This creates an asymmetrical power distribution (Miike in Kalscheuer 2009) which favours the researcher’s perspectives by silencing those of the subjects. The implications are that ‘alternative possibilities of theorizing and
researching culture and communication phenomena’ (Miike 2003:244) are disadvantaged.

Seeking to maintain the broad perspective on cultural interdependence discussed in Section 3, I turned to cultural studies as the platform for this doctoral work. Theorists in cultural studies have impressed upon me the immediacy of needing to hear people on their own terms. The unstoppable ‘trend toward greater diversity’ (Rizvi 2005: 332) means there is a growing diversity of cultural expressions being voiced by individuals everywhere (Appadurai 2002, Chuang 2003) which is not accommodated in most mainstream research.

Researchers such as Tanno and Yandt, and Orbe who appreciate the importance of cultural interdependence have influenced the methodology in this work. Tanno and Yandt (1994) suggest a more equal power distribution is possible in intercultural research when participants become co-creators through playing an active role in designing the methodology. Their approach gives participants the ‘ability, means, and willingness to participate in creating and understanding knowledge’ (1994:41).

Similarly, Orbe’s ‘co-cultural theory’ (1998) puts forward an alternative approach to mainstream research that acknowledges the endemic privileging and marginalisation of peoples voices found in societies with hierarchical power structures. Orbe includes under-represented voices in his research by revealing ‘… the commonalities of oppressed groups while simultaneously acknowledging the great diversity of lived experiences within and among such groups’ (1998:134).

To include alternative viewpoints and promote understanding about differences in this portfolio, a Process Oriented understanding of teleology has been employed. In Process Oriented Psychology teleology refers to the underlying and often unspoken viewpoints held by individuals in discussions (Mindell 1989:151). From a Process Oriented perspective these viewpoints should be included because they offer something meaningful and valuable to discussions, even when messages are not immediately or easily understood (Diamond & Jones 2004:3).

Other important influences that shape my approach, both as a researcher and an educator, are discussed throughout the portfolio: these include Mindell’s notions of Rank (1992, 1995) and Deep Democracy (2002); Bhabha’s work on ‘Third Space’ (1990), which has been extended to notions of transdifference by Breinig and Lösch.

6.1 Developing methodology

Wishing to address the asymmetrical distribution of power between educators and students/researchers and participants, I have viewed the voices of students as integral to the process of creating new, profoundly relevant forms of knowledge that, when introduced into classroom activities, convey deeper understandings to other students.

Attempting to design activities that include the voices of students, however, raised several questions such as:

- How can students who do not belong to the dominant culture be encouraged to contribute to discussions in ways that are meaningful to them?
- How can educators and other students learn to hear and integrate the diverse, unique and complex representations of culture and experience, brought to the classroom by each student, without relying on their inherent cultural assumptions for making meaning about others?
- How can educators generate safe and comfortable environments where all students feel free to express themselves authentically? (see section 3)

Essentially this task involved developing a range of principles and practices for creating classroom spaces where students can hear each other’s contributions, feel comfortable they will also be heard on their own terms, and together develop shared meanings. I began hearing the voices of the students by interviewing eight students in 2008, from both local and international backgrounds, about their interactions with students from other cultures. As discussed in Report 2, the interviewees became co-creators of knowledge with their comments and insights contributing to future activities.

The interviewees also helped me develop professionally, with their insights shaping my understanding of intercultural practices and thereafter my approach to teaching.
intercultural communication. Through analysing the interviews, I found people use highly idiosyncratic, personalised and creative ways for connecting deeply. In terms of their personal development this means each individual learns to ‘interact on their own terms’ in an entirely unique way.

The idiosyncratic nature of personal development became a critical consideration in designing classroom activities promoting intercultural competence. When educators want students to interact authentically with peers they barely know, respecting and accommodating individual differences becomes a priority. The interviewees also stressed that developing intercultural competencies takes time, which translates into an iterative approach, giving students repeated classroom opportunities throughout their studies to revisit and build upon their intercultural understanding and capacity.

As co-collaborators in course development, student voices have been incorporated as accurately as possible within the teaching material and data collection. For example the Learning for Change model (Project 3) uses a ‘Feed Forward’ approach to data use, sharing online with the entire cohort within a week all comments and the answers to any ‘unanswered questions’ collected in evaluations. Students realise their comments and concerns are valued and can compare their views within the group. They receive the answers they need and contribute to better course delivery when course coordinators use these answers to create a Frequently Asked Questions section on the course homepage. Tutors report that Feed-Forward shows students their comments are taken seriously and encourages engagement with staff for the duration of the course.

Central to a relational approach is constructing classroom opportunities for students to learn through interacting together. My attempts have been inspired by Bhabha’s notions of Third Space (1994). By locating intercultural experiences in a spatial context outside each person’s known and familiar worldview, Third Space encounters allow for the cultural discontinuities that occur between people to be better understood (Soja 2009). However Third Space theorists offer few tangible suggestions about how to create such encounters, nor how intercultural sensitivity can be sustained by groups for the life of a project. Insights from Process Oriented Psychology are helpful in this regard, especially the work of Mindell.

I began thinking about constructing Third Space discussions with three critical questions: 1) what will help students move beyond their personal worldview? 2) how
can students be encouraged to listen broadly and include differing contributions? and 3) how can spaces be constructed to encourage personally meaningful discussions?

In answering the first question, I found that before engaging in Third Space discussions students need motivating to move beyond their personal world views. Here motivation takes the form of explaining the broader global context of workplace expectations and needs. Awareness is fostered of ‘… global interconnectivity and interdependence, and their implications for questions of identity and culture’ (Rizvi 2005:339). These perspectives encourage the big picture thinking (Reed & Stoltz 2011) necessary when students are moving away from competitive, individualistic behaviours and developing professional identities with favourable attitudes toward collaboration.

To answer the second question about inclusion of diversity I turned to Mindell’s concepts of Deep Democracy and Rank (1992, 1995, 2002). According to Mindell success in groups and organisations requires the inclusion of all. This Deep Democracy entails ‘…awareness of the diversity of people, roles and feelings, and a guesthouse attitude toward whatever comes to the door of one’s attention.’ (2002: vii).

With this in mind preparing for Third Space discussions also involves foregrounding the communication dynamics in the space between students. A conceptual framework about the effect of Rank on communication is provided and students explore together, in various ways, the attitudes and behaviours associated with high and low rank (Camastral 2000). See also section 3. Mutually exploring the assumptions and expectations that underlie interactions normalises the lived experiences of all group members and shifts the focus of learning to that which is occurring in the group. Upon this experiential foundation Third Space discussions are introduced.

These Third Space discussions are carefully scaffolded to achieve the desired meaningful connections between students. Contextually relevant open-ended questions invite each student to contribute personal information and views. Deep Democracy takes place when students use their awareness of Rank differences for inviting and listening to each other. Third Space learning occurs through engaging with and reflecting on the differing perspectives offered during these discussions. These activities are a model of inclusive communication that groups adopt for the life of the project as reported in Article 2.
7 Embedded research

I have worked for the University of South Australia for over ten years. The research in this portfolio has been influenced by the two different University roles I occupy and my strong theoretical background in Process Oriented Psychology. As a Student Counsellor I have been privy to thousands of students’ personal stories about their intercultural experiences. As a ‘specialist teacher’ I facilitate personal change through introducing concepts and practices into classes and my orientation is influenced by my training and over twenty years’ experience using a Process Oriented Psychology approach.

I am also ‘embedded’ as a member of the local dominant culture, steeped in the cultural assumptions that accompany an Australian academic education and professional status. Concern for the impact of this cultural bias led me to train in Process Oriented Psychology because it employs a transdisciplinary approach to personal and social change, integrating multiple disciplinary perspectives to connect new knowledge and deeper understanding to real life experiences (Kumpar 2009). To understand my own cultural perspectives I chose a different culture in which to study and practice as a psychotherapist - that of a small rural town in the U.S.A.

The research has been undertaken from the perspective of a participant observer with the intention of better understanding the student culture associated with intercultural communication. I have actively situated myself with participants and in my writing as trying to understand the ‘… conventional orders of culture and action…’ experienced by the students (Atkinson & Delmont 2005:8220). The interplay of the students’ reflections and my professional involvement in both shaping their experiences and analysing their comments has inextricably informed the perspectives expressed in this work. In trying to manage this bias I have attempted to ground my work in theory, questioned my own assumptions about findings and accommodated for pitfalls where possible.

One notable pitfall to participant observation is the inequality that exists between the observer and those being observed (Cohen 2000). Possessing a sound understanding of the Process Oriented concepts of Rank and communication has helped me examine my own use of Rank in the classroom. As a researcher I inevitably use my greater Rank to establish the conditions being observed, such as the time, style and topics for discussion, but with my awareness of the effects of Rank it has been incumbent upon me to act as inclusively as possible by encouraging and exploring with students their
personal views and insights and consistently promoting the diversity represented in their contributions.

In any research, information is organised by the theoretical perspectives from which data is viewed. I have adopted a Process Oriented Psychology approach to viewing and respecting student and staff contributions. This approach looks for the kernel of ‘truth’ within data by incorporating the messages from disturbing or contradictory contributions (Mindell 1985). I have tried to more fully represent the diversity of views because both differences and similarities play an important role in creating entirely new understandings (Bhabha 1990). I believe this fuller understanding can lead to more sustainable outcomes.

The consistent methodology used throughout is Grounded Theory because it aims to explain common social patterns that occur in real life situations (Annells, 1996). Grounded Theory is based on the principles of symbolic interactionism, acknowledging that people relate to and through collective social understandings of the world around them using symbolic representations. Grounded Theory is used to create theory through observing and analysing the reality of what is going on between people. It acknowledges the interdependence of the participant-observer relationship in capturing the dynamic nature of how people shape and internally represent the worlds they live in through emphasising ‘… change and process and the variability and complexity of life’ (Goulding 2002).

However, the practicalities of conducting research in busy classroom settings have prevented the use of a traditional grounded theory methodology. Instead of using successive interviews as a means of capturing and refining theory from reality, student voices are captured through written comments, provided in pre and post evaluations. These comments are then compared for consistency with the students’ reflective journal entries about teamwork experiences.

As the projects span several contexts and timeframes, a range of methods have been used for collecting data, either directly from students or through evaluating class activities. Apart from the semi-structured, in-depth student interviews conducted in 2008, the data informing this work has predominantly come from evaluating student experiences of classroom activities using minute evaluations (Angelo & Cross 1993). These evaluations, modified for each contact, included student comments, tick box
responses and Likert scales. Entries in the student learning journals, written as part of their course assessment, have also been analysed, with permission. In addition, the views of tutors and course coordinators were collected through written surveys and focus groups.

Practically speaking, Grounded Theory is well suited to analysing the broad range of quantitative and qualitative data that has been collected, often from large student cohorts. To develop understanding about how a relational approach to intercultural competence builds insight and connectedness among students, common themes are extrapolated from student comments across classes and years.

A limitation of these data collection methods has been the lack of more detailed ethnographic enquiry. Course evaluations must also grasp student responses to core content and delivery, limiting the focus that can be given to professional skill development and intercultural engagement. Despite very strong evidence, in all three reports and in Article 2, that students value and respond constructively to learning new approaches for interacting, there has been no time made available to explore the student experiences more deeply through conducting further interviews or focus groups.

In Project 3 an Action Research methodology has also been employed to implement the Learning for Change model within courses. In educational research this ‘… involves discerning the particularities of a situation from the standpoint of an ethical agent, and in the process, discriminating its practically relevant features’ (Elliot 2009). Data analysis is discussed with the relevant course educators and the combined input informs modifications to existing activities as well as future directions and additions to the work. Course educators report this data has expanded their understanding of student viewpoints by providing differing and complimentary insights about classroom experiences. Course educators have often commented that they form impressions about a class based on the behaviours and attitudes of a few students who catch their attention. These impressions are often challenged when they are presented with statistics and comments providing a fuller picture of the students’ views.

Theoretical understanding about this approach could benefit from a longitudinal study of how student attitudes and behaviours change over time as a result of these experiences. My hope is that further researching student experiences of the relational
approach and increased understanding of Rank will advance scholarly knowledge and contribute to theoretical insight about inclusive approaches in intercultural education.

8 Outcomes

Robson (2002) notes that, for participant-researchers, the ‘reduction of individual freedom is balanced by an increasing likelihood of implementation’ (2002:535). My longstanding employment at UniSA has enabled the projects to germinate a range of diverse outputs, both practical and research oriented.

UniSA has benefited both internally and within the Higher Education community. Within the university, this work has spawned the development and implementation of a range of resources, training programs, curriculum changes and the professional development of academic and professional staff. Within the Higher Education field, I have contributed refereed articles and given conference presentations, with the work receiving both national and international acknowledgement.

I have contributed research to the international academic community via publication in scholarly journals including the International Journal of Diversity in Community and Organisations, Common Ground, The Journal of Academic Language and Literacies, The UniSA website and in national conference proceedings for Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association – ANZSSA (2007), ISANA International Education Association (2010), and the Australasian Association for Engineering Educators (2011 & 2014), with a current submission to Intercultural Education (Journal of the International Association of Intercultural Education).

I am contributing directly to international intercultural education through the adoption of the Learning for Change approach by the International Space University in their 2014 Summer School in Montreal and a further invitation to deliver the 2015 teambuilding strand in Athens, Ohio (Kendall 2014).

My contribution to scholarly teaching and learning, as part of a transdisciplinary team, was acknowledged by UniSA in 2013 when the team received a Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning. The team includes an academic developer, a student counsellor, two course coordinators and a tutor. The activities are
reported in Report 3. In 2014 the ‘Team’ received national recognition for this work with a ‘Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning’ from the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLTC).

A brief summary of outcomes is provided in Table 3.

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<th>Table 3 Key outcomes</th>
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<td>2013 Smart Start – A Companion for New Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project 1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academic output (collaborative)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Beyond the University</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2007</strong> ANZSSA National Conference, Auckland, NZ Dec., presentation ‘Coming together – New approaches to intercultural interaction in higher education: Power, rank and intercultural communication’</td>
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Over the past five years the response by students and staff to this relational approach to intercultural understanding has been encouraging. The activities have been well received and, once introduced, have been integrated into the curriculum in every course and training program. Course coordinators and tutors consistently comment on improvements they observe in student attitudes and approaches to teamwork. The effort taken to collaborate with course educators and provide ongoing support over the past four years has led to a 300% increase in inclusive communication content being delivered in 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year courses. Expressions of interest to embed this approach into other courses increase every year.

Despite this significant contribution to developing intercultural education at UniSA, the future of this work, and my involvement in it, remains tenuous. My status within the institution is that of a ‘blended professional’ (Whitchurch 2008: 384, italics original) whose role spans both professional and academic domains. According to Whitchurch, many educational institutions have difficulty understanding the roles and identities of professionals who span more than one domain and my case is no exception. It is argued that counsellors do not need doctorates to conduct their day to day work, especially doctorates in areas peripheral to therapeutic skill development. In the context of engineering education, I have been described as a ‘communications expert’ without the skills and competencies to teach the core material of any engineering course.

It is hoped that this work will be seen as integral to UniSA’s global outlook for the future and provide the practical strategies for integrating global competencies into the curriculum. As Whitchurch points out:

… those institutions that are able to give recognition to more extended ways of working will be the most likely to maximize the contribution of their staff, and to achieve an effective accommodation with their current and future environments (2008: 394).

9 Concluding Remarks

This portfolio contributes an evidence-based account of the transdisciplinary principles and practices required in creating a relational approach to intercultural communication and global learning. It explores the important contribution such an approach can make to intercultural education in the 21st century and describes in differing contexts how
relational activities are being used for integrating a form of intercultural learning that creates meaningful connection between students.

The three projects in this portfolio outline the progressive development of the approach. Project One discusses basic counselling principles for constructing safe environments for Third Space discussions between commencing students from diverse backgrounds. Project Two then illustrates how campus culture can change when students learn threshold concepts and skills for inclusive engagement. Project Three expands the scope of relational learning through embedding the approach into undergraduate engineering programs to incrementally develop interculturality, global competence and professional communication skills with engineering students.

The portfolio demonstrates the adaptability of a relational approach through integrating intercultural learning into a range of unrelated curriculum. So far it has been effectively applied with students from day one at university through to post graduates in international intensives. Student and staff feedback shows they realise the need to develop globally relevant communication skills and see this approach as offering relevant and timely opportunities to change their personal attitudes and behaviours. Introducing the effect of Rank on communication has facilitated ongoing discussions about communication dynamics that transcend personal and cultural differences. Incorporating the differing experiences and viewpoints of all class members though taking a relational approach to learning has ensured high levels of engagement. Recent feedback from second year Civil Engineering students shows support for an iterative approach which deepens their understanding of interculturality and professional skill development.

Undoubtedly creating a relational approach based on inclusive interactions is both complex and challenging. Working with staff and students in several disciplines has required sensitivity in adapting material to the needs of each course; determination to broaden worldviews through introducing threshold concepts and pioneering new practices; discernment in knowing which concepts to introduce in each context; and creativity for translating underlying principles into active learning experiences.
It is fair to say that meaningful connections between students, course educators and academic developers lie at the heart of this approach. The steady expansion of this work over the past few years can be attributed to listening to and incorporating the voices and needs of everyone. As a result, wherever this material has been introduced its valuable contribution to professional skill development has been acknowledged, and the conceptual input expanded in subsequent years. This innovative approach is now receiving commendations from within the university, nationally and internationally. Most recently, as part of the 2015 accreditation process, Engineers Australia gave a commendation for the development of professional skills across the Civil Engineering program with special mention of two first year undergraduate courses where this approach has been most developed.

The portfolio represents a conceptual and practical foundation for the future development of a relational approach to intercultural communication and global learning that can be widely applied within the higher education sector. It is one step in the shift toward more inclusive educational practices in 21st century higher education.
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Project 1: Counselling Concepts and Intercultural Learning

This project details the vision and scope of the relational approach to intercultural practices, commonly used within the UniSA Counselling team. It explores how Student Counsellors can contribute significantly to enhancing intercultural communication in university contexts. Not only are counsellors trained and experienced in using intercultural communication techniques, but we are in the unique position of working with and learning from the students who have most difficulty engaging with the university’s academic expectations.

Report 1: Orientation wellbeing workshops: Inclusion of local and international students in Study Period 2, 2009

This report is a review of UniSA’s orientation workshops developed by the Counselling Team for Study Period 2, 2009. It was presented to the university-wide Orientation Working Committee as part of Learning Connection’s contributions for enhancing student transition (prepared by Diana Collett 2009).

Article 1: Counselling concepts and cultural marginalisation: a case for interactive strategies in engagement and internationalisation.

Published 2008: Occasional Papers on Learning and Teaching at UniSA – UniSA website.

Diana Collett
Report 1: Orientation wellbeing workshops: Inclusion of international and local students in Study Period 2, 2009

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Report produced for Transition Working Committee, UniSA

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Executive Summary

This report discusses the introduction of a series of three orientation workshops at the University of South Australia (UniSA). These workshops were facilitated by the Counselling Team from Learning Connection during two weeks of orientation at the beginning of Study Period 2 (SP2), 2009 to capture the major intake of commencing students in the year. These workshops focused on personal wellbeing, how to succeed at university and study/life balance. From their experience the Team strongly believes that promoting healthy strategies to enhance student wellbeing will contribute significantly to the retention and success of new students. The Counselling Team define student wellbeing as the way a person’s attitudes to life, goals and levels of resilience influence their daily engagement with activities, study, work and relationships.

These wellbeing workshops are being integrated across the university. They help commencing students to understand university expectations, the importance of maintaining their health and wellbeing, both physical and mental, and how to network and relate with one another in the culturally diverse community they will encounter at UniSA.

Another focus is facilitating intercultural engagement. One objective of these workshops is to also support the university’s commitment to developing intercultural competencies for all students. The University’s 2008 strategic plan, ‘New Horizons’, embeds internationalisation throughout the Teaching and Learning framework including the development of intercultural competencies through intercultural dialogue (Høj 2008:18). One approach for attaining these competencies is through integrating practice-based learning into the curriculum. Practice-based learning endeavours to provide supportive learning environments where students can develop skills and attitudes for ‘incorporating diverse perspectives, experiences and knowledges into collaborative working arrangements’ (Mikilewicz 2008:24). The aim of practice-based learning is to develop capacities in collaborative problem solving and relationship building. However, such collaborations are based on the core assumption that students know how to engage effectively with people from culturally differing orientations. The workshops reported on here introduce students to inclusive communication skills that assist in communicating across cultural differences.

These workshops were created by the Counselling Team to broadly address the transition needs of all students while simultaneously experiencing the benefits of inclusive intercultural communication. The Counsellors facilitated group activities to enable students to experience meaningful interactions in which they explore information and include the diversity of opinions and experiences they bring to study. These facilitated discussions introduce commencing students to the basic skills and inclusive attitudes needed for discussing differing opinions and learning from each other. Practicing this inclusive approach in group projects throughout their studies can assist students to become globally competent communicators prepared to engage in culturally mixed settings. Three workshops were developed and implemented:

1. Welcome to Australia – a workshop for International students only to assist with the transition to living and studying in Adelaide
2 Money Matters – a workshop for all commencing students exploring financial management and strategies for balancing part-time work and study

3 Being a Successful Student – a workshop for all commencing students to discuss managing the study/life balance and dealing with stress.

These workshops feature:
- Opportunities for intercultural interaction as the primary mode of delivery
- Inclusive facilitation to maximise inclusion and engagement of all students
- The use of contemporary intercultural communication theory in creating safe environments that foster inclusive interaction
- Exploration of study/life balance and wellbeing as central issues in taking personal responsibility and achieving success.

The student experience of the workshops was evaluated through paper surveys completed after each workshop (templates provided in Appendix 1). Counsellors also provided written feedback that incorporated comments from the Student Buddies assisting with the workshops. Results of the two sets of evaluations were discussed as a team. The findings and recommendations reflect the views of the entire Counselling Team.

**Key Findings**

The findings are presented in three categories: interactive learning, intercultural engagement and the workshop implementation.

**Interactive learning**

The aspect most valued by students in all workshops was their interaction with other students. For instance, 82% of the Money Matters participants and 91% of the Successful Student participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the workshops successfully created opportunities to meet other students. The many enthusiastic comments students made about their interactions highlighted the value commencers place on networking and establishing friendships. This confirmed the importance of establishing safe and inviting interactive learning spaces as designed by the Counselling Team’s in these workshops.

**Intercultural engagement**

Students valued opportunities to engage with students from differing cultural and social backgrounds. Student comments indicated that introducing intercultural engagement as students commence their studies was surprising but well received. There was no negative or derogatory feedback. This finding indicates that providing opportunities for intercultural dialogue in safe environments for all participants to be heard can enhance internationalisation for all students, and particularly meeting the needs of international students to interact with local students.
Part of creating safe environments is recognising that power imbalances occur in intercultural interactions and differing cultural interpretations of power impede communication. The Counselling Team used their understanding of ‘Rank’, or personal power usage, to construct experiences in which students can move beyond cultural barriers to include diverse perspectives. Such intercultural conversations can help students gain insight about themselves and others that shapes future intercultural encounters.

**Workshop implementation**

The data has provided a clearer picture of the current profile of commencing students. In particular there are higher than anticipated numbers of mature age entrants and a strong representation of commencing students under the age of 18. This more detailed understanding of the student profile has implications for future promotion, content and delivery for each workshop which are outlined in the specific recommendations.

**Recommendations**

Three sets of recommendations were developed relating to the formation and facilitation of interactive learning spaces, the experiences of intercultural engagement and improving the workshop implementation.

**Interactive learning spaces**

*Promotion* – Six recommendations regarding promotion of these workshops were aimed at improving the advertising to commencing students throughout the University. In particular the School staff who advertise workshops with commencing students need to be informed about the important relationship between student wellbeing and long-term retention and success.

*Venues* – Three recommendations regarding suitable venues for conducting interactive activities focus on the need to secure rooms with flat spaces that can cater for large numbers of students.

*Staffing* – Three recommendations regarding staffing endorse the use of Student Buddies for all workshops and supporting them through providing intercultural communication training and recognition.

*Interactive learning* – The two recommendations supporting student interaction focus on maximizing the potential for networking.

**Intercultural engagement**

Seven recommendations regarding intercultural engagement provide detailed information about the design, implementation and promotion of interactive learning spaces within these workshops. Particular attention is paid to foregrounding the importance of learning to hear and appreciate the inherent diversity among students as a means of developing intercultural competencies within their studies.
Workshop implementation

Welcome to Australia – Three recommendations focus on meeting the immediate needs of students and increasing understanding about social and academic expectations.

Money Matters – Four recommendations regarding redesigning the workshop to better suit mature age student participation and including a separate workshop about working part time.

Being a Successful Student – Four recommendations regarding enhancing student wellbeing suggest the provision of more detailed information about stress management, support services available and the role of Unilife on campus.
# Executive Summary

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References
1 Introduction

University of South Australia’s (UniSA’s) recent strategic plan ‘New Horizons’ (Høj 2008) initiates broad goals for internationalising the curriculum and improving transitional experiences for all students. Accordingly, new approaches to intercultural education are being developed to ‘… foster intercultural and global relationships and perspectives in all our activities in a coordinated way…’ (2008:17). With regard to the transition experience of commencing students UniSA trialed an integrated approach to orientation in Study Period 2, 2009 for all international and local students.

As part of this orientation program the Counselling Team was asked by the Orientation Working Committee to contribute workshops about student wellbeing and study/life balance on each campus. Student wellbeing was identified as a vital contributing factor to new student retention and success. The Counselling Team is well suited to developing these workshops with their extensive experience in promoting wellbeing among students who experience difficulties at university. The Team discussed various aspects of student wellbeing and defined it as the way a person’s attitudes to life, goals and levels of resilience influence their daily engagement with activities, study, work and relationships.

The three workshops they designed and implemented aimed to:

- Inform international students about living and studying in Australia in accordance with the Education Services of Overseas Students (ESOS) Act.
- Enhance retention and success of new students by promoting study management, wellbeing and stress reduction
- Encourage networking and relationship building between local and international students.

The workshops are:

1. Welcome to Australia – a workshop for international students only to meet other new students, discuss their transition experiences and become oriented to essential aspects of living in Adelaide and studying at UniSA.
2. Money Matters – a workshop for all commencing students that looks at budgeting and explores work/study balance using common student scenarios
3. Being a Successful Student – a workshop for all commencing students discussing time management, stress and its management and support services available on campus.

The Counsellors, trained and experienced in intercultural communication, also saw these three workshops as opportunities to introduce inclusive communication skills to commencers before they began gravitating toward students from their own backgrounds at the exclusion of culturally differing peers (Marginson 2008). The workshops could
provide opportunities to harness the differing social and cultural backgrounds present so that students would learn from one another.

University presents commencing students with people from many walks of life and cultural backgrounds. During orientation newcomers are expected to interact with one another despite lacking understanding about university social conventions. They naturally seek the comfort of students like themselves (Putnam 2000). Embracing differences is not a natural tendency at the best of times and doing so when students are new to the environment is a challenge. Nevertheless, there is growing evidence to suggest that including diversity in decision making creates better outcomes (Surowiecki 2004, Schubert 2006).

Inclusivity, a crucial but difficult aspect of intercultural interaction (Guirdham 2005), is defined here as the ability to interact with people in ways that acknowledge and embrace both their cultural differences and personal complexities. To include differing perspectives it is important to understand the way meaning is made in mixed cultural groups (Jones 2003). Traditionally meaning-making is based on shared assumptions between people with similar historical, geographical and cultural backgrounds (Denzin 1989). Behaviours and attitudes are assumed to convey a similar understanding of any given situation. Communication is facilitated because people take for granted common understandings. Hence, students who are unsure of university expectations or pressured to achieve academic results quickly seek the ease of communication found with people who share their cultural and social histories (Marginson 2008). However, people who do not share cultural backgrounds, or have ‘discontinuous historical realities’ (Bhabha1994:217), cannot accurately assume the same meaning from words or behaviours. With no ‘common ground’ for understanding each other, meaning must be negotiated from the outset. Such negotiations can lead to uncomfortable moments as differing opinions, previously held to be ‘truths’, are found not to be true for everyone.

This negotiation of shared meaning is an important competency for new students to learn. The counsellors realised that developing the communication skills and attitudes that create shared meaning out of differences would not only assist students to succeed in their studies but also prepare them for professional practice in a global workplace (Bourne & Neale 2008). If these orientation workshops could successfully help students to incorporate the diversity among them, they would promote a more inclusive way of working in groups.

To achieve this objective in the workshops Counsellors included many interactive activities that were conducted using a ‘strengths-based’ approach which encourages interactive learning with students contributing their knowledge and understanding (Murphy 1999, Seligman, Rashid & Parks 2006). Facilitators encourage students to answer each other’s questions, only providing further information when necessary to give the full picture. This approach has many benefits. When students contribute to the discussion they model the initiative required for independent, student oriented learning. Confidence is built when students recognise how much they already know and are valued for their input. Networking is promoted as students learn relevant information about each other.

This report discusses the development and design of these three workshops and reviews data captured about their implementation. The commencing students completed minute evaluations at the end of each workshop and written feedback was provided by the counsellors who facilitated the delivery of workshops. Student Buddies, paid senior
students who assisted in the Welcome to Australia workshops, provided oral feedback to the counsellors with whom they worked which has been included in the counsellors reports. Recommendations for improving the workshops follow each finding. The next section outlines the process by which the Counselling Team developed these interactive, wellbeing focused workshops.

2 Designing the workshops

Orientation workshops generally impart information about university expectations (Krause & Coates 2008). However, the Counselling team also wanted to help students learn from each other right from the outset by introducing opportunities for interactive learning and inclusive communication.

2.1 Interactive learning

The team decided that each workshop would be about ‘how to operate at university’ but the information would be explored through interactive activities. These activities would encourage students to discuss university life – exploring the interface between university expectations and their own understandings, and hearing similar and different approaches to the transition process. The Counselling Team therefore designed activities suitable for interactive learning spaces where students could feel comfortable to share and discuss their contributions. Groups were provided with a range of issues of mutual importance which formed meaningful points of contact for students to talk personally, learn from one another and problem-solve together.

Counsellors are well placed to develop these workshops incorporating interactive learning spaces as they are skilled in developing rapport quickly with students from all cultures and walks of life. Whether working one-to-one or facilitating groups, university counsellors use particular techniques to engage rapidly and then discuss sensitive and personal information in ways that are meaningful and relevant to the situation.

Commencing students are effectively strangers with a common goal. Eager to be successful in a new venture, they want to learn the expectations, make friends and become part of the university community. The Counsellors wanted to harness this eagerness to foster intercultural engagement in environments where all students can feel safe to share and learn from each other. For all participants to feel included, the counsellors had to understand who would be attending.

The diversity among commencing undergraduates at UniSA includes:

- students from local, rural, interstate and overseas
- mature age students over the age of 21 years
- students articulating into 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} year from Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) institutions and other Foundation programs
- students under 18 years old
- students with special needs such as disabilities and local students with English as an Additional Language (EAL).
• others.

While these generic workshops were never intended to meet the specific needs of any or all of these cohorts, facilitators needed to be aware of the differing profiles to better include their unique perspectives.

Between July and December 2008 the team discussed current concepts in intercultural communication and cultural studies— for example, the need for intercultural competence (Rizvi 2005) and intercultural engagement on campus (Marginson 2008) — and the best ways of implementing these concepts in activities. These discussions ensured a consistent approach would be used by all workshop facilitators. They focused on communication skills for including cultural differences and minimising the effects of power differences. Personal power is referred to here as ‘Rank’. It was agreed that inclusivity is achieved when the communicator with higher Rank, in this case the facilitator, listens to those with lower Rank, acknowledging and clarifying differences and actively seeking a shared understanding of all perspectives. The Councillors agreed that communication skills for achieving shared understanding include paying close attention and following a path of open enquiry, encouraging disclosure of information and helping people to feel heard and understood. When people feel heard they are more receptive to hearing what others have to say.

As a result, the following six objectives were developed for the workshops:

1. Promoting understanding of wellbeing, stress, life balance, budgeting, work, university expectations and accessing services
2. Using an inclusive presentation style to encourage student engagement with content and one another
3. Providing opportunities for intercultural interaction as a primary mode of delivery
4. Fostering understandings between students that incorporates differences instead of ignoring them
5. Accommodating for the inherent power imbalances that differences in culture, age, maturity and gender bring to communication in a university context
6. Training facilitators in groupwork skills for inclusive intercultural interaction.

Activities were designed to facilitate communication ‘across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect’ (Pratt 1990:11). Safe environments where students could move beyond their comfort zones were defined as places where all participants could suspend judgement and hear beyond personal preferences. The following strategies were used consistently in all workshops to create safe environments for exploring differences.
Motivating students to be inclusive by explaining that the university expected all students to engage with difference. Workshops started with the following inclusivity statement:

_Inclusivity Statement:_ At uni we are fortunate to meet many people we would not otherwise come in contact with. In your group you will find there are a number of differing ways of thinking about things and many different perspectives for the same problem. This is a rich source of new ideas of how to go about life because there is no one way that is the right way. Please make the most of this opportunity, both in this workshop and throughout your time at uni, to hear and learn from everyone’s perspective (Money Matters presenter’s worksheet).

Democratic facilitation to encourage input and participation. Workshop participants were viewed as ‘responsible, intelligent, articulate, creative and divergent thinkers’ (Murphy 1999:365). Information was tailored to student needs using a democratic process in which students stated their ‘Burning Questions’ about orienting themselves to Adelaide and studying at university. Group discussions then explored contributions from other students.

Interacting with difference: Students interacted in small groups of 6–8 students from culturally mixed backgrounds. This approach gave all students opportunities to participate in discussions. Groups were facilitated by trained Counsellors or Student Buddies who encouraged quieter students and brought out different contributions. For example, in discussing transport in Adelaide, students were encouraged to share what they knew about driving and public transport and facilitators augmented this information.

Sharing strengths and capacities: Students were empowered to talk about their strengths and capacities, helping to foster inclusion. Every unique perspective and capability is intrinsically important to discussions, tasks or problems (Murphy 1999). Collaborative discovery of different views creates textured discussions in which students can appreciate the relevance of their contributions and learn to incorporate diversity. Self-esteem increases when students realise their contribution is important. While each group’s discussion is different and unpredictable this way of discussing a topic models the respectful development of shared understanding.

Large group debriefs gave opportunities for small groups to report their outcomes to the whole class. Facilitators could then build on this information to ensure the information is correct and relevant.
2.2 Intercultural engagement

At first glance inclusive groupwork may seem straightforward, but for many years now it has been understood that intercultural engagement within interactions does not just happen (Volet & Ang 1998). The Counselling Team considered the following research in attempting to create environments where every participant would feel safe to contribute. The objective was for all students to develop the intercultural communication skills that would help them to complete assignments during classroom collaborations.

2.2.1 Rank and intercultural engagement

Particular attention was paid to how Rank is used in intercultural communication. Promoting inclusivity in group activities requires an understanding of the subtle, often unintended ways that power imbalances form and silence or exclude some members of the group.

This form of marginalisation can be seen as an unintended consequence of the teaching style used in Australian universities. For the purposes of the report, this teaching style is defined as the direct, linear and descriptive style used in classroom and academic settings. Many international students come to study in Australia to learn this approach to scholarly practice as they see it as a passport to future global success (Marginson 2008). Much evidence suggests however that these same students are marginalised in their interactions with local students because of the prevailing ethnocentric assumptions made by those of the dominant local culture in higher education (Bodycott & Walker 2000; Mann 2001; Arkoudis 2007; Marginson 2008).

Students new to these academic settings are disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge of the prevailing communication style and these cultural assumptions. Institutions assume all students will learn local cultural conventions and ‘fit in’ (Bodycott & Walker 2000). However local students who understand these cultural conventions are better equipped to put forward their arguments in discussions and often use this advantage to the exclusion of newcomers. Without realising, the local students are using their higher communicative Rank to close down opportunities to engage with diverse contributions. Such practices inadvertently marginalise the voices and experiences of students who do not understand or share dominant values (Collett 2007).

When differing cultural and personal histories are marginalized, all students miss out on valuable opportunities to grow through the inclusion of difference (Mann 2005). With this understanding the Counselling Team considered inclusive strategies to counteract the use of Rank to exclude. They adopted the Process Oriented Psychology approach to understanding Rank which explores the behaviours and attitudes experienced in interactions that are associated with both high and low Rank (Camastral 2000). Appendix 2 provides an overview of concepts about Rank and communication that informed the Counselling Team in preparation for the workshops.

Central to this theory is the concept that people with higher Rank often take for granted their capacity to dominate in conversations. They assert their dominance through determining the place, time and communication style of interactions and those with less Rank comply. People with lower Rank tend to remain quiet while learning how to communicate in an unfamiliar context. In these interactions they can feel uncomfortable and less capable than local students and rarely understand that this discomfort is
associated with having lower Rank and needing to learn a new communication style. Those with higher Rank have a responsibility to include or invite those with less Rank to contribute.

The groupwork approach taken in the orientation workshops involved ‘… collaborative discovery of existing strengths and resources relevant to the ... [student’s] goals’ (Murphy1999:370). This inclusive strengths-based approach places responsibility on all students to communicate which is a shift away from the common perception that communication issues are the problem of the new students who need to understand the prevailing academic approach (Bodycott & Walker 2000). Instead, this approach helps students to know each other better as the basis for building understanding and relationships.

The Counsellors therefore designed activities for all participants to contribute and listen respectfully to each other. For example, an icebreaking small group activity in the ‘Successful Student’ workshop was designed to give those students who had recently moved to Adelaide (rural, interstate and international students) the opportunity to ask questions of local students about Adelaide and Australia. This simple exercise gives those who are usually excluded the Rank of determining what is discussed. The higher Rank of local students is also respected as they hold the local knowledge to answer the questions. The power dynamics are changed in these groups with those who traditionally dominate having to listen and accommodate the needs of others. Perceived differences among newcomers are also reduced when international students recognise that rural and interstate students have similar needs and issues about understanding the local environs.

Such activities can potentially change the communication dynamics between students on campus. In one of their very first classroom experiences local students are given the message that, at this university, they are expected to engage meaningfully with and include those they perceive as different. Local students are being asked to use their higher Rank to include others when all students are learning new social expectations and responsibilities.

2.2.2 Developing intercultural competence through inclusive interactions

Social interaction is a natural and powerful way of promoting personal and professional development. Throughout life our sense of identity, belonging and self-esteem are generated through engaging with others in a range of social and professional contexts. Rizvi (2005) maintains cultural identity may be rooted in our ethnic and social heritage but is transformed through interacting, with each encounter bringing opportunities to re-evaluate and reorient our own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours toward others.

Interacting in culturally mixed group can be catalysts for developing intercultural competence (Crichton 2004, Rizvi 2005, Pyvis & Chapman in Marginson 2008) because intercultural engagement enhances our knowledge of self and others through sharing and reflecting on differences. Each of us interprets the world from our own perspective and contributes to the understanding that ‘... our problems and solutions [which] are interconnected and transcend national boundaries’ (Rizvi 2005:332). The processes which develop insight also foster the qualities of understanding, flexibility and resilience (Deverson 2003).
The Counselling Team recognised the potential for intercultural encounters in these workshops as opportunities for promoting inclusive communication and reflection about communication and personal responsibility.

2.3 The resultant workshops and their evaluation

Each workshop began with an interactive icebreaker such as people bingo for building cultural awareness. Where venues permitted students then sat in culturally mixed groups of 6-8 to partake in small group discussions of relevant issues. Counsellors introduced topics by explaining why each topic was important for university study and reinforcing the value of learning from diverse perspectives. Introductions were followed by opportunities for groups to discuss and explore each other’s viewpoints and feedback to the whole workshop. Activities included answering Burning Questions, exploring common scenarios, comparing personal responses to situations, and engaging with student panels. Facilitators used reflective questioning to build on important information and interspersed short periods of providing information about university services and expectations. 3-4 related topics were included in each workshop, sequenced to develop engagement and broader understanding throughout. Appendix 1.3 gives an example of the power point presentations used, in this instance for the Money Matters Workshop.

The workshops were evaluated by students and the Counselling Team. The templates for both sets of evaluation forms are found in Appendix 1. At the end of each workshop students were asked to complete paper-based evaluations. Due to the unanticipated large numbers, there are fewer evaluations than actual attendees. The following numbers of evaluations were received: Welcome to Australia (n = 112), Money Matters (n = 171) and Successful Student (n = 249). Students were asked to rate a range of statements about the workshops using a Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree and not applicable. In the Money Matters and Successful Student workshops, two questions were asked to gauge overall satisfaction, namely: ‘Overall the workshop was useful’ and ‘My questions were answered’.

3 Findings

The findings, based on the feedback data, focus particularly on the interactive learning components of the workshops, the intercultural aspects and the workshops themselves. As this report focuses primarily on the intercultural aspects of the workshops, these findings are based mainly on data generated in the workshops attended by both local and international students during the second Orientation Week, namely Money Matters and Successful Student. The recommendations reflect the views of the entire Counselling Team and lead to specific recommendations.

3.1 Attendances

The three workshops had varying levels of attendances on the difference UniSA campuses (see Table 1.1). Money Matters and Successful Student workshops were well attended on all campuses except Mawson Lakes because there was limited promotion in the Orientation Programs.
Table 1.1 Workshop attendances by campus SP2 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UniSA metropolitan campuses</th>
<th>Welcome to Australia</th>
<th>Money Matters</th>
<th>Successful Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City East (CE)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City West (CW)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magill (MG)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawson Lakes (ML)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>145</strong></td>
<td><strong>243</strong></td>
<td><strong>329</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The profile of the student participants was determined from the evaluation forms. Students were asked to mark their age from a predetermined range. They were also asked to indicate if they were international or local, school leavers or mature age students. A summary of the diversity of students attending the Money Matters and Successful Student workshops is presented in Table 1.2. This data provided valuable information about the diversity present among commencers which has informed recommended changes in content and delivery.

Table 1.2 Students attending the workshops during the second orientation week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student group</th>
<th>Money Matters (n = 171)</th>
<th>Successful Student (n = 249)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local students</td>
<td>31% (51)</td>
<td>39% (99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International students</td>
<td>69% (120)</td>
<td>61% (150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leavers (under 20)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature age</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local/international students

Wellbeing workshops have not been offered for local students in the past so the Counsellors were keen to see if they would attend. The local/international student composition in these workshops was dominated by the international students. The large presence of International students indicates that it is feasible for these Orientation workshops to successfully fulfil ESOS obligations.

Local student turnout was poor compared with that of international students. International students represent only 20% of the commencing student intake but comprised around two thirds of participants in the workshops. Nonetheless, this local student attendance is encouraging as their low attendance had been anticipated. Magill and Mawson Lakes campuses only offered the workshops as optional extras on days when local students were not otherwise required on campus. Even so, 63 students presented for the Magill Money Matters workshop at 9.00 am on a Friday morning. Presenters felt the local students who attended were the keen students who would take every opportunity to improve their performance. Greater effort is needed to reach less engaged locals who could arguably benefit more from the workshops.
The workshops were promoted more successfully to International students through their attendance during International Student Orientation the previous week. This suggests that targeted promotion to local students may also increase their attendance rate. Greater numbers of local students would benefit the intercultural engagement for all students.

**School leavers/mature age students**

The data received about age composition is confusing. When asked to circle their age range at the beginning of the evaluation a distinctive pattern emerged (see Figure 1.1).

![Money Matters](image1)

*Figure 1.1 Age range of participants*

In both workshops around 30% of students nominated as 18–19 and around 50% nominated in the 20–29 age range. The university classifies students over 21 as ‘mature age’ so combining data fields into those below or above 20 years old. However, a very different profile emerged when students rated themselves as school leavers or mature age students (see Table 1.3).
In both workshops around half the students were in the age bracket 20–29. It is possible that many of these students do not consider themselves as mature age. With nearly two thirds of participants rating themselves as school leavers, it appears the majority of attendees see themselves with less life experience than the term ‘mature age’ would suggest. Despite their physical age these students see the need to learn about study/life balance in the transition to university.

What becomes evident is that both the content and delivery of these workshops need to cater to the wide spectrum of ages and life experience present in the group. The responses of students under 18 and mature age students are particularly interesting:

**Students under 18** represented 6% *Money Matters* and 9% *Successful Student* attendees. Proportionately, under 18 students were more highly represented than any other cohort. The university has a greater duty of care toward students under 18 and the data indicates that many of this cohort are actively seeking support for their transition to an adult learning environment. Although unintentional, the workshops can be seen as a proactive response to the university’s duty of care to under 18 year old students.

**Mature age students** indicated they got something different out of the workshops than school leavers. Instead of learning afresh about transition, this cohort contributed their knowledge and expertise freely for school leavers to learn from. In the *Money Matters* workshop they gave tips for balancing budgets and in *Successful Student* workshops they gave tips about balancing life. While this cohort may have less need of the information, their feedback suggests that sharing their competencies and experiences helped to build their confidence in managing university studies. Students who had previously attended the Early Preparation Workshops (EPW) for mature age students commented that the Orientation workshops enabled them to meet other mature age students and share the information they learned during EPW. These networking opportunities helped them form supportive friendships that they hoped would continue into their studies.

### 3.2 Promotion

Promotion methods were evaluated to determine how best to advertise workshops to each cohort. Publicity methods included:

- School Orientation Programs both online and print form
- Orientation Programs placed in ‘Welcome Packs’ for new international students
- Posters around campus (Magill and Mawson Lakes)
• Flyers in *Campus Central* – a ‘one-stop-shop’ on each campus responding to student administrative enquiries
• Endorsement during EPW and ISO sessions.

Students indicated the methods of publicity that reached them (see Table 1.4).

**Table 1.4 Methods of promoting the workshops**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publicity method</th>
<th>Money Matters</th>
<th>Successful Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation Program</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Orientation Program was clearly the most successful means of advertising with the least successful being flyers around campus (no feedback). Online advertising was also an important means of capturing approximately 40% of participants.

International and mature age students began having their transition needs met through ISO and EPW programs. In contrast, local school leavers do not receive this level of support. These workshops are therefore vital opportunities for local school leavers to learn about university expectations, network and begin forming friendships. With few other available opportunities to find out about the workshops, local school leavers need particular efforts to encourage them to attend.

Promotion to local school leavers is more difficult than to internationals and mature age students because there are fewer opportunities when they engage with university staff prior to Orientation week. The staff in each School and Division who develop the Orientation programs, both online and in print, are also most likely to talk to these prospective students. They need to understand the link between study/life balance, social networking and academic success so that they will have a better understanding of how these workshops can enhance retention and success. They also need clear and detailed descriptors of each workshop targeting local school leavers for inclusion in the orientation material for each Program.

### 3.3 Venues

The Counselling Team was not expecting such large attendances, particularly on the two city-based (CE and CW) campuses. Therefore, tutorial rooms accommodating 30 students were booked. At the CE campus larger rooms had to be found immediately and 15 minutes of the ‘Successful Student’ workshop was lost in moving rooms. The CW workshops were held in lecture theatres as no tutorial rooms were big enough to accommodate all participants. It soon became evident that lecture style seating was entirely unsuitable for interactive small group work. Students could only talk to two or three neighbours, limiting exposure to cultural differences. On both campuses the students commented that they were disappointed at lost opportunities for networking. In contrast, comments from students on Magill and Mawson Lakes campuses, where
workshops were held in tutorial rooms, commented favourably about their interactive experiences.

The use of flat tutorial rooms with movable furniture is optimal for small group activities but this presents logistical issues for future orientation sessions. Throughout the university the largest flat spaced rooms only hold 60 students. Accommodating the small group activities in these workshops will require limiting attendance at each workshop to the size of the tutorial room, and running several sessions per campus. This decision has implications for staffing and room bookings.

3.4 Staffing

Both students and counsellors valued the Student Buddies’ contributions. They facilitated groups in the Welcome to Australia workshops but only assisted with registration and handing out material at the Money Matters workshop on CW campus. Commencing students receive a powerful message about the importance of intercultural engagement when their peers, the Student Buddies, model and facilitate appropriate intercultural interactions. In the future, greater use of Buddies could be made in all three workshops. Buddies could assist in setting-up and registration, handing out material and facilitating small group activities.

Each new group of Buddies will need inclusive intercultural communication training which the Counsellors are prepared to conduct. Investing in the professional communication skills of these mentors pays double as they both model and facilitate inclusive communication with all students in the university community. Buddies deserve recognition for their contributions through Certificates of Recognition that outline the skills and competencies in intercultural communication they are developing.

3.5 Workshop implementation

The data provided various insights about the implantation and responses to the workshops, collectively and individually. These insights relate to interaction within the created learning spaces, the intercultural engagement and the workshops themselves.

3.5.1 Interactive learning spaces

Most of all students valued the opportunities to interact. In the evaluations students were asked to respond to the statement: ‘The workshop provided me with opportunities to meet other students’. Student satisfaction for the two workshops conducted for all students reflects agreement with this statement (see Figure 1.2).
The workshop activities provided safe and relevant ways for students to connect with 82% of Money Matters and 91% of Successful Student participants either strongly agreeing or agreeing that the workshops successfully created opportunities to meet other students.

Students also commented on how these activities helped them to meet and begin to understand people from other cultures. Students made insightful observations about their experiences in response to the statement: ‘The most useful thing that I learned from the workshop included …’.

*How to make a relationship with friends.*

*Needs to be more students sharing with students.*

*It was good getting in groups, being able to talk to other people.*

*Not only the international students are wary of making new friends – we’re all the same.*

*People of different countries feel the same as I do.*

The workshops enabled the international students’ to mix with local students. They openly shared their optimism and concerns about these interactions with comments as follows:

*It helps me know new friends with same interest.*

*Overall good that been international student can be easy in beginning but don’t know later on.*

*It was good to meet other students and really interesting finding out there are students from all over the world.*

*Great for international students new to the country.*

Attendees responded well to interacting in structured activities. There were many positive comments by both local and international students about interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds, indicating they felt safe to engage together. Contrary to classroom findings (Kelly 2008), no negative comments were received about moving beyond their comfort zones and engaging across differences.
The international students particularly understood the importance of these initial encounters with local students. They commented on how these connections would help them build friendships in a new country and requested more mixed group activities both socially and in workshops.

In answer to the statement: ‘The workshop would have been better if…’, students felt the most significant improvement would be to create more opportunities to interact. In all workshops this topic had the highest percentage of responses: Welcome to Australia 56%, Money Matters 18% and Successful Student 39%.

To improve these interactive opportunities, many students made constructive comments on networking and intercultural friendship building. Their ideas ranged from broad ideas like inclusion of more buddies; more interactive icebreakers, activities and Q & A time; facilitators to stimulate more discussion among students in small groups to hear differing opinions; and, the inclusion of fun but targeted activities. Students also made quite specific requests such as holding workshops before lunch breaks for students to continue networking afterward, smaller group activities and the use of local mentors in group activities.

The Counsellors agreed that holding workshops before a break would allow students to build on successful introductions made during the activities. Ideally workshops could be held before one of the welcome lunches provided by some Divisions during Orientation Week.

**Recommendations**

Various recommendations emerged from discussions which aim to improve the interaction and the interactive learning occurring within these spaces.

---

**Recommendations for creating better interactive learning spaces**

**Promotion**
- Develop and disseminate clear descriptors of content and who should attend to all avenues where orientation programs are promoted.
- Inform staff in each School of the importance of student wellbeing and intercultural competence for retention and success along with the significance of their role in promoting the workshops.
- Workshops occur on days when local students are attending other orientation events on campus.
- Workshops are promoted as supporting the wellbeing of students aged under 18.
- Focus groups are conducted with mature age students to better understand their capacities and needs and workshops need to be adapted accordingly.
- Workshops are promoted at all LTU Orientation activities in previous weeks.

**Venues**
- Workshops are held in flat tutorial rooms with movable furniture.
- Multiple rooms are booked to allow for large numbers on all campuses.
- Stagger the workshops across campuses for adequate counsellor staffing on larger campuses.
**Staffing**
- Prior training for Student Buddies in facilitating intercultural small groups provided by Counselling Team.
- Student Buddies assist with organisation and small group facilitation in all three workshops.
- Student Buddies receive Certificates of Recognition for their contributions.

**Student interaction**
- Allocate more time to interactive activities on all workshops.
- Conduct workshops before an organised lunch to encourage informal interactions.

### 3.5.2 Intercultural engagement

Given the complexities of intercultural engagement (see Section 2.2), the Counsellors designed all activities to enhance inclusivity within interactions and monitored these activities to further promote the interaction. Within safe environments the students could engage and explore their differences constructively. Counsellors would facilitate moments when tensions arose so that students could comfortably explore differences. The counsellors achieved this by watching for any awkward moments in group discussions and then encouraging the small group to focus on thoughts and opinions that contributed to this awkwardness.

For example, during the ‘Burning Questions’ activity (described above) a student in the Magill workshop volunteered her feelings about being the only Chinese person in a sea of white people. She explained that she felt frightened and nervous and found it difficult to be herself. The local students in her small group expressed surprise that someone could find them frightening. They spoke of being friendly toward her and could not understand how anyone would find them frightening. This is an example of behaviours having very different cultural interpretations.

The facilitator noticed this moment of cultural difference and wanted the class explore these contrasting responses. The Chinese student’s comment created an opportunity for the tangible reality of cultural differences to be explained and explored by the whole class. The students in the small group candidly explained their impressions and feelings. The facilitator did not favour any position but explained the communication dynamics and how tensions can occur during intercultural discussions. A safe environment was created by normalising all responses and including all responses. Other students in the class were encouraged to explore their own reactions and a discussion was held about how differing attitudes might affect communication within groups. The facilitator concluded by emphasising that students benefit from having an inclusive attitude toward difference throughout their studies, particularly in groupwork where shared experiences and perceptions can enhance the outcome.

Changing attitudes about intercultural engagement develops when students reflect on the ways they are both similar and different from one another (Mezirow 2003). By foregrounding these communication dynamics students are encouraged to experiment with new ways to connect and understand each other. Providing students with opportunities to explore and interrogate cultural differences without local cultural...
conventions influencing the conversation can stimulate interculturally relevant attitudes and skills in students.

**Recommendations**

These recommendations suggest additional development of the intercultural activities to further promote intercultural competence.

**Recommendations regarding intercultural engagement**

- Promote workshops as opportunities for students to learn about intercultural interaction.
- Icebreaking activities explore cultural differences, e.g. people bingo.
- At the beginning of each workshop students are organised into culturally mixed groups including local, rural and overseas students where possible.
- Facilitators make explicit the significance of including the diversity present in discussions for strengthening academic performance and global competency.
- Exploration of differences is encouraged in small group activities.
- Students are encouraged to reflect on what they learn from inclusive experiences.
- Provide handouts about inclusive intercultural communication and its importance in university study.

**3.5.3 Workshop implementation**

There is considerable interest in student responses to this first iteration of the interactive, wellbeing focused workshops delivered during orientation week. This section discusses significant issues arising from the student feedback for these workshop Specific workshop recommendations, including the *Welcome to Australia* workshop for international students are listed below.

Student satisfaction in response to the statement: ‘**Overall the workshop was useful**’ is shown in Figure 1.3.

![Figure 1.3 Satisfaction with the useful of the workshops](image)
Most students found the workshops useful with around 80% in both workshops either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the workshop was useful, however 10–15% of participants marked neutral as their response.

Student responses to the statement: ‘My questions were answered’ are shown in Figure 1.4.

![Figure 1.4 Satisfaction with the useful of two workshops](image)

Around 70% of students in both workshops either agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop answered their questions with almost 24–28% of participants marking neutral.

This feedback is perplexing as in each case high numbers of students (70–80%) either strongly agreed or agreed the workshops were useful and relevant but also a relatively high number were not impressed by the workshops (15–30% neutral). The Counsellors agreed to continue the current format in future workshops but changes would be necessary to meet the needs of those participants who were not completely satisfied.

One possible reason for the neutral responses could be the high number of mature age students attending. The Counsellors had directed the material toward school leavers, not anticipating so many mature age students. While the mature age students were a great asset to their groups, sharing their experience with finances and managing their lives, they may have preferred the inclusion of tailored information to meet their more complex needs. Further work is needed in redesigning activities to better accommodate mature age students.

Another possibility for the high neutral response is that students did not feel they received adequate information through discussions with their peers. This can be overcome by facilitators clearly outlining at the beginning of each session the benefits of peer discussions for intercultural skill development and relationship-building and assuring students they will receive correct and relevant information as well.

The following sections discuss responses to each of the three workshops specifically.
**Welcome to Australia**

The most valued aspects of this workshop were the interactive experiences and information about making friends in Australia. This was reflected in responses to the statement: ‘**The workshop would be better if ...**’.

- *There were more buddies to sit together with the students and the answer their many questions as they appear.*
- *The icebreaker activity involves everyone.*
- *More icebreaking sessions like having group activities instead of just introducing one another.*

In addition, many students asked for specific information about Australian cultural conventions and details about living in Adelaide. Topics they recommended including were:

- *Life in Adelaide, where to eat, entertainment, places of interest, history (11 students).*
- *Australian culture – do’s and don’ts (6 students).*
- *Unilife Clubs and societies/Unilife (4 students)*
- *Australian history, Places to go in and around Adelaide.*

Although information about how to behave in Australia is important to students, the Counselling Team wanted to avoid the likelihood of encouraging stereotypical responses when international students try to engage with ‘the Australians’. Providing material about cultural conventions and greeting behaviours may not lead to intercultural connections if the international students use stereotypes with local students that do not apply. In any case, information about conventions is already made available to new international students through several sources including the UniSA International Student Guide, and brochures and websites provided by other universities and local council. Instead of reiterating these facts in the workshop it was decided to provide handouts offering essential information and specific web links.

To enhance connectedness with local students the counsellors recommend a workshop segment that talks about ways of interacting with locals students and explains the difficulties arising from stereotyping. For example, international students can be encouraged to initiate contact by asking locals to tell them about appropriate behaviours in different contexts. Their lack of knowledge about local conventions could be used as a pretext for introductory conversations.

Again, there was an unexpectedly high neutral response rate to most questions on the **Welcome to Australian** evaluation form, as follows:

- *The workshop met your expectations* 31%
- *The handouts were useful* 25%
- *I feel more confident about living in Australia* 25%
- *I feel more confident about studying in Australia* 22%
- *My questions were answered* 19%

Several reasons for this ambivalence to the workshop were posited:
• As this is the first workshop students attend during International Student Orientation many are completely new to UniSA formats and expectations. They may be hesitant to comment feeling uncomfortable in a new environment.
• The use of small group discussions in workshops could be a new experience for many international students who come from academic backgrounds where personal contributions are not commonly included.
• Most students had recently arrived in Australia and were still learning how to understand English spoken with different accents. This issue was indicated in the comments that recommended using more PowerPoint slides for students to read as well as hear the material.
• With 82% of participants aged between 20 and 29, information could be targeted to a more mature audience.

Recommendations

Possible improvements to Welcome to Australia workshop are recommended.

Recommendations for the Welcome to Australia workshop

• Ask for Burning Questions on all topics early in the session and make sure these are answered.
• Clearly explain the use of small group discussions, purpose and benefits as a means of information delivery.
• Include an activity that clarifies the distinction between stereotyping and engaging more personally with local students.

Money Matters

Student satisfaction of the Money Matters workshop was evaluated by the statement: ‘The workshop helped me to feel more confident about managing my finances while studying’. Over 70% of students agreed or strongly agreed they felt more confident about managing their finances after attending the Money Matters workshop.
The students’ comments provided valuable insights for further development of the workshop, as follows:

The workshop helped a lot and allowed me to plan better for uni.
Thank you, Thank you for mentioning outside organisations that can help (employment services).
I have been a sole parent for 10 years and have great budgeting skills. I was hoping for a more detailed session e.g. paying for books, HECS scholarships.
Great for international students new to the country.
Most students who attended the class/workshop today are looking for a part-time job so we need to know how to get a job at this moment, if we got more information about it, it could have been better for us to be comfortable.

From 171 evaluations, there were 113 responses to the statement: ‘The most useful information in the workshop was …’.

The overwhelming favourite topic was part-time jobs, as nominated by 51% or participants. The comments mentioned associated issues like: understanding employment, fair pay rates, disadvantages of part-time work, and the Careers website. It became clear that most students are keen to learn about balancing working and studying – how to get part time work, how to balance work and study and what types of work are available and suitable for students.

Students also want more detailed information about services offered by the community such as Centrelink, volunteering opportunities, available grants and scholarships. Perhaps a separate workshop about part-time work and career paths could be delivered in conjunction with the Money Matters workshops.

While many students focus on how to get work at this stage, the Counsellors recognised the need to emphasise study/life balance so that students can be successful in completing their studies. Creating balance was valued by the 33% of students who nominated budgeting and money management as the most important aspect of the workshop. Students particularly valued the ‘Budgeting’ Worksheets and associated ‘Balancing the Budget ’activity. While mature age students stated they had less need for
this activity, their expertise could be used in explaining budgeting to the school leavers in the future.

In response to the question: ‘How could the workshop be improved?’, most students wanted more interactive activities. Students participated well in the activities, particularly when exploring ‘real life’ scenarios.

**Recommendations**

Possible improvements to *Money Matters* workshop are recommended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations for the <em>Money Matters</em> workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Clearly promote the content of the workshop and suitability for mature age students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduce number of 'real life' scenarios with more variation between them and extra time for discussion in groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include more material about study/work balance and a stimulating ‘budgeting challenge’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consider separate workshop about part time work and financial opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Successful Student**

This workshop received the most positive feedback and had 40% more participants than the *Money Matters* workshop. Student responses to the statement: ‘The *Successful Student* workshop has given me some useful tips to balance my life as a student’ are summarised in Figure 1.6.

![Successful Student](image)

**Figure 1.6 Satisfaction with the tips about balancing life as a student**

Nearly 80% of students agreed or strongly agreed that this workshop was useful and this was also reflected in their comments. Almost all students (245 out of 249) responded to the statement: ‘The most useful information in the workshop was …’. This large number of comments reflects a high degree of engagement with the workshop and the material. There were a wide variety of comments with the most frequently mentioned topic areas being:
Helpfulness of the Uni and where to get help 18%
Significance of stress 14%
Study planning and time management 11%
Need for balance in life and study 5%
Networking and making friends, similarities 5%

Students were eager to find out about relevant services and the assistance provided by them. They wanted to know when and how to access services in a self-directed university environment. The Counsellors believe students would appreciate hearing about clubs and societies and advocacy from the Student Association, named Unilife, during these workshops.

With regard to the interactive activities most students appeared to recognise their own stressors and reactions to stress. In group discussions they readily shared from their experience and insight about managing wellbeing. They openly discussed personal information and similarities that bridged their cultural differences. They were open to hearing about differing approaches for future reference. Many students reflected on their own lives and wellbeing at university, in response to the statement: ‘The most useful information in the workshop was …’:

To recognise stress before it became unmanageable.
The amount of support there is within Uni – mentors – counsellors – careers etc.
About my well being. Was thinking of quitting dance but I’m not going to now.
How to make challenges into opportunities.
It helps me know new friends with same interest.
How to make a relationship with friends.
Be confident.

However not all comments were positive:

Most of the stuff was a bit obvious.
I don’t need to learn about stress.
It wasn’t the class which I was expecting.
Better preparation, information structured next time (dot points).

Students acknowledged the importance of understanding stress and how to recognise it, but there were slightly more comments referring to managing life at university – time management, study planning and life balance. The negative comments about the segment on understanding stress are consistent with the Counsellors’ observations that many students seemed to know about stress and their own triggers. This feedback suggests the stress segment could focus more on tips for preventing stress instead of exploring the nature of stress.

The 18% of neutral responses about the workshop’s usefulness may represent students who already know a great deal about study/life balance. Nevertheless, students engaged together well in the interactive activities and were stimulated to share their responses and hear each other, even if they did not learn any new strategies personally. The Counsellors see value in emphasising personal wellbeing within the university context, not just for the content but as a vehicle for inclusive intercultural relationship building.
These discussions about personal strengths transcend cultural differences and build connections that are relevant to study.

The comments received about lack of preparation are reasonable given the difficulties with rooms encountered on city campuses.

**Recommendations**

Several recommended changes to the *Successful Student* workshop have been suggested.

### Recommendations for the *Successful Student* workshop

- Begin workshops by highlighting the importance of including differing contributions in group discussions.
- Redesign material about stress providing detailed handouts about signs and tips for dealing with stress.
- Include handouts about where to find services on each campus.
- Invite *Unilife* campus representatives to speak in each workshop.

**4 Conclusion**

The Counselling Team’s approach to student transition translates current intercultural communication concepts into inclusive workshop activities that are conducted in safe environments. This conceptualization has resulted in three wellbeing focused orientation workshops that prepare students to engage with both the academic expectations of the university and the rich intercultural environment they will encounter throughout their studies.

Drawing on their counselling skills and extensive experience working with UniSA’s diverse student population, the Counsellors constructed a range of activities featuring interactive learning spaces where all students are encouraged to participate. Intercultural dialogue was enhances by the inclusive use of Rank and exploring moments of intercultural tension to create deeper understanding between students. Feedback indicated that both international and local students were keenly involved in the mixed group experiences with most students feeling safe to contribute. Their extensive comments suggest students were stimulated by these experiences of intercultural dialogue. It appears that constructing opportunities for students to engage in mutually relevant discussions where all viewpoints can contribute new and valuable information can assist them to transcend cultural barriers and learn from one another. The positive responses to these experiences suggest this approach could potentially be used more broadly, such as in classroom settings for enhancing groupwork activities.

The data also highlighted the importance of involving local school leavers who have never been offered wellbeing workshops previously. This under represented cohort can benefit from greater understanding of university expectations as well as the opportunities to develop intercultural skills with peers from a diversity of cultural backgrounds. Shifting local student attitudes toward intercultural engagement from the
beginning of their studies supports the universities internationalisation policy to develop intercultural competency within all students.

Instead of international students needing to adopt local conventions, all students can be expected to interact together inclusively during their studies. Emphasising the importance of developing skills and attitudes for intercultural engagement from the very beginning of tertiary studies could open the way for further training and experimentation in intercultural communication during the practice-based learning components of programs.

Despite overall satisfaction with the workshops these findings also raise many questions about how best to meet commencing student needs in the future. These questions are best answered by the students themselves. The cohorts of mature age students and students under the age of 18 have been identified as warranting particular attention. This new approach to orientation could benefit from running focus groups with each of these cohorts to collect specific data about their needs.

The Counselling Team has welcomed this opportunity to contribute proactively to the wellbeing and ultimate retention and success of commencing students as well as the chance to contribute to new approaches in internationalisation at UniSA that promote inclusive attitudes to intercultural engagement.
References


Mikilewicz, S., 2008, ‘Study the past if you would define the future: An analysis of student comments from UniSA, core evaluation instruments’, Planning and Assurance Services, University of South Australia, Adelaide.


Article 1: Counselling concepts and cultural marginalisation: A case for interactive strategies in engagement and internationalisation
Counselling Concepts and Cultural Marginalisation: a case for interactive strategies in engagement and internationalisation

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Counsellor
Learning and Teaching Unit

Introduction

In line with the needs of a rapidly changing global workplace and the Review of Australian Higher Education (2008), UniSA is restructuring the Teaching and Learning framework in ways that emphasise internationalisation and student engagement.

Internationalisation at UniSA is envisaged as active involvement by all students and staff in opportunities for intercultural engagement (Høj 2008, p.18) Similarly, effective education through student engagement involves active learning opportunities, built around experience with diversity and cooperation among students in a supportive learning environment (Mikilewicz 2008, p.24)

Incorporating effective intercultural engagement into the educational framework presents an interesting challenge for us all to stretch beyond our sense of what is normal and acceptable and embrace our differences in meaningful ways. Greater understanding of the factors that influence communication across cultures requires examination of the important role that marginalisation plays in preventing some student cohorts from feeling included and/or contributing their perspectives in the classroom. There is indication to suggest that the marginalisation incurred through cultural and linguistic difference is having an increasingly adverse affect on educational outcomes for Non English Speaking Background (NESB) students at UniSA.

Counsellors at UniSA have significant insight into these issues. Not only are we trained and experienced in understanding and using intercultural communication techniques but we are in the unique position of working with and learning from the students who have most difficulty engaging in educational processes at UniSA.

It is in this context that I would like to introduce perspectives and practices of interculturality that address the vexing issue of marginalisation and the role that it plays in preventing intercultural engagement among students. In this paper I will outline current thinking and rationale about marginalisation and student engagement in higher education, explore concepts and strategies for inclusive communication practices that will enhance both student engagement and internationalisation and explain the ways that counselling concepts can contribute to this.

The impact of marginalisation on student engagement

In order to comprehend the extent of marginalisation it is necessary to first consider the breadth and scope of this issue.

Marginson (2008, p.8) describes marginalisation as “occur(ing) when groups lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society”. The complexities of marginalisation and its impact on student engagement in the higher education arena are rooted in the ethnocentric assumptions of prevailing higher education practice. (Mann,2001, p.9; Bodycott & Walker, 2000, p.92; Arkoudis, 2007, p.4, Marginson, 2008, p.12). In the following quotation
Marginson outlines how the Western higher education environment inadvertently marginalises international students:

First, the Western environ is established. A ring is drawn around practices, sites, and subjects, within which lies the space (‘international education’, ‘quality assured practices’, etc) that is marked out for organisation. Other cultural and educational practices, such as those in the home countries from which the students have come, are pushed outside of the circle and ignored. Second – within the circle agents bearing ‘difference’ are subordinated, by defining how far they must travel to achieve sameness by eliminating educational practices that are ‘deficient’, i.e. habits of learning that differ from those prevailing in the country of education. (2008. p.20)

Those who do not understand the rules of engagement in this environment have double the experience of marginalisation through this practice of favouring the inherently ethnocentric values within the academic approach. Firstly they are alienated from their own cultural norms and practices and secondly they do not know precisely how to operate within the academic context with which they are presented.

To further my effectiveness as a counsellor I have been researching the internal thought processes about intercultural interaction of local and international students. I conducted interviews with students regarding their personal experiences of intercultural interaction with staff and other students at UniSA. Both international and local students with intercultural experience acknowledged the marginalisation of those from other cultures. Through these discussions I became particularly aware of the ways that each student’s personal reaction to marginalisation affects their attitude toward study. The nature of the reactions varies from person to person, but these internalised responses can have a profound effect on study behaviours. For example one international student responded:

... somebody asking me to change and behaving in a more local manner in Australia, and to adhere to a set of rules that are true local, like to Adelaide even, then my first reaction is of resistance because I have never seen myself as an Adelaide citizen, ...and I don’t feel why I should because I am actually trying to, I’m trying to behave and act in a way that can take me further than Adelaide....

Others commented on their difficulties while speaking in class fearing they will make a mistake or be misunderstood. These internalised responses underline for the student the ways in which their approaches and beliefs are different and excluded.

Such responses are rarely voiced except in situations where students feel safe to share of themselves such as in counselling sessions. It is more common for people who are feeling marginalised to think that it is their responsibility to fit in, after all, it is easier to change (or hide) than challenge the established culture (Camastral, 2000). The above quote however highlights that silence should not be seen as meek acquiescence. I was surprised by how readily volunteers for this research acknowledged the deficit that marginalisation creates and stated they were eager to be interviewed in the hope of changing the status quo. For example several students commented that they hoped this research would encourage the kinds of changes that would facilitate interactions so that future students would not have to experience the loneliness and confusion that they had struggled through.

Counsellors at UniSA often support students through the Academic Review process which ensues as a result of unsuccessful engagement with academic learning. Through this process, counsellors gain first hand understanding of the personal experiences and the internal beliefs that impact academic performance and are very aware of the relationship between internal marginalisation and the
downward spiral to failure that can occur for students when they are unsuccessful in adopting the rules of engagement of this academic system. Internal marginalisation is a contributing factor for a significant number of those who fail to engage whether they be international students of local student with English as an additional language.

For many students their experiences of marginalisation are short lived as they successfully learn to make the necessary accommodations to operate in the dominant academic environment. A significant number of those who fail to make this transition, in particular students who come from culturally and linguistically differing backgrounds, fail because they take these internalised reactions personally and view their cultural differences as a personal inability to make the grade. These feelings of failure can have a disastrous impact not only upon their studies but also upon their self esteem and mental health.

Table 1 indicates there is a clear and increasing correlation between retention and success and belonging to the dominant culture for students at UniSA. The Non English Speaking Background (NESB) students include international and transnational students as well as local students with English as an additional language. In all instances the proportion of NESB students receiving notification letters is significantly higher than their proportion of the total student population. In the case of those receiving Notification 3 letters averaged over the Years 2005 – 2008, there is a 12.8 percentage point difference between their representation in the overall student body and their representation of Notification 3 recipients. What is more concerning is the fact that this trend toward failure for students with NESB backgrounds has increased markedly over the past four years for those receiving Notification 2 and Notification 3 letters.

<table>
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<td>NESB</td>
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<td>43.1</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>60.6</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>42.7</td>
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This data on its own does not provide evidence that the current approach to Academic Review is inappropriate, nor is that the point. It does suggest however, that those from Non English Speaking Background are not being adequately catered for.

When the impact of marginalisation is brought into the equation, it follows that no matter how accommodating and supportive we try to be towards students from differing backgrounds they can experience an unacknowledged, internalised negative reaction towards their studies. The fact that their previous experience and cultural differences are largely omitted or discounted in the academic
environment affects their ability to comprehend both the content of a course and what is expected of them. It also influences their ability to interact with staff and students alike.

For all students the marginalisation of differing cultural and personal histories means that they miss out on valuable opportunities to interact with others and grow through the inclusion of difference.

**Conceptual Shift**

“If our future is to be cosmopolitan then we need to develop forms of self-reflexivity about how our identities are historically constituted but socially dynamic, how our practices of the representations of the other reflect particular relations to power and how this understanding is necessary to develop cultural relations better informed by a moral discourse about the need for the people of the world to live together in a more harmonious manner. There are no principles more important to the task that many universities around the world have set themselves – to internationalise their curriculum.” (Rizvi, 2005, p.339)

Rizvi (2005, p.334) maintains that in order for ‘global interculturality’ to emerge it is necessary to move beyond the static view of one predominant social form being the appropriate style for communicating ideas and learning.

Marginson (2008, p.39) also calls for a conceptual shift towards inclusivity when he states there is ‘a growing need for psychological techniques that are more adept in cultural relations and multiple agent trajectories.’ Central to this shift is recognition that the complexity of differences present in the classroom must be incorporated in meaningful ways. If all students are to identify with their educative experiences the diversity of cultural and social backgrounds, with their rich variety of perspectives and interpretations, must be integral to academic engagement, relationships, internationalisation and global citizenship.

UniSA has been working toward this conceptual shift at both the policy and the teaching level for some years. Embedding the Graduate Qualities of interactive capacity, internationalisation and community responsibility into the curriculum has created a tangible mechanism by which to raise awareness of the need for personal responsibility in reflecting upon and working with diversity in all walks of life. This expectation of personal responsibility is a sound foundation upon which inclusive strategies can evolve.

Personal, historically constituted identities influence understanding of both the content and the process of learning in every classroom. Social interaction is one of the most natural and powerful vehicles for personal development and engagement. Our sense of identity, belonging and self esteem are generated through the process of socialisation. This process occurs throughout life, in every social context as the mechanism by which we continually re-evaluate and reorient our own cultural identity and beliefs, attitudes and behaviours toward others. An important premise for operating in heterogeneous shared spaces is that each of us will interpret the world from our own perspective but that ‘our problems and solutions are interconnected and transcend national boundaries’. (Rizvi, 2005, p.332)

Through creating opportunities for the sharing of differences and personal reflection, both students and staff could utilize interactions with others as a vehicle for developing their cultural identities and intercultural competence. (Rizvi, 2005, p.331; Crichton 2004, p.4; Pyvis & Chapman, cited in Marginson, 2008, p.34). Three different but synergistic approaches to intercultural interaction that have bearing on all stages of the learning process are explored below. These are the strength-based
approach employed by the UniSA counselling team, contact zones as they are utilised in academic settings and the concept of deep democracy that underpins Process Oriented conflict resolution.

1. From a deficit-based to a strengths-based perspective

If the goal of student engagement and internationalisation throughout UniSA is to create effective educational experiences for all student cohorts, inclusivity is a concept of crucial importance. Efficacy relies upon the ability to engage meaningfully with people in ways that embrace both their cultural differences and personal complexities.

A strengths-based approach for working with students, as utilised by the counselling team, aims to minimise the marginalisation in interactions resultant from cultural and power differences. It involves strategies for engaging which acknowledge and seek to understand all perspectives. Building upon this understanding, discussions about differences can occur and students can develop relevant beliefs and attitudes about how their views relate to others in the university context. This inclusive approach is a key factor in working successfully with the diverse range of cultural backgrounds that characterise the student population at UniSA to facilitate the creation of meaningful changes for all students.

The strategic conceptual shift involved moves from a deficit-based approach to a strengths-based orientation. This is a pivotal re-orientation away from seeing those who are not adopting our Western academic modality as problematic, to ‘the collaborative discovery of existing strengths and resources relevant to the client’s [student’s] goals.” (Murphy, 1999, p.370).

Marginson’s characterisation of the Western academic environ is consistent with a deficit-based approach to difference. Deficit-based environments are characterised as settings in which

- the social context is closed to outside influence, implying that certain norms are valued more than others (Marginson, 2008, p.17);
- focus is placed on “issues” that must be “solved” (Murphy, 1999, p.370);
- difference is viewed as ‘less than’ (i.e. those that don’t fit accepted parameters must make the adjustment to fit in (Bodycoatt & Walker, cited in Crichton, 2004, p.3));
- examples of diversity are seen as illustrative not educative in order to reinforce the dominant cultural perspective. (Crichton, 2004, p.4) and
- the problem is viewed as belonging to the individual who doesn’t fit in, not the result of marginalisation.

A strengths-based perspective on the other hand, is characterised by

- recognition of the importance of the unique perspectives and capabilities contributed by all students to the discussion, task or problem; (Murphy, 1999, p.370);
- development of understanding through collaborative engagement with differing perspectives; (ibid);
- rules of communication ‘across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect’ (Pratt, 1990, p.11);
- production of knowledge of self and others alongside the development of resilience through the use of relationships that build upon personal experience and insight in the creation of professional perspectives (Deverson, 2003, p.65)

A strengths-based approach involves respect for both the individual perspectives and the unique outcome that is made possible through engaging with these diverse perspectives. Surowiecki (2004,
p.28) argues that struggling with the ideas generated through meaningful differences in cultural orientation, conceptual understanding and cognitive processing creates more innovative and effective approaches to problem solving. True diversity, not just minor variations on the same opinion, increases the possibility for a broader exploration of concepts and insights, leading to more innovative, relevant and nuanced solutions. He cites the approach taken by scientists worldwide who collaborated their differing approaches to solve the problem of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus in 2004 as an instance of using scientific collaboration that built upon differences to bring about a far swifter and more effective solution to the SARS epidemic than could ever be possible for any one scientific team to do on their own.

The Counselling team at UniSA has found the use of a strength-based perspective in the counselling context to be particularly effective because of the need to work quickly and specifically with clients from a large range of cultural and social backgrounds. Using this perspective, counsellors aim to strengthen the student’s resilience by acknowledging the positives of who they are and the capacities that have got them to this point in their life and their studies. They gain knowledge of their perspective relative to expectations of the university which enables them to have more realistic insight into the efficacy of their actions. Students and counsellors develop a plan collaboratively that best fits with their conceptualisation of current circumstances and the creation of manageable goals. Through this process students are able to increase their capacity to take agency in their lives, and become more resilient for tackling new and different challenges. Table 1 outlines the personal development that can emerge from such a process.

**Conceptual Elements of a Strength-Based Approach**

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<th>Strengths</th>
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<th>Agency</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
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<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>• perspective</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Develop competencies</td>
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<td>• preferences</td>
<td>broader context from</td>
<td>cognition/response to</td>
<td>transferrable to other</td>
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<tr>
<td>• capabilities</td>
<td>their terms</td>
<td>broader context</td>
<td>situations</td>
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The strengths-based approach provides insight for the development of future interactive opportunities in the academic learning environment. Many of the simple techniques can be employed in the classroom. Skills such as active listening, reflexivity and sharing appropriately, along with understanding the effect of power and rank and cultural difference on communication, could be taught to students as basic tools for exploring interculturality and increasing global interactive competency.

**2. Contact Zones**

The concept of contact zones, in line with the strength based perspective, incorporates the experience, perspective and capabilities that each student brings with them into this encounter. (Nelson, 1996; Rodero, 1995, cited in Murphy, 1999, p.365).

First developed by Mary Louise Pratt, this concept provides a framework for heterogeneous interaction that is currently being applied in universities. She defines contact zones as ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.’ (Pratt, 1990, p.2) They are spaces where students see themselves, their personal histories and insights, as part of educational experiences engendering a sense of belonging within them (Pratt, 1990, p.9) These educational experiences have a dialectic approach in which change results from the interplay of opposite tendencies.

Contact zones are possible when academic staff understand the importance of developing an egalitarian teaching space where culture and power differences can coexist. Setting up contact zones in the classroom requires understanding of the ways power traditionally excludes some students and a
readiness to create spaces where all views can be explored and challenged including one’s own. Facilitators are required to adopt the position of the ‘committed outsider’ (Pratt, 2004, p.2) and stretch their perceptions of what is acceptable knowledge. Van Slyck (1997, p.150) emphasises the importance of asking the right questions in order to enlarge understanding rather than confirm one perspective. Each person’s historically and culturally developed truth is valid and participants explore ideas, opinions and experiences with an attitude of reciprocity in which “provisional community [is] created across lines of difference through a pursuit of truth that (does) not need to produce consensus in order to succeed.” (Pratt, 2004, p.4) Personal reflexivity is embedded into opportunities for reflection in class assignment tasks.

Contact zones can be dynamic, confronting and enriching. With the inclusion of many perspectives comes the gamut of emotional reactions, whether participants are actively speaking or merely listening, everyone’s view will become only one of many perspectives, contesting everyone’s beliefs about what is the truth. This challenges participants to see beyond their cultural identity, a challenge that is simultaneously exhilarating, scary and real. (Pratt 1990, p.10) Facilitators are responsible for maintaining the tensions between perspectives which creates an active learning experience as well as outlining the professional expectations relevant as the context for the discussion.

3. Deep Democracy

Process Oriented Psychology has developed a similar, perhaps more universally applicable approach to inclusive group interaction through the concept of deep democracy.

“Deep democracy involves helping the various parts of a group to come forward and interact with each other, including those parts that have been silenced or seen as disturbing. Out of the interaction between all of these parts, conflicts can be resolved and a deeper sense of community created.” (Diamond, 2004, p.11)

The principle of deep democracy recognises the intrinsic value of all perspectives; they do not have to make sense in everybody’s mind but will in some and are therefore equally valid and important. It therefore creates a framework for juxtaposing seemingly incongruent contributions as part of an interconnected global entity. In so doing, it provides a means of encapsulating the contributions that arise in heterogeneous interactions that could otherwise be dismissed as irrelevant and illogical.

Although a full description of the conceptual framework that supports the theory of deep democracy is beyond the scope of this article, Process Oriented Psychology has developed a psychological framework broad enough to encompass cultural and social difference that could be useful for creating interactive spaces (that is, contact zones) in which everyone’s experience is validated. (Mindell, 1993)

In concert with the expression of views encouraged through contact zones, Process Oriented group work recognises the importance of these types of interaction for changing personal understanding. Personal interaction with others who represent differing views, styles and feelings requires engagement of the whole person. The many and varied reactions that arise within live encounters are core to the socialisation processes that create internal change for participants. This cannot be gained in the same way through reading about difference or engaging in discourse analysis. Interpersonal communication involves a rich interplay between the message, as presented verbally, and the non-verbal elements, which can be both intended and unintended, conveyed through signals in the context, intonation and physical gesturing both sent and received (Diamond, 1996, p.15). In fact human beings are designed to learn through interaction. The human neurophysiology is wired to learn the rules of
interaction from other people, starting with that very first relationship with our mothers. (Chilton Pearce, 1992)

An example at UniSA

The counselling team have begun exploring ways to promote inclusive interaction in culturally heterogeneous groups. During SP 2 Orientation 2009 the counselling team presented workshops to explore ways in which students can find out about what is expected of them in the academic process and network with other new students. In these workshops interaction is encouraged through interactive exercises where students gather in groups of 6-10. Attempts are made to ensure that groups are a mix of local students with students from rural, interstate or international. As an icebreaker on Magill Campus, an opportunity was given for those from out of town to ask questions of local students about Adelaide and Australia. This simple exercise reduced the power differences between individuals by providing a chance for those who are marginalised by their lack of familiarity with the local context to engage in conversations that are meaningful for them and driven by them.

Local students are given the message that they are expected to engage with difference at university through encountering this opportunity to meet and interact with students from different backgrounds in one of their first classroom activities at university.

While debriefing to the large group after this icebreaking exercise, one student from China volunteered her feelings about the experience of being the only Chinese person in a sea of white people. She explained how she felt frightened and nervous and found it difficult to be herself. The students in her small group expressed surprise that someone could find them frightening. This recognition that interaction across culture can have unexpected consequences and making sense of their own reactions to it, will now become part of these student’s socialisation process.

It is an illustration of how students become aware of the differing internal processes that occur in each participant in a heterogeneous contact zone. Firstly the local students have the opportunity to consider how their rank in the group impacts others in unintended (sometimes scary) ways. Secondly through the inclusion of such personal insights they are given the chance to reflect on how they are both similar and different from people with another cultural background and respond with the inclusion of this knowledge.

The role of staff in creating a new approach to engagement and internationalisation

In the field of higher education the move toward internationalisation has made many academic staff increasingly aware of their responsibility to include those from other cultures. (Arkoudis, 2007, p.6)

Awareness of the need for inclusion is not the same as awareness of how the system operates, and one’s own choices in the classroom perpetuate marginalisation. Change can occur if those with the power to make these changes in the classroom recognise this as their responsibility and choose to do things differently.

To understand the mechanisms by which marginalisation occurs, requires greater acknowledgement of the ways in which those with power in education use it. Mindell (1995, p.49 ) points out the tendency for those with rank in any situation to have difficulty recognising how their decisions and behaviours exclude others. While the imperative to ready our graduates with globally responsive professional capabilities necessitates an awareness of the impact of marginalisation and the inclusion of differing perspectives, the complexity of the issues involved remains a challenge to many staff
It is little wonder considering what is required to embed a conceptual shift toward inclusivity as described above.

Several factors militate against changing established practices in the classroom. The pedagogic style for academic institutions has developed over centuries; it bears the weight of tradition and academic staff have a vested interest to fit into this status quo. Academics have a mandate to teach relevant and up to date course content in a rapidly changing global environment. It is understandable that focusing on the process by which this occurs is a secondary consideration. Grappling with the complexities inherent within a diverse student population is in itself a difficult issue; for example how can course coordinators, lecturers and tutors make adequate allowances for varying degrees of language proficiency and its impact on conceptual understanding, differing educational backgrounds and their implied expectations of students, as well as the impact that differing cultural backgrounds can have on views and beliefs?

It stands to reason therefore that until recently there has been little movement toward challenging this status quo. Now there is a new imperative. The implementation of UniSA’s Teaching and Learning Framework with its emphasis on the changing spaces for education, experiential learning and growing focus on embedding internationalisation into the curriculum (Høj, 2008:12) is a major departure from traditional academic approaches that incorporates intercultural development from the policy level down.

Developing inclusive educative practices will require academic staff to develop an awareness of the impact of marginalisation and use their rank in the development and delivery of a range of strategies that embrace the knowledges, experiences and histories of a heterogeneous student group. Inclusive interactive experiences are challenging, as they require staff to stretch their personal capacities and stay open to those uncomfortable moments of dissent or disagreement, knowing they harbour the kernels of difference. Pratt (1990, p.10) reflects this when she says, “one had to work in the knowledge that whatever one said was going to be systematically reviewed in radically heterogeneous ways that we were neither able nor entitled to prescribe”.

Counselling insight into personal reactions and use of effective strategies for engagement could contribute to greater understanding of marginalisation and the creation of inclusive classroom methodologies. A feedback loop developed between the counsellors and the academic staff could enable greater synergy between counselling knowledge and classroom activities for the benefit of students, academic staff and counsellors alike. Tackling these issues proactively may assist in reducing the contribution that marginalisation plays in unsatisfactory progress.

Conclusion

Global mobility will increasingly demand from professionals the capacity to appreciate and incorporate difference. Their professional perspectives and communication will need to reflect their ability to engage effectively with people from culturally differing orientations in ways that utilise the diversity present as an essential element of professional problem solving UniSA’s long term focus on internationalisation, communication and personal responsibility along with embedding strategies for engagement into the curriculum, provides an environment in which to consider introducing student engagement through inclusive interaction.

Recognising the impact of marginalisation on personal self esteem, relationships and even academic performance is a necessary step towards changing the orientation from one pervaded by upholding the dominant perspective, to one where the importance of understanding and incorporating the range of
perspectives present in the classroom is recognised as a foundation upon which interculturally competent professional relationships can develop. The approaches of a strengths-based perspective, contact zones and deep democracy provide some concepts and strategies suitable for creating inclusive intercultural spaces within the curriculum.

Adding this spoke to the internationalisation hub would incorporate practical and measurable competencies that go far beyond merely addressing students’ experiences of marginalisation. This significant shift underpins an approach to internationalisation that creates a dialectical approach to change and learning through the inclusion of personal histories and cultural identities. It creates an environment in which all students can recognise that their opinions and experiences can be heard with regard to their professional context in an environment in which they belong and have meaning.

References:

Arkoudis, S., 2007, Teaching International Students: Strategies to enhance learning, Centre for study of higher education, University of Melbourne.


Mikilewicz, S., April 2008, ‘Study the past if you would define the future: An analysis of student comments from UniSA, core evaluation instruments’. Planning and Assurance Services, UniSA.


Project 2: Cultural Understanding and Inclusive Communication

Project 2 contextualises notions of culture and intercultural communication dynamics within the contemporary landscape of intercultural communication theory and student experience. Contemporary theorists such as Bhabha (1990), Pratt (1999), Mindell (2002), Breinig and Lösch, (2006) and Kramsch (2011) bring valuable perspectives about the conditions and spaces in which respectful intercultural engagement can occur. But how can such spaces be created in the classroom?

Report 2: Building intercultural competence: from student experiences to classroom strategies.

This report analyses the lived experiences of intercultural engagement for eight UniSA students of mixed cultural backgrounds. These lived experiences are coupled with intercultural concepts to create interactive class activities for helping students explore and develop together their intercultural communication skills.


Submitted to Intercultural Education (Journal of the International Association of Intercultural Education) March 2015.

Diana Collett
Report 2: A relational approach to building intercultural competence: from student experience to classroom strategies

Report produced for Dean Teaching and Learning ITEE, UniSA

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&
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About this report

This report outlines the development of classroom activities promoting intercultural competence within university students. In line with the New Horizons strategic direction to promote intercultural engagement among UniSA students and staff (Høj 2008:18), an innovative, relational approach to intercultural engagement is developing, based on understanding the students’ own experiences of intercultural communication on campus. The report introduces lecturers and tutors to classroom activities and promotes a deeper understanding about the specific design features and why they are important.

The work has been approached from a student counsellor’s perspective of student engagement and draws on the insights of both local and international students’ about intercultural communication patterns commonly observed on campus. Relationship building and personal change are facilitated by providing students with greater understanding of the differing experiences students have of the same interaction on campus and how these experiences are associated with differences in Rank, or personal power, in the interaction.

Since 2010 this approach to developing intercultural competence trained student mentors, informed LTU staff in professional development workshops and been embedded into undergraduate Engineering courses. Interest has grown steadily among academic and professional staff during this time, prompting the need to provide more detailed explanations about the approach.

In 2013 this report was initiated to provide a web-based explanation of this relational approach. This report outlines the rationale behind and processes used for developing activities, how these activities can be implemented in the classroom and findings arising from the students’ experiences. The account is now part of the Professional Communication Skills Guide website, a resource created for all staff explaining how intercultural skill development can be embedded into courses through pairing with relevant classroom activities.

The development, design, implementation and findings about critical aspects of intercultural relationship building are explored in relation to four areas of interest to
students. The four areas include cultural siloing, fear of engaging with difference, strategies for connecting in intercultural conversations and working in groups. Background material informing these activities combines leading concepts and practices in cultural studies and intercultural competency with the findings from eight interviews about intercultural interaction I conducted with local and international students in 2008.

These interviewees did not see intercultural interactions as isolated or anomalous incidents, but integral to their experience of belonging in a university community. Relationship building lies at the heart of this approach which focuses on incorporating personal differences, instead of the common practice of ignoring them. For instance, the interviewees offered strategies for bridging the cultural divide which have been incorporated into an activity for stimulating reflection among peers about their own intercultural engagement. Students also learn to understand the effect of inherent power dynamics, as described in the student interviews, and to observe their own interactions for signs of including or excluding others.

This report illustrates a central tenet for effective intercultural communication - aware that different people view the same interaction from different perspectives. Using a relational approach encourages students to recognise how ‘Rank’ affects communication and to use their Rank in interactions to include others.

Developing a relational approach to intercultural competency requires a shift in focus from understanding differences to creating meaningful connections that incorporate these differences. The findings reported on here indicate that such shifts can be supported through:

- creating clear expectations that students will work inclusively with their culturally differing peers
- expanding understanding about intercultural engagement using relevant threshold concept
- sharing successful intercultural communication strategies used by other students
- creating safe environments for students to explore their differences.
1 Introduction

It is common for local and international students to have difficulties interacting in Australian universities (McCausland 2010). Over the years I have listened to countless tales about the impact of miscommunication on student learning experiences (See Appendix 1 – A story of intercultural confusion). Despite UniSA’s good intentions (Høj 2008), intercultural communication is not intuitive (Bergan, 2009) and both local and international students are currently losing valuable opportunities to make connections that share their diverse insights and understandings. A major incentive for helping students to improve their intercultural connections is the advantages they will gain in the global marketplace. Skilled communication and effective collaboration are in the top four qualities sought by graduate employers (High Flyers 2011). The onus is therefore on universities to equip graduates with professional communication skills that enhance their intercultural competency.

This report outlines the development of structured classroom activities for teaching students effective communication to bridge cultural differences. The aim is to change the way students interact with culturally differing peers. The activities are based on a student counsellor’s belief that lasting change in personal behaviours and attitudes requires a deeper understanding of what actually happens between people when they communicate.

The initiatives respond to the vision of intercultural engagement contained in the New Horizons strategic directions document: ‘Internationalisation also means providing opportunities for intercultural engagement on campus and offering international perspectives and opportunities for all our domestic students and staff.’ (Høj 2008:18). To achieve this, an innovative, relational approach to intercultural engagement based on understanding the students’ own experiences of intercultural communication on campus is emerging.

Intercultural engagement presents students with a number of challenges. Coming face to face with people who differ culturally and express alternative opinions and approaches to life can be uncomfortable and challenging for both students and educators (Stephen & Stephen 1985, Gudykunst 1998). Intercultural interactions are inevitably situations where alternative worldviews are exposed and unquestioned assumptions confronted. These experiences can be fearful and discomforting for some, while others try to move beyond such feelings to make meaningful connections.
The incentive for this work comes from my experience as a student counsellor for over ten years, focusing on international student issues at UniSA. The student voices quoted throughout come from interviews conducted with both local and international students. These interviews explored common communication dynamics that currently occur on campus along with the strategies used by interviewees to create connections across cultural differences. The students spoke of how ‘Rank’, or personal power, is used in shaping intercultural interactions on campus with long term effects on relationship building. These interviews inspired the development of classroom activities for exploring personal communication and alternative ways to interact.

Between 2009 and 2014 this material has been used repeatedly in a range of contexts including mentor trainings, undergraduate and post graduate orientations, and for embedding teambuilding initiatives into undergraduate Engineering and Communication Information Systems (CIS) programs. Interest has grown steadily among academic and professional staff with an expanding number of course coordinators in the Division of Information Technology, Engineering and the Environment (ITEE) embedding this material in their courses from 3 in 2011 to 9 in 2014. In 2013, in conjunction with the Dean Teaching and Learning ITEE, it was decided that a deeper understanding of this relational approach would benefit both the academics involved in these courses and other interested staff. Hence this account provides background information for the Professional Communication Skills Guide, a training website currently being developed for the academic staff embedding intercultural communication into engineering courses in the Division of ITEE at UniSA.

2 Intercultural engagement on campus

Our natural communication style will not always create meaningful connections with people from other cultures (Kachru & Nelson 2001). University students experience this and tend to mix with people from their own socio-cultural backgrounds. The 2010 Australian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE, ACER 2010) reported 48% of students either never or rarely engage with students from different ethnic groups. Despite all good intentions, promoting intercultural engagement has proven difficult for
universities nationally with 73% university students believing their institution does not do enough to encourage engagement across differences (ACER 2010). At UniSA, 62% of students feel only mildly encouraged to socialise with culturally differing peers and only 6% choose to explore intercultural opportunities through studying abroad (McCausland 2010).

Closer inspection of the 2010 Australian Survey of Student Experience reveals however that a significant minority of students do engage with peers from other cultures. 21% have conversations with ethnically differing students very often and 23% frequently mix with or develop intercultural friendships (ACER 2010). Intercultural understanding develops incidentally for about half the students (49%) who believed their university experiences significantly improved their understanding of other racial and ethnic groups (ibid). These figures indicate there is interest among students to engage across differences but something prevents many students from doing so.

While proximity can promote understanding, it does not teach most students how to effectively interact with culturally differing peers. Educators have acknowledged this fact for over a decade (Leask 2010), but finding ways to improve intercultural competence on campus has proven difficult.

2.1 This study

My starting point in this work was to determine if local students use their university experiences to engage with culturally differing peers and if this helped them develop their capacity in interculturality. Interculturality is the ongoing interpretive practice of negotiating cultural meanings through social engagement (Otten 2009). When individuals have a personal capacity for interculturality they possess the attitudes and skills that enable them to create effective intercultural relationships. This form of intercultural competence extends beyond understanding differences to being able to relate with them. Kramsch (2011:355) describes this intercultural competence as the ability to process differences in cultural understanding and come to a ‘Third place’, making new meanings that lie beyond the duality of differing perspectives. I recognised that globally competitive graduates will possess a capacity for interculturality when they can create new perspectives from and within their intercultural encounters.
A second objective was to explore how students develop their intercultural competence without support from the university. I believed a lot could be learned from the 20% of students who can engage across differences. Understanding how these students interact could provide valuable insight into peer relationships and promote intercultural understanding in the classroom.

To gain an understanding of how students experience intercultural engagement, I conducted in-depth interviews with eight local and international student volunteers as part of a study undertaken in 2008 by the School of Communication and Information Systems (CIS). Even among this small snapshot of students, a broad range of cultural affiliations and intercultural experience emerge (outlined in Appendix 2.2: The interviewees). Participants included local students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, ‘Anglo’ Australians growing up overseas, international students who had studied in other countries before coming to Australia, and others with commencing students with little intercultural experience. Some interviewees actively engaged in intercultural endeavours during their studies while others were openly hesitant. Some were resourceful, inventive and mindful in their analysis of situations, finding answers to their impasses where others found similar situations insurmountable. There was large variation in the participant’s capacity for interculturality and intercultural competence.

2.2 Learning from students

Much of the research data about intercultural communication informing Australian university practices examines the lack of engagement between culturally differing students. Data is typically collected through student satisfaction surveys like university-based Course Evaluation Instruments (CEIs) and the Australian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) which provide tick box options with prescribed choices and optional spaces for brief comments. The data is skewed by the cultural orientation of the surveyors providing these options (Kalsheuer 2009). Typically students from non-European backgrounds are seen as having a deficit (Marginson 2008). The options supplied cannot accurately capture their cultural perspectives or psychological orientations (Chuang 2003).

These surveys cannot capture the detailed insight into interactive behaviours required to create understanding about differing interpretations of communication that is needed if
we are going to move beyond seeing international students as the only ones who need to change (Marginson 2008). Information is needed about the nature of intercultural exchanges on campus and how these exchanges impact students’ educational outcomes. Student views about intercultural communication need to be recognised for their complexity (Chuang 2003) which involves hearing the students’ experiences and closely examining the communication dynamics they describe. In particular, little is known about local student experiences (Dunne 2008). Hearing how local students perceive their interactions will provide a fuller picture of the complex dynamics that occur in intercultural communication (Holstein & Gubrium 2005). I have therefore chosen to explore the lived experiences of both local and international students.

The cultural differences between researcher and interviewee can influence whether or not students are heard on their own terms. Tanno and Jandt (1994) point out that learning from the lived experiences of culturally differing students requires an inclusive approach with the researcher perceiving ‘the others in multicultural research … as being co-owners and co-producers of knowledge …’ (1994:39).

There is currently much conjecture but no ground rules for dealing with cultural bias in research. In response to my own cultural biases and mainstream orientation, I therefore asked myself – ‘how can I look beyond my Anglo-Saxon assumptions to view differences on their own terms?’ My approach has been twofold: 1) to develop a working knowledge of my own perspectives and the assumptions associated with these views, and 2) to use client-centred interview techniques developed as a counsellor to explore what lies beyond cultural assumptions. To lessen the researcher/participant gap I have adopted an open inquisitive and non-judgmental attitude toward the personal interpretations of interviewees, viewing them as co-creators of knowledge (Tanno & Yandt 1994).

The specific interview techniques have been informed by my training in Process Oriented Psychology. This client-centred model is based in the concept of ‘deep democracy’ which sees each person’s perspective as inherently right for them and respects cultural differences as variations in the ways individuals meet their needs and desires (Mindell 2002:12). When interviewing individuals, this means exploring the interviewee’s perspective for the distinctions and strengths they bring to the topic.
These interviews explored the way students engage with one another on campus and what they learnt from these experiences. I looked for the inherent strengths, capacities and resilience of each person by focusing on what is happening and what is possible (see Article 1). These in-depth interviews (Denzin 1989) captured detailed or thick descriptions (Geertz 1973) of how the students perceived their encounters. Each 60–90 minute, semi-structured discussion allowed enough time for the interviewee to consider their inner thoughts and feelings and talk about elements significant for them (Holstein & Gubrium 2005). This deeper exploration, uncovers insights and personal beliefs, eliciting what Saukko calls 'emotional and embodied forms of knowledge and understanding' (2005:348). Each interviewee’s comments were then deconstructed to expose ‘the underlying meanings, biases, and preconceptions’ that structure their relationships (Denzin 1994:185).

The types of interactions discussed in the interviews are essentially between students who are strangers, attempting to form effective working relationships across their differences. The stories they told were all different. All described both the subtle and overt behaviours occurring between students who do not share a common culture – some explained how they made good connections, while others described the barriers they encountered. Most participants joined the study to improve intercultural connections on campus. The students’ comments were then transformed into classroom strategies to improve university practices in intercultural engagement.

3 From student experience to classroom strategy

This section explains how the students’ experiences became classroom strategies to address intercultural engagement. The pedagogic principles behind these activities are outlined, followed by an analysis of top four themes emerging from the interviews and the activities they informed.

**Guiding principles from the students** I analysed the interviewee’s approaches to intercultural engagement and found five guiding principles they had in common when creating effective intercultural connections. Each of these students:
• is motivated to interact meaningfully
• uses a non-judgmental approach
• actively seeks out opportunities to talk with people from other cultures
• finds creative solutions when understanding each other is difficult
• reflects on behaviours, attitudes and perceptions in themselves and others.

These principles have been used to inform the student centred classroom activities, thereby co-creating new knowledge with the students.

Current thinking in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL, Trigwell 2013) has also been applied. Aspects of this approach that have been consistently used are: teaching style, threshold concepts, classroom discussions, feedback, and a systematic structured approach.

**Teaching style** A student-centred teaching approach best meets the needs of individual students where there is large variation in intercultural experience. Where personal change is required, students exhibit shifts in understanding and behaviour in highly personalised ways and timeframes, depending upon their ‘level of prior knowledge, experience, and disciplinary background’ (Meyer 2012:9). Encouraging students to explore communication strategies they find comfortable is a student-centred approach to developing skills.

**Threshold concepts** Relevant and timely threshold concepts about intercultural communication are introduced to help students move beyond common place interactive practices that reinforce the dominance of local students. These concepts are specifically chosen to challenge beliefs and attitudes about communicating across difference. A threshold concept ‘not only allows the learner to grasp important new disciplinary material, but it also reshapes how the learner sees other aspects of the world’ (King & Felton 2012:5). These concepts offer doorways to new knowledge which is transformative, often counter-intuitive and troublesome in nature, because it conflicts with long held assumptions (ibid). Once understood, threshold concepts instigate ‘shifts in epistemological understanding’ (King & Felton 2012: 6) that are irreversible.

Threshold concepts about inclusive communication are used to motivate personal change and inform non-judgmental. The threshold concepts illustrated in this report are explained in detail in Appendix 2.3: ‘Why’ and ‘How’ threshold concepts.
**Classroom discussions** Facilitating discussions about differing perspectives is a means of including the diversity present in a group. Laurillard’s Conversational Framework is employed for these discussions. This framework operates as an iterative dialogue which is discursive, adaptive, interactive and reflective. Issues can be described and explored at all levels including related tasks and actions (Laurillard 2002). The learning process associated with a Conversational Framework is described in Figure 1.

![The Conversational Framework](image)

**Fig. 1 The Conversational Framework (Laurillard 2002:87)**

**Feedback** Feedback about all initiatives was provided through short one minute evaluations (Angelo & Cross 1993) either at the time of delivery or, where applicable, repeatedly across a course. In some engineering courses, reflective learning journals also provide valuable insight into how students implement their learning and develop over time. This feedback has informed an Action Research model for shaping future activities.

**Systematic structured approach** Changing culturally determined patterns of communication is neither simple nor quick. In the classroom it is best delivered through a structured, iterative approach which provides safety for learners and teachers to move beyond their comfort zones. Respect for and inclusion of the views and needs of the students and academic staff in the classroom is core to the success of this approach.
For the students, this involves:

- creating a safe, respectful learning environment through structured activities for exploring common student experiences of communication dynamics
- providing ongoing opportunities for students to experiment and develop their skills together in group activities during tutorials
- incorporating structured reflective exercises, ideally assessable, for students to integrate their experiences and feedback insights to educators.

The staff were supported through numerous staff development activities. Respectful collaboration with teaching staff involves ongoing discussion and support. Working relationships for embedding professional communication within a course are based on:

- waiting to be invited to embed material into a course
- preliminary discussions about the method and rationale of the proposed initiatives
- addressing problematic issues identified by course staff
- inviting comment on lesson plans prior to class presentation and adapting accordingly
- embracing feedback from lecturers and tutors throughout the study period and discussing the collated student data in a timely manner
- co-designing any necessary changes for future presentations.

Sections 3.1–3.4 explore the four themes that emerged from the interviews and have subsequently been shaped into classroom interventions. These are:

1. addressing intercultural separatism in the classroom
2. addressing student fear and hesitancy
3. How do students connect?
4. making groupwork work.

Each of these themes follows a progression from student experience to classroom strategy under the following headings:

**Student voices:** examines student comments about each topic.
Classroom strategies: explores rationale and development of classroom activities which relate to these issues.

Examples of current practice: explores the implementation of these activities with feedback from students and staff.

3.1 Addressing intercultural separatism in the classroom

Marginson (2008:7) describes intercultural dynamics occurring on campus in terms of the students from the dominant cultural group ‘segregate’, while students from non-dominant cultural groupings ‘separate’. Dunne (2008:149) describes culturally similar peers socialising together as a ‘natural, ineluctable, gravitation toward what is perceived to be culturally familiar’. The tendency for students to mix with likeminded people prevents them from developing the necessary skills and attitudes to interact with culturally differing peers. When forced to do so intercultural interactions in the classroom are often described as ‘superficial and sparse’ (Smart in Kelly 2008:6). This type of interaction was also noted by the interviewees whose descriptions of cultural separatism provide insight into how and why cultural divides occur.

3.1.1 Student voices: Cultural siloing

a. Sticking together

... something that I have not enjoyed so much about Australia is the fact that ... the groups are separated. People coming from Asia just hang around with other people from Asia ... and people from Australia stick with people from Australia, and in a country that takes pride in being multicultural, it’s rather conflicting to me. (Juan, a master’s student from Mexico who studied in USA and Switzerland before coming to Australia)

Juan described cultural siloing as a response to the behaviour of ‘the Australians’. In fact, all the participants referred to ‘the Australians’ or local students as being responsible for this segregation.

Steve, himself an Australian who grew up overseas, explained that ‘local students’ even sanctioned which topics and styles of communication were acceptable:

... [in Singapore] you could break into Singaporean English or just stay with your own British English which you’d been taught – that was all acceptable, whereas you came to Australia and it wasn’t literally acceptable around friends to speak with a British English accent or an American influenced accent, or anything like [that]. You just sort of had to adapt to the Australian way of speaking ...
This sanctioning was also experienced by Bakhir, a first year undergraduate from Pakistan, who found locals were only willing to listen if contributions conformed to local communication conventions:

... they [Australians] try to judge you if you are good ..., it’s difficult to get into the Australian work culture as Australians are properly culture community ... first they judge, and then they probably might invite you make friendship with you.

This narrow focus of the local students made Vlorna feel excluded after she first arrived from Kosovo.

That’s why I felt a bit like I’m not part of this culture, even though I’m living here, I felt like you don’t belong in here, one thing. Even you try so hard but in that moment I felt that I’m not talking to understanding people.

Little is written about the effect of international students’ perceptions of local student behaviours on their own communication. I therefore asked interviewees about the signals of exclusion they received from local students. They mentioned a range of behaviours including the use of cutting remarks, dismissive glances, raised eyebrows and actively ignoring the comments of ‘outsiders’. The international students interpreted these behaviours as a lack of understanding about and sensitivity toward cultural variances.

Interestingly Sean, a local first year local student from the dominant culture, also experiences other local students as proscriptive. He spoke of preferring his relationship with international students, in particular his high school friendship with a Chinese boy:

... People here [Australians] generally look at what you look like, how you act, that sort of thing. He’s [international student] more interested in becoming friends with people who help him and ... he can help them. It doesn’t matter what you wear ... because he has different expectations ... I don’t feel as much pressure to impress myself and impress everyone else ... I just get the feeling that it doesn’t matter what I wear, it won’t make a difference.

b. Spiraling misperceptions

These dynamics are particularly pertinent to intercultural groupwork experiences when conversations between ‘locals’ can inhibit or exclude other group members. In response, international interviewees perceived ‘Australians’ as aloof, judgmental, defensive, dismissive and unwilling to change. While Rohit saw Australians as ‘reserved’, Juan saw them as saying one thing and meaning another:
When somebody is having a problem with you in Australia, it may not come out as straightforward as “Oh, this is a problem. Oh look, I am upset at this”, but it may come out as “It’s alright” or “No worries” but then after a few instances you realise that it was never really no worries, it was actually, yes, a worry.

For Juan ‘no worries’ was a way of preventing further discussion:

... it seems like there is a way of doing things in here that you’re supposed to work within a framework, ... if you write something, you are expected to express it in a certain way. If you introduce a topic you are expected to introduce it in a certain way. If you conclude something, you are expected to conclude it in a certain way.

The international interviewees talked of becoming reserved and withdrawn as a consequence; they did not want to disturb the status quo, preferring instead to withhold their contribution. Their reserve is understandable when seen as a response to the messages they were receiving from locals. However, this non-engagement only reinforced local student dominance in conversations.

Local students have their own perceptions of international student silences. Steve explained how the silences fuel a belief by locals that international students are incapable or deficient, which further reinforces the cultural divide:

Yeah, and even if [local students] don’t think [international students] need to adapt, they think maybe [international students] are limited and they just expect that [international students] are limited and leave them at that.

In turn, some international students form negative impressions of locals cementing an atmosphere of non-engagement across cultural lines:

... after you’ve had enough experiences, you start having these conditionings towards most people who are living in Australia, especially if they are Australians ... Yeah, you start to ... generalise it. (Juan)

Cultural siloing flourishes when such impressions remain uncontested. Impressions gained during superficial interactions between culturally differing peers linger as a palimpsest: ‘… what has been excluded can never be erased, but only overwritten by what has been selected. And the traces of the repressed are therefore present and the repressed alternatives can be reconstructed …’ (Breinig & Lösch 2006:110). The repressed information is never discussed or clarified but inhabits the space between students in the form of judgements and stereotypes held about one another. Deeper connections between intercultural groups are needed to move beyond these impressions and create effective engagement on campus.
3.1.2 Classroom strategy: Changing attitudes toward cultural difference

Individuals use a range of perceptual constructs to filter and understand the information they receive (Nuener 2012). These perceptual constructs work well when information is familiar but less so when information is unfamiliar. In intercultural situations, our perceptual constructs cannot easily interpret the information associated with cultural differences. Typically when information does not fit into familiar categories we either reinterpret it to fit our constructs, ignore it or isolate it as ‘other’ (2012:29). Each of these reinterpretations creates a boundary which prevents us from listening to those who are culturally different on their own terms.

In their broadest sense, cultural boundaries can be categorised ‘as lines of demarcation, as unbridgeable gaps, as contact zones or as spaces in between’ (Breinig & Lösch 2006:112). The educators’ task is to help students move from seeing cultural boundaries as ‘unbridgeable gaps’ to creating ‘spaces in between’ where students explore their potential for connecting. These spaces in-between provide opportunities for negotiating diversity, encouraging students to reflect upon their perceptual constructs and cultural assumptions.

Addressing intercultural separatism is an important first step toward creating better intercultural connections in the classroom. In these examples, teachers and students discuss their experiences of intercultural separation. When students are encouraged to recognise and name the awkwardness and misperceptions commonly experienced in intercultural situations they realise they indeed share common reactions. These conversations normalise feelings of exclusion and give students permission to talk about that which is difficult between them which leads to deeper understanding.

3.1.3 Examples

Classroom networking exercises shaped cultural understanding between students by contesting their judgments and stereotypes (see Example 1). Here differing experiences of the same situation are examined, challenging the students’ cultural perceptions. A Conversational Framework is used to explore the students’ personal insights and assists them in considering their similarities and cultural differences. The strategic use of reflective questions with all group members enables students to gain a deeper understanding about others, challenging their previous attitudes and normalising the practice of discussing differing viewpoints.
Example 1 – First impressions

During an Orientation Workshop in 2009, the counselling team facilitated small group activities for commencing students to network with one another. In culturally mixed groups of 6–10, the students from out of town were encouraged to ask questions of local students about living in Adelaide. This simple exercise cuts across local domination by letting newcomers establish the agenda in the conversation. Local students are given the message that at University they are expected to engage respectfully with students they have less in common with.

In the following debrief, a Chinese girl explained her feelings about being the only Chinese in a sea of white people. She said she was frightened and nervous and found it difficult to be herself. The local students in her small group expressed surprise that someone found them frightening. The contrasting responses were explored more deeply with these students candidly explaining their impressions and feelings. Their conversation enabled the rest of the class to gain an understanding of how such attitudes arise. The Chinese student made culturally differing assumptions a tangible reality for the whole class and the facilitator created a safe environment in which these reactions could be explored by asking other students how they would feel in a similar situation. Building on these personal reflections, the facilitator asked all students to reflect on how differing attitudes might affect communication within groups. Students were then encouraged to hold an inclusive attitude throughout their studies, being mindful that within all groups there will be differing perceptions of shared experiences and all viewpoints are valid in a university context.

Example 2 describes a facilitated discussion for shifting perceptions about cultural boundaries and the unfamiliar. Threshold concepts about inclusive communication and accommodating differences have been introduced to create understanding about intercultural dynamics. The conversational framework encourages students to explore and reflect on the personal relevance of these strategies.
Example 2 – Exploring intercultural dynamics on campus

Attitudes to cultural differences were explored during an introductory session for students in the Global Experience Program in 2011. Global Experience promotes professional skill development through a range of intercultural projects and attracts students from many backgrounds, both local and international.

During the lecture segment I used the interviewees’ comments to outline common misinterpretations that occur between students from different cultures. I described the signals that prompted miscommunication, how these were interpreted and the effect for both local students and newcomers.

In the conversation that followed students shared their own campus experiences, exploring different thoughts and behaviours. To include the diversity present I asked for differing opinions, encouraging the students’ awareness of other perspectives by exploring more deeply alternative views. Alternative perspective challenge previously held perceptual constructs generalisations and stereotypes.

As the conversation progressed, the group discussed situations where international students chose not to interact with people from their own cultural or religious backgrounds in Australia. Some international students said they deliberately seek local friendships to learn about Australian culture while others want to avoid the social behaviours and gossip of their cultural counterparts. In response some local students openly expressed surprise in people preferring intercultural relationships. In this structured activity they felt safe enough to ask probing questions about such choices.

Within a few minutes international students were sharing their feelings about sojourning in a foreign land and their sense of loneliness from not belonging to any one group. This was an awkward moment but the students were encouraged to listen and simply hear these feelings without judgment or the need to change the subject. Other students expressed empathy for their situation.

A deeper appreciation for the personal journeys undertaken by foreign students arose and local students gained an understanding of the struggles and difficulties international students have in navigating the unfamiliar in a new country.

3.2 Addressing student fear and hesitancy

Guirdham (2011) states that interpreting cultural messages is associated with personal inner beliefs and expectation of difference. Those who are fearful and mistrusting see intercultural relationships as risky and hold back to avoid devastating outcomes (Jones 2003).

3.2.1 Student voices: What stops local students from engaging?

The interviews explored local student perspectives in some depth, providing valuable insights into the problem of exclusion. More timid local students gave some clues about why students hold back and the perceptual shifts needed for them to interact effectively.

Juan described intercultural relating as generally fearful:
... there is this inability to break the ice between the two groups, for one of them to take the step and talk with the other cultural group. When you look into the way we work, it’s so hard to approach somebody who is in a group when you don’t feel like you belong to that group. It is like a vicious circle because these groups have already been created, so for someone who wants to exit their comfort zone ... There’s this risk that probably your pride is going to be hurt, or probably you’re going to fail, or probably people are going to look at you like you’re a freak. I guess a part of you knows that you don’t really understand each other yet.

Similarly Kane, a local first year undergraduate, named fear of conflict and tension as the cause of his hesitation:

... yeah that tension, at least I suppose clashes of cultures and how many wars have happened in history just because of that. When it gets a bit strained, that’s sort of where it starts – from miscommunication, and next thing you know another war is going.

He then described how fear coloured his perception of an international student in his group’s behaviours:

Kane: ... I don’t know if it was intentional or not, but ... one of the students just like used their middle finger as they are sort of pointing to stuff, and ... here in our culture ... it’s more an offensive sign ... [I thought] ... “Do they know that ...?”

Diana: ... What happened inside of you when that happened?

Kane: ... yeah, I just sort of took a bit of a step back mentally, and it was like “Hang on, what’s going on here?” but ... I ... kept it professional and this is what ... you’re supposed to do. That’s how I done it.

Diana: So those little things you actually do notice, and how does that change your approach to them?

Kane: ... I suppose a bit more standoff-ish ... wouldn’t have been as willing to just go up and say good-day ...

3.2.2 Classroom strategy: Moving beyond the comfort zone

Classroom experiences where students move beyond the known and engage across their differences are an effective means of developing a capacity for interculturality (Richeson & Shelton 2007; Plaut 2010). Yet fearful students, like Kane, are unlikely to volunteer for such experiences (Jones 2003), even in situations where these activities are contextually relevant and educationally important. The design of activities that foster intercultural engagement and interculturality therefore needs to consider these internal barriers (Fischer 2011).
It is important to establish a safe, supportive environment where hesitant students feel comfortable to engage. This requires careful planning, structuring and sequencing of activities.

From the perspective of reducing fear, safe and supportive environments are created using the following elements:

- Motivating students to move beyond their fears by helping them understand why they need to engage with people who are different and the significant gains this can provide. Students are motivated to change their attitudes and behaviours when they understand the broader context, ‘why’ they should change and ‘how’ to go about it. Providing relevant information about the big picture better equips students to move beyond personal worldviews and change their interactive behaviours.
- Facilitating conversations that model inclusive student/teacher engagement across Rank differences. This style of interacting shifts the dynamics from traditional classroom interactions, with academics dominating, to an egalitarian sharing of and reflecting upon all contributions. This respectful dialogue models the type of interaction expected of students in their intercultural exchanges with peers (Bergan 2009). Individuals are encouraged to share only what they feel comfortable to share in a public setting.
- Introducing threshold concepts about inclusive communication present alternative explanations about common communication dynamics relevant to the teaching context. Learning journal entries show that students gain greater understanding about communication dynamics with which to observe and adapt their own communication skills.
- Creating and facilitating active learning opportunities where culturally differing students share their experiences and insights about differences. This creates an expectation that all students will engage and discuss differences, encouraging hesitant students to move outside their comfort zones and join with their peers.

3.2.3 Examples

Example 3 illustrates how the concept of Bonding and Bridging Relationships is used to assist students explore their comfort zones while undertaking internships in local workplaces. Students also explore the cultural shifts they are expected to make in the
workplace. The students assist each other’s transition to the workplace through sharing their insights.

**Example 3 – Bonding and bridging: Developing interculturality**

In Study Period 2, 2013 the concepts of bonding and bridging relationships and associated communication techniques were introduced to final year Masters in Engineering students in the ‘Learning in the Workplace’ (LIW) course. After an explanation of bonding and bridging concepts, students explored their own experiences of bonding and bridging relationships using a personal sociogram (see Appendix 2.3 ‘How’ and ‘Why’ threshold concepts).

The following group discussions explored different qualities of bonding and bridging relationships, why bridging relationships are necessary in the workplace and useful attitudes for developing bridging relationships. One student said he was able to engage in bridging relationships because he knew his own strengths and was confident in his abilities. Another felt his sense of curiosity and valuing diversity motivated him to engage. A third admitted that conversing in the workplace was hard for him but he would work on his English pronunciation to be better understood.

The sociogram created a safe environment for students to learn about their own social networking. Students shared only that which they were comfortable to share in a public setting and their reflections triggered lively class discussions. The concept of ‘Third Space’ was then introduced as a process by which cultural identity shifts when people discuss cultural differences.

The subsequent discussion explored how intercultural communication skills help in developing shared meaning in the workplace. Students identified instances when their perceptions of others had changed from previously held cultural assumptions to understanding an individual’s behaviour. They talked about instances in the workplace where negotiating culturally differing approaches to a problem had yielded more effective solutions.

After the Study Period 5 session students nominated which new concepts they found valuable. 78% students included bonding and bridging relationship and 88% students named the concept of interculturality. Exploring the concepts of bonding and bridging relationships from a ‘Third’ place helped these students to understand their own attitudes and appreciate the need for interculturality as a professional skill. Comments in response to the evaluation question: ‘the most useful thing I have learned from the workshop was …’ were mostly reflexive:

- Communication and difference. In my culture people may think difference is not good, but now I know difference does not mean less or bad. What I need is communication.
- How to communicate with outer world and how to do my self-assessment
- To think about my own personal experiences that I had
- Good attitudes are the best way to work in a team and it is important to have an open mind in order to understand others
- How to ‘deal’ with different cultures and how knowing your own attitudes can help this.
3.3 How do students connect?

While a hesitancy to engage with peers from other cultures is commonly acknowledged, there are a many students who do engage or would be willing to do so, if only they knew how. Several interviewees wanted to be part of the study expressly to share their approaches to intercultural relationship building with other students. This section explores the nature of their intercultural connections and the strategies they use to create them.

3.3.1 Student voices: benefits from and adaptations in intercultural relations

a. What students gain from intercultural relationships

The interviewees spoke of their intercultural friendships as different from those they have with students from their own cultural background. These connections emerged out of their endeavours to communicate across cultures, not in spite of them:

“I feel more comfortable with [international students] sometimes than I would with people I’ve grown up with in Australia, just because we’ve shared so many experiences and can communicate better than anyone else ... you all become very advanced in expressing yourselves, even if the other person can’t understand anything but a few words ... in the same native language as you. You just know how to express yourself as plainly as possible and use what they communicate to you with and ... what you think you can express to them, with them, and that just becomes a very, a very natural thing ...” (Steve)

They were quick to point out that successful relating is less about using sophisticated communication skills and more about the willingness to try and keep trying. They mentioned attitudes like acceptance, curiosity and patience as the ‘glue’ that holds these connections while they try to understand one another. Their non-judgmental attitudes create the comfort needed to go beyond familiar communication patterns and experiment creatively together.

They allow enough time for sharing ideas and making meaningful connections that include a deeper appreciation of other perspectives. In their conversations students express personal feelings, explore differences, laugh at mistakes, work through misunderstandings and find common ground. Trust is built out of finding creative solutions and working through differences, creating a very real sense of mutual acceptance and achievement. Lasting friendships form through a process of patience, respect and appreciation where nothing was taken for granted.
b. When locals adapt their English usage

All the interviewees spoke of adapting their English usage style to make themselves understood. They wanted non-native English users to comprehend their message and used clear, precise expressions that were not simplistic or patronising. They gauged understanding and achieved shared understanding by watching for feedback, listening attentively and noticing visual cues from the other person. These adaptations are consistent with findings of Lustig and Koester (2000).

Sean, a local first year student commented:

*I don’t think I actually used simpler words to make sure he understood ... I used the same words but then I just had to explain myself again and again, which helped him to learn what the words meant I guess ... it wasn’t annoying to keep explaining things, I was fine with that ...*

When local students adapt their style, students new to Australia are encouraged to also try. Vlorna found this immensely helpful:

... you need people that understands you even though you make mistakes while we're talking, there are some ... Australian people, I can say they're really good with foreigners, they understand even if you don’t know the way of telling people do, they do understand what you’re talking, ... and that makes me feeling really good, and then feel like “OK, I’m doing OK”, ... but there are some people you talks with them with the same way ... and they’re just going to say “Sorry, excuse me, what?” and then you feel “God, I’m never ever going to learn English”.

Intercultural connections rely heavily on interrogating feedback to find out which strategies are effective. This functional usage of English involves deciphering sentence construction and non-verbal signals in order to adapt one’s language (Kachru & Nelson 2001). When watching for feedback, the interviewees looked for signs of comfort and comprehension versus confusion and exclusion:

... probably silence is the biggest indicator that someone hasn’t understood ... silence and also just sort of concerned looks that they ... don’t understand ... they tend to sort of wait for something to become clear. They don’t like to intrude and ask someone to repeat something ... (Steve)

When they noticed signals of discomfort, the interviewees asked clarifying questions and kept focusing on the point until understanding was achieved.

Intercultural competence is both complex and simple (Poglia et al. 2009). Creating meaningful connections requires perseverance and a willingness to grapple with
concepts that can be difficult to understand. Juan’s approach was to adjust to superficial differences in the search for deeper similarities:

... knowing how to be in harmony with the local culture, ... takes some skill and it’s not instant, the way that you know how to react ... the basis we are all the same and the basis in our communication is still the same.

3.3.2 Classroom activity: Sharing strategies that work

An activity has been developed out of the techniques the interviewees described for creating effective connections. Each interviewee spoke about having their own distinct repertoire from which they chose when and how to use a technique. Between them the interviewees mentioned thirty seven different strategies which I collated into the ‘Strategies for Inclusive Communication’ Handout (see Appendix 2.3, p. 9). This handout is a means of co-creating knowledge and understanding with the students. It literally fulfils the desire of the interviewees to share their approaches with other students.

The freedom to choose which strategies to use is essential. In comparing strategy use between interviewees, I found as few as 25% of strategies were used by all interviewees. The personality of the speaker is reflected in their choice of strategy and students need to feel comfortable to express their personalities when they interact. When teaching intercultural communication, it is important to empower students to use the strategies that feel natural for them. Prescribing particular strategies can alienate the students who are not yet willing to attempt them.

3.3.3 Example

Example 4 illustrates how the handout is used to help student mentors recognise their own interactive strengths.
Example 4 – Training student mentors

At UniSA peer mentors welcome commencing students during orientation. Both local and international students are given intercultural training to help them connect quickly with new students. In this exercise the ‘Strategies for Inclusive Communication Handout’ (Appendix 2.3) is given to each mentor for review. A group discussion follows in which mentors are asked to share their thoughts about these strategies and any others they personally find effective. Their capacity for intercultural communication becomes evident during these discussions.

The facilitator calls for a range of viewpoints and experiences from the group. By including less dominant viewpoints the group comes to realise there are no right or wrong ways to making a connection and it is safe to share their thoughts. Everyone learns from each other’s approach.

Conversations are often lively with frank and thoughtful comments. For instance, one mentor asked how is it possible to avoid using an Australian accent. In response, there were a number of comments including ‘speak like a news-reader on television’ and ‘enunciate all t’s and d’s’.

Comments on the minute evaluation in the Feb 2010 workshop included:

*The brainstorming highlighted the value of diversity within groups.*

*While we were brainstorming about interacting with people from other cultures, we got to hear people’s point of view and some of the people in the workshop had disagreements with each other which was an eye opener towards how people may have different opinions about culture.*

3.4 Making groupwork work

Improving team collaboration is important in preparing students for graduate employability. In today’s highly competitive workplaces employers are seeking graduates who can demonstrate effective group collaboration from the outset (Ernst & Young 2012). Like many universities, UniSA addresses these workplace requirements through embedding groupwork into the curriculum in most courses. However, simply providing opportunities for students to work together does not guarantee they will develop relevant team skills and experience. The skills and attitudes needed in intercultural groupwork are not intuitive and require training and development for graduates to skillfully collaborate with diversity.

3.4.1 Student voices: Group disconnect

All the interviewees spoke of experiencing cultural separatismin their groupwork. Steve described these dynamics best:

... if we’re working on a project and we have to ... read through a whole bunch of information and put forward suggestions and points and eventually draft a whole thing, and submit a report ... the Australians would be all for defining roles and they’re quite happy to explain and well help explain to the international students ...
and listen to them whenever they have something to say, but they don’t really engage them, they don’t expect that they have something to say, and they almost always suggest that the international student doesn’t contribute to ... the actual production of the report.

This scenario is seen as the norm in classrooms. Several interviewees were aware of these divisions but did not know how to change them. With all his intercultural experience, Steve felt powerless to influence other locals in his groups:

*I suppose I just didn’t think there was too much of a means. If I communicated it to my lecturer or ... to the university, then they probably wouldn’t have given me much of a voice in terms of explaining the actual situation and explaining ... what I felt needed to be changed ... I don’t even have ideas how it can be changed really.*

In competitive classroom environments, it is common for groups to be led by local students who understand the academic expectations (Breining & Lösch 2006). The students genuinely believe they are including newcomers by showing them what is expected. However, this approach reinforces their own agenda to the exclusion of alternative contributions (for more detailed analysis see Report 3 on Rank and inclusive communication).

Steve however recognised and appreciated the value of international student contributions:

*... but what I’ve found is not only do [international students] have a very good idea of what’s going on because they’ve had the time to go through that reading and had the time to get their head around it, their suggestions are invaluable... Because they tend to have much more creative inputs ... In terms of writing up a final document and actually assisting in the hard writing of ... an essay for example, while their English may not be perfect, the way they write is actually very, very much similar to ours. It’s still structured because they’ve obviously learnt proper written communication. There are still points, analysis and discussion of various solutions and then a final recommendation at the end and summaries and conclusions ... they actually have all that capability to input but they’re often not given the chance.*

The potential to learn from one another’s differences is lost when only the voices from the dominant culture are taken seriously and several interviewees lamented this loss. Rohit, a Master’s student from India, advocates learning from difference and recommends teachers take a more active role in promoting inclusion:

*There should be some strategy in university that if you are making groups, there should be people from a different culture. That would improve your thinking*
because if you are from the same country your mentality will be the same..., we take donkey as a low animal but in some countries a donkey is a sign of freedom. The same thing [is] different from both the cultures, how can you use that?

However, trying to change the communication style in groups is difficult because it feels unnatural. Local students believe they have a mandate to dominate conversations because they inherently understand local conventions (Goffman 1959). This makes it difficult to interrupt the flow of conversations between culturally similar students.

3.4.2 Classroom strategy: Changing group dynamics together

Course educators are unsure how to tackle ineffective group dynamics and without support cannot be expected to introduce collaborative models of groupwork that challenge this unacknowledged cultural dominance. The support and training – now being offered – helps staff to understand how groups can become more inclusive using awareness of Rank and how to impacts group dynamics.

Changing group dynamics in the classroom requires a carefully sequenced series of activities that are delivered in environments where students feel safe to engage. These activities introduce threshold concepts about inclusive communication using a conversational framework. This multifaceted approach incrementally builds student capacity and insight across an entire course. A range of activities are woven into the curriculum across the entire study period, including: group discussions, team agreements, peer assessment and reflective journals (see Table 1).

Table 1: Course Embedding Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Embedding Model</th>
<th>Team Formation Weeks 1-3</th>
<th>Team Building Weeks 4 - 12</th>
<th>Evaluation Weeks 1, 7 &amp; 12 or 1 &amp; 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icebreakers, group discussions, Rank concepts, collective team agreements</td>
<td>Collective team agreement review, peer assessment, introduction of inclusive communication concepts – e.g. constructive feedback</td>
<td>Minute evaluations, learning journals, wiki’s blogs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Embedding teambuilding into courses means working closely with lecturers and tutors and collaborating throughout the study period. Lecturers and tutors learn new concepts
and approaches which, in turn, they are expected to teach to students. Throughout the course, they reinforce threshold concepts while monitoring and supporting groups to develop new communication strategies. This close collaboration with the course staff, described under Staff Development in Section 3, ensures the activities offered are both relevant and effective.

### 3.4.3 Examples

Examples 5 and 6 of first and second year activities illustrate the process by which teamwork capacity can be built incrementally across a program. In the first example (Example 5), the Leadership Styles Activity is introduced in Tutorial 2 Engineering Design and Innovation (EDI). It explores how different ways of using Rank impact team performance. This activity is followed by negotiating a Collective Team Agreement that formulates the basis upon which these teams operate.

The second example takes place in a second year course – Systems Analysis, Design & Project Management (SADPM). This activity takes place in Week 7 after teams have experience together. It introduces threshold concepts about group dynamics and students explore their own teamwork experiences, discussing any difficult situations they have encountered.
Example 5 – Exploring leadership styles in groups

An activity about group leadership was introduced into Tutorial 2 Engineering Design & Innovation (EDI) in response to the Course Coordinator’s concern about some teams choosing to remain leaderless in the preceding course. The newly formed teams were each given the task of exploring one of three different leadership styles – Leader as Dominator, Leader as Facilitator and Leaderless Group – using a series of reflective questions designed to structure their investigation (see Appendix 2.4 Leadership Styles Activity). During their small group discussions, students discussed the benefits and difficulties of each style and drew upon personal experience from the previous study period. In the class debrief that followed, groups reported on their discussions of a particular leadership style, displaying their capacity for reflection and insight about team dynamics.

Each team was then asked to consider which leadership style would best suit the members of their current team, based on the communication dynamics they observed in the previous discussion. This discussion prepared the teams for negotiating a Collective Team Agreement that would form the basis of their collaboration throughout the course.

Comments to the question: Something I have learned from the first two tutorials … (minute evaluation Tut 2 SP5 2013) included:

- I worked in a leaderless group last study period and it went well although we had twice as many meetings and had to discuss every decision.
- The type of team members I will have to work with and their personalities so that I can work out how to work well in a team with them.
- Working in teams is fundamental and it is important to work harmoniously to get things happening.
- Really helping me to start my life of studying.

The tutors feedback indicated students engaged more thoughtfully and inclusively when developing their new Collective Agreements after the discussion about leadership styles:

- The leadership discussion was an excellent activity to lead in to this. And students thoughtfully filled this in. (Tutor A Eval Sheet, EDI SP5, 2013)
- Good topic before team agreement. (Tutor B Eval Sheet, EDI SP5, 2013)

In Week 8 the course coordinator emailed the following feedback about team development:

- You’ll be happy to know the students did really well in their practice presentations this week, some groups reflected on their learning’s from the Minor Project (even though they didn’t need to) and many groups were making connections with prior learning. A few groups also asked about doing a team agreement for the Major Project. (Elizabeth Smith, CC, Pers. Com A, 18-09-13)

When reporting to the Dean Teaching and Learning about 2013 Professional Communication Skill development for first year engineers, the Course Coordinator wrote:

1. I have noticed a significant shift in students’ attitudes. Prior CEI feedback illustrated how frustrated students were with their teamwork experience, however since Pat and Diana’s involvement and the introduction of SPARK this opinion has shifted dramatically. They feel supported with their teamwork experience and see each teamwork experience as an opportunity to learn.
2. They are trying different team organisation and leadership styles. (Smith, pers. com A, 18-10-13)
4 Conclusion

The core of intercultural communication is recognising that different people view the same experience from different perspectives. There is no ‘one way’ or ‘right way’ to perceive the world. We each have our own way. Even though there are no ‘golden pathways’ for grappling with diversity (Saguy et al. 2008:12), students can develop intercultural competencies and a capacity for interculturality when they can successfully navigate these perceptual differences (Richeson & Shelton 2007).

This report illustrates how helping students to recognise perceptual differences and develop skills for negotiating intercultural differences can contribute to graduate professional skill development. The inclusive approach to intercultural education described here requires a shift in focus from understanding about differences to creating meaningful connections that incorporate differences. This relational approach focusses on developing within students the skills and attitudes to work with differences, not
inspite of them. This approach incorporates an understanding the effect of Rank on student communication and how issues like cultural separation, fear of conflict, and inadequate communication skills are assisted by using one’s personal Rank inclusively.

Inclusive relationship building and intercultural understanding are promoted through embedding threshold concepts about intercultural communication into classroom activities that students recognise as relevant to their chosen area of study. The examples in this report support the following findings about developing intercultural competencies among students:

- When introduced in a safe manner students are open to exploring and understanding cultural differences among their peers (see Example 2)
- Students become more inclusive toward other group members when they can understand how some voices are excluded from conversations (see Examples 1 & 6)
- The introduction of threshold concepts about intercultural communication enables student to expand their intercultural understanding (see Examples 3 & 5)
- Students become motivated to engage across cultural differences when they are aware of the successful strategies employed by their peers (see Example 4)
- Teaching students strategies for inclusive communication improves their ability to work in culturally mixed groups (see Examples 5 & 6).

In addition course educators receive intensive academic development and ongoing close collaboration which supports their own development as intercultural educators. Tutors and lecturers involved in these courses over several years freely acknowledge this development and some now use this approach in other courses (Sim, pers.com 3/9/2013).

Currently intercultural educators are seeking to address lasting worldwide changes in society (Neuner 2012). Placing relationships at the centre of the educative process promotes respectful interacting well suited to a social landscape increasingly characterised by cultural interdependence. It is therefore timely for universities to consider developing intercultural competencies within graduates using relational approaches that can meet the needs of culturally interdependent societies.
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‘Third Space’ pedagogy in intercultural education: Building intercultural competence through inclusive teamwork

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This paper explores how ‘Third Space’ and associated concepts can inform intercultural teambuilding activities that promote the competencies of interculturality and inclusivity. It also discusses the benefits and complexities of embedding intercultural education into discipline specific courses in order to prepare graduates for global workplaces. In this new approach to intercultural education, Third Space encounters about leadership and collaboration are introduced to promote intercultural engagement and transform attitudes toward difference within teams. The students in a core first year engineering course at an Australian university learned to observe and discuss power dynamics and experiment with inclusive communication in teams across the semester. Student comments and journal entries indicated increased capacity for interculturality and the practice of globally relevant inclusive communication skills during team negotiations.

Keywords: Rank, power dynamics, Third Space, intercultural education, intercultural competence, Process Oriented Psychology

Introduction
Preparing interculturally competent graduates is important for the Higher Education sector. Rapid social, technological and economic change, with increasing global mobility and internet connectivity, mean graduates now operate in societies with a global focus (Lewis 2011), bringing together people from diverse backgrounds. Engaging with diversity requires skills and the will to interact with ‘intercultural awareness and cultural adaptability’ (Campbell 2000). This paper contributes to the discussion about building this type of intercultural capacity into higher education. It outlines and evidences how relevant skills and attitudes are being developed using an approach based on ‘Third Space’ concepts (Bhabha 1990). These concepts are salient to
intercultural skill-building because they explain processes for exploring and negotiating cultural differences on their own terms.

For some years now educators have been calling for universities to include intercultural capacity building in their internationalisation processes (Rizvi 2004, Bourn 2011, Huber in Neuner 2012), but to date, changes are mainly to be found in policy documents and curriculum outlines (Spiro 2014). Cultivating intercultural awareness and cultural adaptability involves developing a capacity for interculturality as part of the scholarly activities of all students (Huber 2012, Anderson 2013). At this time, however, little evidence suggests university students engage in the types of intercultural experiences that build this capacity (Meerwald 2013). Non-engagement between culturally differing students is a common campus experience (Spiro 2014) and exposure to cultural difference does not guarantee increased intercultural understanding (Saguy, Dovidio & Pratto 2008). The educational challenge for universities is how to create interculturally sensitive pedagogy that prepares students to think globally and interact considerately in culturally diverse situations.

Intercultural competence is defined here as the ability to process differences in cultural understanding and come to a ‘Third Place’, making new meanings that lie beyond the duality of differing perspectives (Kramsch 2011, 355). To process differences in cultural understandings individuals need to be willing to understand differences and able to engage with differing cultural styles. Enhancing intercultural competence in students requires both internal and inter-personal adjustments to develop their capacity in both interculturality and inclusivity. Interculturality is defined here as the ongoing interpretive practice of negotiating cultural meanings through social engagement (Otten 2009), and in this context, inclusivity is an awareness of and active engagement with all students in a group.

This research paper sheds light on the salient but complex processes of translating theoretical understandings about engaging with diversity into educational practices that develop intercultural competence. It is rare to find examples of interculturally sensitive teaching practices being incorporated into core professional courses, but this is happening at University of South Australia (UniSA) to prepare engineering graduates for collaborating in culturally mixed environments. The paper discusses how teambuilding activities were embedded into a core first year engineering course to support intercultural engagement and transform attitudes toward difference. Using the premise that cultural understanding is negotiated through social interaction (Beavan & Borghetti 2015), it explores how classroom activities can harness the cultural diversity present among students to build understanding about the ‘realities of cultural globalisation’ (Rizvi 2013, 18).

The first section contextualizes the importance of intercultural competence in contemporary engineering practice and issues associated with embedding intercultural education into engineering courses at UniSA. A discussion of the contribution to pedagogical design made by Third Space discourse and Process Oriented Psychology concepts about power in groups follows. The pragmatics of translating theory into practice and evaluating intercultural competence are
explained in the sections on Third Space pedagogy in action and Evaluation. The findings about personal changes in attitudes and behaviours associated with developing intercultural competence are then discussed.

**Developing intercultural competence in Engineering**

Engineers today are responding to significant shifts in the global context, including such challenges as ‘climate change, globalisation and inequality’ (Bourne & Neil 2008, 4). Engineers are now required to operate in complex circumstances ‘… creating and participating in responsible and effective professional communities’ (Sheppard, Macatangay, Colby et al. 2009, 8). Graduates working with the complex social and cultural realities of global societies require the skills to equitably and inclusively interact with a wide range of diverse stakeholders. They need to establish cultural co-existence among these stakeholders for creating mutually acceptable and sustainable outcomes.

In response to this need, a scaffolded, context-specific and globally-oriented approach to teambuilding, known as *Learning for Change (LfC)* has been developed at UniSA, introducing staff and students to communication concepts and activities, which feature the use of ‘Rank’, or personal power, in intercultural communication practice (Mindell, 1992). This approach places intercultural education at the heart of education. In collaboration with course educators, team-based class-room activities have been developed, using Third Space team discussions for negotiating and achieving collective goals. Interculturally appropriate learning material has been woven strategically and incrementally throughout undergraduate engineering courses to correspond with student maturity levels, embedding globally relevant intercultural communication skills across programs.

Teaching such skills to engineering students has its own demands. Sheppard et al. (2009, 8) argue that developing this professional expertise is an ‘iterative process’, best achieved when embedded alongside the delivery of core course knowledge. However many engineering educators do not support the pedagogic and curriculum changes necessary to achieve this (Sheppard et al. 2009).

Despite internationalisation rhetoric, incorporating intercultural education into discipline-specific pedagogy is not intuitive (Huber 2012). Interculturally speaking, university classrooms are complex learning environments that ‘… bring together learners at very different stages of development …’ (Neuner 2012, 26). Each student can be at ‘… various development stages for different intercultural aspects …’ (ibid). The *LfC* approach employs student-centered learning in an attempt to accommodate for this individual variation. Student-centred learning encourages students to adopt ‘a flexible, versatile, self-regulated way of thinking and learning’ (Vermunt & Verschaffel 2000, 217). Another critical consideration is the personal transformative process required to develop intercultural competence (Boud & Walker 1998). The *LfC* approach aims to support these change processes by creating and maintaining safe environments that promote
effective engagement between students and encouraging them to reflect upon these experiences (ibid). The long-term benefits of this approach include internal transformative processes that develop reflective judgment (Mezirow 2003) and lead to the acceptance of difference and change (Kelly 2008).

Another challenge for globally minded engineering educators is that intercultural competence is generally viewed as a means by which effective teamwork can develop, not a dedicated focus in its own right. Classroom activities promoting intercultural competence must also achieve teambuilding objectives. An important design feature for effective intercultural learning is the embedding of interactive experiences that feature structured intercultural dialogue (Spiro 2014). The Council of Europe’s notion of ‘interculturalism’ is relevant here because it emphasises ‘the interactive dimension of groups, and their capacity to build common projects, to assume shared responsibilities and to create common identities …’ (in Neuner 2012, 24). However, while interculturalism places interactions at the centre of building intercultural capacity, it does not explain how students can grapple with and learn from the awkwardness arising when cultural differences are not easily understood. In the LfC approach Third Space concepts have been explored to inform the design of safe environments where students can venture beyond their comfort zones, critically analyse their differences and experiment with team members in intercultural collaboration.

This paper describes an example of embedding the Learning for Change approach into a first year core undergraduate engineering course about design and innovation in 2013. The course coordinator was both keen to develop intercultural competence and concerned about demonstrated student antipathy toward teambuilding (Kelly & Collett 2013). This course coordinator was receptive to embedding intercultural education into the curriculum to benefit from the rich source of cultural diversity found within the student cohort (Meerwald 2013). Interrogating constructions of difference is viewed favourably in engineering education as a means of drawing from many sources to foster creativity and sustainable solutions within collaborations. Facilitating these interactions, however, required constructing safe environments where students could learn tolerance for the awkward moments that can occur when cultural differences intersect.

Intercultural competence was fostered within teams of 4 - 6 students working together to build two assessable construction projects across a 13 week semester. Professional skill development occurred throughout the course, with the first two tutorials devoted to teamwork foundations. Concepts about leadership styles, power dynamics in groups and inclusive communication were introduced using Third Space interactive learning activities and trained tutors continued supporting the teams’ development throughout the semester. Personal change was supported and
observed through the students’ reflective journal entries about teamwork experiences (scaffolded with guiding questions and contributed to course assessment).

**Third Space encounters**

This section discusses the concepts informing the pedagogical design. It outlines the role of Third Space discourse in creating constructive intercultural encounters where students discuss *Learning for Change* material in classroom activities. Third Space literature does not discuss how suitable environments for such encounters can be created, nor how intercultural sensitivity can be sustained for the duration of project-based collaborations. These issues have been addressed by introducing the Process Oriented Psychology concepts of ‘Rank’ and ‘Deep Democracy’ (Mindell, 1992) and Kramsch’s ‘Third Culture’ (1993) as useful conceptual frameworks for sustaining intercultural engagement in groups.

The concept of Third Space emphasises the importance of negotiating cultural differences for achieving shared understanding. ‘It is the “inter”- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in between space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture’ (Bhabha 1994, 39). Third Space encounters locate intercultural experiences in a spatial context outside each person’s known and familiar worldview, enabling the cultural discontinuities that occur between people to be better understood (Soja 2009). This notion shifts away from traditional multicultural approaches that exoticise difference and intercultural communication theories that view culture as unconscious and immutable aspects of personal identity (Kalscheuer 2009). It encourages people to think beyond their subjective narratives, focusing instead on ‘those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences’ (Bhabha 1994, 2).

Third Space models emphasise the processes that occur within interactions as agents for shaping and changing cultural identity. People enter with their preconceived cultural definitions and attitudes, are confronted with other cultural predispositions and, through interrogating these differences, construct an entirely new and different meaning ‘… across the bar of difference and separation’ (Bhabha 1990, 210). Third Space encounters are however hard to pin-point as they occur in the ‘undecidable’ moments of uncertainty that lie between people; neither one thing, nor the other - something new is constructed in-between (Young 2009, 87).

In intercultural communication, the Third Space concept created a paradigm shift (Soja, 2009) by acknowledging the inherent difficulties of cultural co-existence and fostering the examination of that which lies between people. Notwithstanding Third Space is not a tangible ‘space’, but rather a ‘category of observation’ (Lossau 2009, 72) which is hard to imagine (Young 2009), much less try to construct in the classroom. While Third Space encounters give desirable opportunities for considering all group members’ views, the impact of these momentary encounters may not be far reaching (Soja 2009). Fostering such
encounters in the classroom is as much about creating safe, comfortable environments where the unspoken can continue to come forward (Diamond & Jones 2004), as it is about challenging worldviews.

Breinig and Lösch (2006:21) extend the idea of Third Space through the concept of ‘transdifference’. They argue that experiences of transdifference more accurately respond to the ‘complex field of cultural contact’ present in today’s cosmopolitan society (2006, 115). The notion of transdifference applies to situations like classroom interactions where constructions of difference are ‘… not necessarily overcome or done away with’ (2006, 116). This implies a tolerance for the uncomfortable discontinuities that arise when multiple cultural differences intersect. Transdifferent experiences also consider the power dynamics occurring within interactions.

Moments of contestation in intercultural exchanges are linked to asymmetrical power relations between culturally differing participants (Mindell 1992, Bhabha 1999). For example, moments of transdifference are often interrupted when members of the dominant cultural group re-establish customary power dynamics (Breinig and Lösch 2006). The analysis of power in Third Space discourse is superficial, however, acknowledging at best that power differences in interactions are ‘… not the individual’s free choice …’ but rather a social inevitability (Kalscheuer 2009, 42).

This static construction of power is not helpful for establishing long-term intercultural collaborations because it portrays those with less power as victims of social forces and helpless within their circumstances. A more dynamic conceptualisation of power is the Process Oriented view of ‘Rank’. Here Rank is ‘a conscious or unconscious, social or personal ability or power …’ organising much of our communication behaviour (Mindell 1992, 45) This concept of Rank has been incorporated into the Learning for Change approach to assist students with navigating awkward moments in their intercultural exchanges (Collett 2007).

Another concept providing additional support for ongoing collaboration is that of ‘Deep Democracy’ (Mindell, 2002). It explores the inclusion of members who are often left out. ‘The philosophy of deep democracy claims that all people, parts and feelings are needed’ (Mindell 2002, 13) in group interactions. Encouraging groups to engage in deeply democratic practices involves becoming aware of the atmosphere between members and including unspoken feelings, views and perceptions that disturb the atmosphere. Inclusion of the unspoken opens a space where differences can be acknowledged and explored and connectedness is created out of mutual understanding (Diamond & Jones, 2004). Such encounters foster personal change with students becoming more self-reflective and develop ‘sensitivity toward reciprocity’ (Mezirow 2003, 62).

Developing and incorporating personal understandings is further supported by Kramsch’s concept of ‘Third Culture’ (1993, 234), which considers the impact of globalisation on personal constructions of culture. Kramsch (2011) sees contemporary notions of ‘culture’ as no longer based in collective symbolic representations and ideology. Instead ‘culture’ is rooted in each person’s subjective understandings and personal histories. She describes Third Culture as a
process of meaning making between people, more relevant in today’s society. Hence, a Third Cultural understanding in today’s groups is achieved by creating shared meaning through listening to and discussing the personal stories and interpretations present within a group.

Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space (1994), and the allied concepts of ‘transdifference’, Rank, Deep Democracy and Third Culture are useful constructs. Employing these concepts in intercultural education involves providing students with relevant conceptual frameworks for assisting them to move beyond their cultural comfort zone. Well-designed activities where students discuss their lived experiences and cultural identities provide opportunities for engaging with the intercultural dimension in group endeavours and creating entirely new, contextually relevant understandings out of their differences.

The following section describes how Third Space pedagogy has been incorporated into the design and innovation course previously mentioned.

**Third Space pedagogy in action**

Effective teamwork is important in this design and innovation course because teams collaborate on two projects where they are tasked with, and assessed on, designing and building working models. In 2013, 159 first year engineering students took part in teambuilding activities incorporated within the course. In this cohort cultural diversity was plentiful with 45% students being either international or local students from wide ranging cultural backgrounds. *LfC* material was introduced to promote student understanding and negotiation of the use of power within their teams.

Third Space pedagogy was built into these activities to encourage moments of transdifference in team discussions: sharing divergent views and exploring power-related issues within their relationships. Safe environments were developed to overcome the tendency for local students to drive discussions (Collett 2007). Safety was established through introductory Focused Team Discussions, where all members contributed personal and relevant information (Kelly, 2008).

When teams were assigned, students took part in two Third Space activities. In the first activity, teams discussed the impact of leadership styles on team functioning using three scenarios – ‘Leader as Dominator’, ‘Leader as Facilitator’ and ‘Leaderless’ (see Attachment 2.4). Drawing on previous group experiences, students shared their observations about power use and the involvement of team members.

In the second activity, groups turned their attention to the operational needs of their current teams, creating a Collective Agreement for guiding their working relationships throughout the construction projects. Students were asked to consider the personalities, experiences, strengths and weaknesses of all their team members and discuss the leadership style best suited to this
team. These activities gave students a contextually relevant experience of inclusivity, linking their personal contributions with the need to establish effective operating procedures within the team.

The Third Space activities are an attempt to accommodate for otherwise hidden complexities and allowed course educators to test how establishing safe ‘Third Space’ environments could assist students in developing the competencies of inclusivity and interculturality. However, intercultural competence is not developed through ‘one-off’ encounters alone. Personal change of this magnitude requires the use of transformative education practices that promote reflection and situational analysis (Mezirow, 2003). As teams were required to sustain meaningful intercultural encounters over a 12 week period, further measures were introduced to promote team cohesion across the semester: teams were encouraged to discuss their power dynamics, a peer review system was implemented, inclusive team communication strategies were introduced in the Week 7 lecture, tutors supported teams throughout and students wrote reflective journals about their team experiences. A more detailed description of this pedagogic framework can be found in Kelly & Collett (2014).

**Evaluation**

Evaluating the effectiveness of Third Space pedagogy has proven essential for securing continued support for the Learning for Change approach. Course educators and the university’s senior management are keenly interested in the efficacy of this new transformative learning approach, which they are being asked to support, but initially do not understand.

Analysing student comments and reflections is an appropriate method of evaluating the approach because transformative educational practices assist students to become more self-reflective and develop ‘sensitivity toward reciprocity’ (Mezirow 2003, 62). In addition, self-reflective or reflexive thinking can indicate a capacity for self-knowledge based in understanding ‘the other’ (Said 2004, 4) and leads to acceptance of difference (Kelly 2008). This data was both convenient and comprehensive because reflective writing formed part of course assessment and the personal nature of these reflections accurately portrayed the variations and differences in student learnings.

**Evaluation methods**

Three data sources were used to measure the efficacy of the Learning for Change curriculum:

- journal entries about teamwork from 101 students, with written permission.
- minute evaluations (Angelo & Cross 1993) administered to all students attending class in Weeks 3 (n= 131) & 13 (n= 133). These included pre- and post-Likert scores, rating from 1 – 5, about inclusivity within teams.
- feedback from course educators (n= 6) via questionnaire and focus group discussion.
Data analysis

The data analysis examines how the inclusion of Lf C activities fostered team cohesion through the use of inclusive practices and interculturality. Careful attention has been paid to student comments about the influence of Third Space encounters in establishing the team culture and the nature of personal engagement within teams.

To address the interests of both engineering and intercultural educators, the data is presented under the following headings:

- Achieving teambuilding objectives
- Team inclusivity
- Building interculturality through personal change

Findings and discussion

Achieving teambuilding objectives

LfC teambuilding activities in tutorials 1 and 2 were evaluated in Week 3. When asked to comment on significant learnings in the course so far, 63% of students mentioned teamwork-related topics. The percentage of students nominating each teamwork sub-topic included: Group Dynamics (26%), Teamwork (14%), Leadership (14%) and Communication (9%).

Longer term team engagement associated with the LfC curriculum was evaluated by analysing student journal entries for the use of teamwork and leadership related concepts. The ability to analyse team dynamics objectively, outlining group dynamics without judging or favouring any team members, was demonstrated by 96% of students, for example: ‘... already I can see some people who are shy and may need a little encouragement to offer up their ideas’. Objective attitudes toward difference like this example are important for developing interculturality.

The ability to generate and sustain cohesion within teams was demonstrated in 58% of comments, describing how all team members’ views were listened to and decisions made jointly, for example:

*Our team is working well together because we’ve been communicating constantly, keeping everyone in the loop. I feel like we’ve all gotten to know each other quite well and become friends which has ... allowed us to feel comfortable enough to give out any new ideas and suggestions …*

Of special interest was the emergence of a particular version of leadership which could be particularly appropriate for engaging in global communities. Many students spoke of teams
opting to function consensually, using a model they referred to as ‘Leaderless’. Two descriptions of this style are:

... the group is working so well because we do not have one set leader but instead all take control of smaller aspects of the design and build. As long as everyone continues to pull their own weight ... we will be successful. This type of leader was a unanimous decision ... when our group formed.

In a team like us in UniSA, it is difficult for a leader to have an absolute power to control the team, because all of team members are classmates. Unless the leader has a great contribute to the team, all the commands given by the leader will make others feel they are working for the leader. So, it will be better for a team without a leader and everyone just do what they can do.

Many teams allowed leadership to emerge: ‘As an area arises where one team member’s strengths are greatest ... then that team member takes a higher leadership role’. This is Deep Democracy in action with roles shifting between members depending on the momentary needs of the group. Consequently, students developed skills and attitudes in flexibility, listening, comparing ideas, creating shared understandings and appraising their use of power.

Arguably these are exactly the skills and attitudes needed for establishing cultural co-existence and creating mutually acceptable and sustainable outcomes in global workplaces. By declaring themselves ‘Leaderless’ these groups are saying they do not want to be associated with practices of cultural domination, turning instead to their combined strengths and capacities and nominating leaders as needs emerge.

This form of teamwork was not always comfortable for the course educators, however. Their initial responses to the ‘Leadership Styles’ activity were favourable, noting the Collective Agreements prepared by each team were more detailed than previous years and that, for the first time, teams had asked to create new agreements for their second projects. But tutors found it disturbing that most teams elected to remain ‘Leaderless’ after the Third Space Leadership activity. Teaching staff reported teams slow to get started with some encountering difficulties. Tutors noticed groups continuing to call themselves leaderless, even when it was evident that leaders emerged. They saw these teams as disorganised and lacking appreciation for the leadership role.

Meanwhile teams continued to observe and negotiate the way they functioned with some teams learning ‘… from their mistakes and later identified the need for leadership’ (Tutor). Some students also described needing to change styles for the second project, stipulating the leader was ‘... only for organising, delegating and coordinating, but not for decision-making...’. Eventually the tutors conceded that teams formed strong, effective working relationships and ‘At the end they
are very friendly and have a good understanding’ (Tutor). The teams benefitted from incorporating diverse perspectives, with tutors reporting 22 of 26 teams had developed more innovative and creative project designs than those seen in previous years.

In terms of understanding power structures the students showed greater capacity than their teachers for moving beyond conventional models with their comments indicating globally relevant awareness. The fact that tutors saw these teams as disrespecting the role of the leader, suggests that they favour traditional team functioning at the expense of the emergence of new ways of operating.

**Team Inclusivity**

Student perception of inclusivity in their teams was gauged across the semester using pre- and post- Likert scales about inclusivity in the minute evaluations. In Week 3, 84% students reported either inclusive or very inclusive experiences during initial teambuilding activities. This inclusivity developed further after working on their projects. In Week 13, 93% students rated their teams as inclusive or very inclusive. A Chi squared test for homogeneity of these ratings, presented in Figure 1, shows a highly significant increase in inclusivity across the semester ($P < .001, n = 131, \chi^2 = 18.754, \text{Two-tailed } P\text{ value} = 0.0003$).

![Comparison Week 3 & Week 13](image)

**Figure 1: Comparison of Week 3 and Week 13 teamwork inclusivity (n = 131)**

Journal entries confirmed this finding with 77% of students saying their teams worked collaboratively. Students described the personalities and experiences of members and many mentioned their personal learning from these collaborations, for example:

... teamwork has provided me with a crucial inspiration beyond technical learning such as, making friends, learning different cultures, respecting members ideas, views and more importantly to facilitate an
understanding of how to adjust myself in order to apply my knowledge most effectively in the team.

This and other similar comments express both a willingness to engage with difference and an awareness of personal transformation through the process. The positive tone in phrases like ‘crucial inspiration’ and ‘more importantly to facilitate an understanding of’ indicate development of intercultural awareness and competence.

Asking teams to choose their own power structures and negotiate group dynamics foregrounded ‘taken for granted’ communication practices that affect team inclusion. These experiences also set expectations that teams would continue engaging inclusively. In response, 77% of students documented intentional, negotiated collaboration in their teams using the combined strengths of the members. Inclusivity increased across the semester, more from ongoing communication between members than any nominated team structure.

The choice to collaborate inclusively, instead of asserting commonplace power dynamics and domination by local students (Saguy, Dovidio & Pratto 2008), is a noteworthy departure from the cultural non-engagement reported by Spiro (2014). The Third Space activities explored the often experienced but rarely discussed power dynamics occurring between members, giving teams a means of centering their discussions in operational realities. The initial experiences of transdifference established models of practice which teams continued to use in their working relationships. This is evidenced by students adopting the terms and concepts learned in workshops for describing their personal and team development. It appears that most students were capable of overcoming the tacit power dynamics that customarily govern group behaviours with almost 80% reporting personal changes they willingly made to create cultures of inclusion in their teams.

Building interculturality through personal change

At the core of developing a capacity for interculturality is developing new perspectives about relating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Two indicators were used to determine personal development of this competency:

1. Use of reflexive thinking (self-reflection about a given situation).

2. Self-reported behavioural changes ‘for the good of the team’.

Table 1 summarises the development of these indicators after the introduction of Third Space pedagogy.
Table 1: Personal change comments - 2013 cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>% responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive thinking</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing ‘for the good of the team’</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly 70% of all students commented reflexively, using ‘I’ statements about their personal relationship to team dynamics. Moreover 59% spoke of their personal changes ‘for the good of the team’. Personal growth occurred whether or not teamwork experiences were positive. Instead of blaming or judging others, students mentioned specific behaviours, like lateness to meetings, perfectionism or dominating attitudes as impediments to progress. Well-functioning teams attributed success to hearing all views, making joint decisions, everyone being leaders in some way, respect and trust. As Anderson (2013) found, the long-term benefits of collaboration between students from differing cultures include increased intercultural understanding and competency, especially in the areas of listening and negotiating.

These findings suggest the Learning for Change activities assisted students to move out of their comfort zones, to observe and consider the team’s needs in their working relationships. Over half demonstrated increased intercultural competence through their willingness to change for more inclusive teamwork.

Conclusion
This article illustrates the benefits and complexities of marrying transformative intercultural learning with professional skill development. It describes a completely new form of intercultural education that brings together the need to prepare engineering graduates for global workplaces with discipline specific courses requirements. Based in Third Space theory and delivered through safe, student-centred, interactive learning activities, the Learning for Change approach helps students from diverse backgrounds explore and negotiate their differences. At one level, the teambuilding negotiations prepared students for workplace collaborations as professional engineers. However, the discussions were also ‘Third Space’ because students were encouraged to observe their personal responses to power dynamics and negotiate their team culture. These practices were supported with conceptual frameworks the students continued to use for observing and responding to power dynamics in their teams. This level of collaboration goes far beyond standard workplace protocols and current efforts to embed intercultural education into university courses.
Another important aspect highlighted here is the need for sound evaluation. Measurable outcomes help course educators and university management to appreciate student responses to the call for personal change through embedding professional skill development into discipline-specific courses. This article discusses one attempt at developing objective measures for defining and evaluating intercultural competence, but more work is needed to establish qualitative and quantitative measures for assessing personal change. In the intricate business of exploring personal differences, there are no ‘comfortable endpoints or uniform outcomes’ (Anderson 2013, 48). Students describe many differing learnings associated with their intercultural development, including self-awareness and a willingness to explore alternatives and create new understandings. In the domain of intercultural development researchers need to respect these inevitable variations in personal growth and provide data analysis that acknowledges this diversity.

This research study presents a conceptualised and evidenced approach to promoting culturally sensitive engagement within and among students. The data strongly suggests that Third Space and associated concepts assisted students to develop the intercultural competencies of inclusivity and interculturality. Most students were willing to make personal changes to transcend cultural boundaries and include other team members. However a range of global competencies are required for preparing graduates with the professional communication skills to work in global societies. Future directions for this approach lie in introducing further professional skill development promoting these global competencies across entire degree programs.

References


Project 3: Power and Rank in University Classrooms

Project 3 explores the benefits and challenges of teaching students about the effects of Rank in intercultural classroom communication. It puts forward the premise that understanding common power dynamics provides a unifying conceptual framework that facilitates ways of relating that support cultural inclusion beyond what is commonly experienced in intercultural practices.


This report outlines how understanding power dynamics enables both students and staff to analyse the influence of Rank in their own relationships and shifts attitudes toward intercultural engagement. It outlines the conceptual underpinnings, implementation and evaluation of the *Learning for Change* model which embeds professional communication skills into undergraduate engineering courses.

Article 3: Coming together: power, rank and intercultural interaction – developing inclusive approaches in higher education


Diana Collett
Report 3: The ‘Learning for Change’ model of professional skill development: building global competence using concepts of ‘Rank’ and intercultural engagement

Report produced for Dean Teaching and Learning ITEE, UniSA

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About this report

This report outlines the development of the Learning for Change (LFC) model of professional skill development which provides a transdisciplinary, scaffolded, context-specific and globally-oriented approach to professional skill development in undergraduate engineering courses at UniSA. In essence, the LFC team has promoted a new vision of what it means to be an engineer in a global environment and assisted students to develop the necessary competencies to become global practitioners.

Research worldwide indicates that engineering graduates lack the professional communication skills to collaborate effectively in the workplace. In 2010 the Dean Teaching and Learning in the Division of Information Technology Engineering and the Environment (ITEE) asked Patricia Kelly, along with Diana Collett and key course coordinators, to address the issue of professional skills development. This work responds to the challenge of creating globally competent graduates with appropriate professional competencies for culturally diverse workplaces. From 2010 to 2014, Kelly and Collett have teamed with many course educators in developing the LFC model for embedding strategic interventions that promote essential attitudinal and behavioural changes and the work has expanded to include courses in all year levels.

This systematic, context-specific approach builds student competencies incrementally across their program of study. The central principles and practices associated with this model are outlined in this report. Based largely on transformative learning principles, Learning for Change also incorporates a Process Oriented Psychological understanding of the effect of ‘Rank’, or personal power use, on communication, and introduces course relevant threshold concepts about inclusive communication. This innovative approach has led to significant improvements in teamwork as described in this report.

Evaluation of one of the most developed courses, Sustainable Engineering Practice (SEP), a core first year course is reported on here, between the years 2011 and 2013.

Findings

1. From 2011 – 2014 the inclusion of training in professional communication skills has been consistently valued by most students, with around 90% appreciating the opportunity to interact meaningfully with other students and learn about Rank and communication.

2. Both local and international student attitudes toward understanding cultural diversity and the need to develop global competencies shifted in response to interactive learning opportunities within the course.

3. The use of a scaffolded, incremental approach to developing communication skills has proven effective in reducing student resistance to change.

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Students significantly increased their capacity for personal reflection and written expression, as demonstrated through the use of reflexive comments in Learning Journals and minute evaluations.

One second year course found significant improvement of grades for teams who worked effectively, compared with students who did not collaborate.

While this groundbreaking model is complex and initially time consuming to establish in courses, ten significant benefits associated with embedding Learning for Change into engineering programs have been identified. Over time this model can be cost effective, sustainable and an effective method of preparing students of all cultural backgrounds to become globally competent professionals.

Post Script: In 2014 the Learning for Change team received a national citation from the Office of Teaching and Learning for ‘outstanding contributions to student learning’ (http://www.olt.gov.au/).
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1 Introduction

This report introduces the ‘Learning for Change’ (LFC) model for teaching interculturally relevant professional communication skills. The need for graduates with globally competent professional communication skills is well-documented (Poglia et al. 2009, Bourn 2011, Huber 2012) and the University of South Australia (UniSA) is keen to promote intercultural competence that responds to industry demands for graduates who are highly competent in ‘interpersonal and organisational skills, … mobile and international in outlook’ (McCausland 2010:9). As a result, various internationalisation programs like Global Experience and Your Culture/My Culture are offered (Global Opportunities Website http://www.unisa.edu.au/student-life/global-opportunities/) where students voluntarily engage and explore cultural differences. These programs are built on the understanding that intercultural engagement lies at the heart of creating global competencies, but more is needed to help students build relevant professional communication skills.

Intercultural action does not ‘just happen’ in the classroom (Volet & Ang 1998:9) and most coursework activities at UniSA currently do not support local and international students to develop these teambuilding and communication skills (Jacobs 2006). Without support, course educators are not equipped to enhance the cross-cultural communication skills graduates need to work effectively in diverse, multidisciplinary, multinational teams (Business Council of Aust. 2011). Within the Division of Information Technology, Engineer and the Environment (ITEE) however, the Learning for Change model is starting to address this issue by providing transdisciplinary, scaffolded, context-specific and globally-oriented approach to professional skill development within undergraduate engineering courses.

This work is relevant to the engineering profession because gaps have been identified worldwide, in engineering graduates’ ability to communicate and collaborate professionally (Male, Bush & Chapman 2010), deficits which increasingly impact their ability to ‘work across national and cultural boundaries’ (Newberry et al. 2011:172).

In 2011 at UniSA, lecturers in undergraduate engineering courses faced the reality that students were having difficulty communicating. They were required to work in teams and write reports but found both tasks challenging and distasteful. Concerns about this teamwork aversion led the Dean Teaching and Learning ITEE to ask an Academic Developer, Patricia Kelly, to address the issue of professional skill development for graduate employability (Kelly & Dansie 2012). A Student Counsellor, Diana Collett, was invited to contribute expertise about the effect of ‘Rank’, defined here as the personal use of power, in intercultural communication and inclusive teambuilding.

Thus began the Learning for Change (LFC) approach to intercultural competence and inclusive communication training in undergraduate Engineering and Computer Information Systems courses. Effectively the LFC team was being asked to promote a new vision of what it means to be an engineer in a global environment and assist students to develop the necessary competencies to become global practitioners. The LFC model is specifically designed to address critical mismatches between student and university expectations and classroom realities in the areas of intercultural competence, oral and written communication and teambuilding. This systematic, context-specific approach builds student competencies incrementally.
Since 2011, Kelly and Collett have collaborated with academic staff in designing, delivering and evaluating a suite of activities that are embedded in 1st, 2nd, 3rd and final year undergraduate courses. Embedding LFC concepts and activities into core courses across the entire program enables intercultural understandings and communication skills to be introduced and reintroduced at relevant moments. This supports students to build their capacities progressively in line with their maturity levels. Figure 1 below outlines how activities are embedded within a workshop, within a course and within a program.

A distinguishing feature of LFC is the use of concepts about Rank and communication to enhance intercultural engagement. Developing the students’ understanding of how to use their Rank respectfully, or personal power effectively, acts as a catalyst for students to engage inclusively when interacting across cultures. Inclusive communication, in turn, leads to better teamwork.

Teaching staff who work with the LFC model are initially unfamiliar with the concepts and educational approaches. They appreciate the Tutor Training Sessions and Guides (Appendix 3.1) provided to support this work and many talk about developing personally and professionally from their involvement (Sim 2013). As the model expands, however, there is growing interest within and beyond the university in knowing what is involved in Learning for Change and why it is taught this way. In the interests of ‘Scholarly Teaching’ that enhances teaching practices within universities (Trigwell 2013), this report describes the Learning for Change model, the concepts, the activities, the theoretical foundations, how we know it works and the teaching challenges and benefits it brings.
2 Background to intercultural communication in higher education

Sidanis et al. (2008) found that while university students from all cultural backgrounds developed a more liberal outlook through engaging with campus culture, their sense of identity and cultural affiliation remained unchanged and their views about race crystalized. ‘Most [students] came away … with a more coherent perspective on cultural diversity for better or, sometimes, worse’ (2008:381). They concluded that merely being present on culturally diverse campuses is not enough to reduce inter-ethnic prejudices and conflict-related attitudes. The type of contact between students must involve ‘acquaintance potential’ (2008:319). However, finding ways to enhance ‘acquaintance potential’ between university students has proven more difficult than first thought (Leask 2010). In a review of social psychology research, Sorensen et al. (2009) conclude that: ‘Interracial interactions, when enacted without effective communication and guidance, are not golden pathways toward building relationships between diverse peers’ (2009:7).

Power dynamics determine the nature of student interactions within universities. As Marginson (2008) describes, students from outside the culture are expected to fit into the dominant style which systematically excludes much of their cultural and personal input:

First, the Western environ is established. A ring is drawn around practices, sites, and subjects, within which lies the space (‘international education’, ‘quality assured practices’, etc) that is marked out for organisation. Other cultural and educational practices, such as those in the home countries from which the students have come, are pushed outside of the circle and ignored. Second – within the circle agents bearing ‘difference’ are subordinated, by defining how far they must travel to achieve sameness by eliminating educational practices that are ‘deficient’, i.e. habits of learning that differ from those prevailing in the country of education. (2008: 20)

These dynamics are common and long standing (Volet & Ang 1998). They persist as covert influences reinforcing the dominant cultural values and assumptions of the institutions in which they occur (Sidanis & Pratto 1999). At the level of personal interactions students know what happens in the classroom. Steve, a local Computer Information Systems (CIS) student whom I interviewed in 2008, described experiences of intercultural exclusion:

... if we’re working on a project and we have to read through a whole bunch of information and put forward suggestions ... and submit a report, the Australians would be all for defining roles and they’re quite happy to ... help explain to the international students the situation and listen to them ... but they don’t really engage them. They don’t expect that they have something to say and they almost always suggest that the international student doesn’t contribute to ... the actual production of the report.

It is common for students to use different communication styles in their interactions with peers from different cultural backgrounds (Gudykunst 1998). Group members from the dominant (local) culture tend to use their status and privilege to direct proceedings.
without considering members with less power (Levin 2004). They are also more likely to behave in their own interests (Sidani et al. 2004).

Without the aid of structured guidance, students are not developing the skills to create effective working relationships with their culturally differing peers. The Learning for Change model builds upon the understanding that power dynamics play a significant role in intercultural communication by marrying understanding about power dynamics with intercultural skill development. It is designed to promote attitudes and behaviours for developing professional communication skills that consider Rank differentials and include everyone.

3 Pedagogic approach

Engaging all students in professional communication skill development requires careful consideration of the diversity that exists within each class. At UniSA, cohorts typically include students who are first in family to tertiary study, mature entry students (up to 30%) with wide-ranging previous experience and English as additional language (EAL) students (up to 45%). In later years, up to 45% of the cohort may have transferred into the program after second year, missing the substantial amounts of professional skills training provided in earlier years. Activities therefore need to cater for students from diverse cultural backgrounds, students with prior learning and/or prior workplace experience and those with no previous experience at all.

Moreover, developing intercultural capacity has its own inherent difficulties. Intercultural capacity embraces various aspects such as inclusive communication skills, awareness of self and others, and preparedness to engage effectively across differences. Each student can be at a different stage for each of these aspects (Neuner 2012).

In response to these considerations, the Learning for Change model uses approaches and techniques that respect and incorporate the variety of learning and communication styles students bring to their studies, supporting them to move beyond known comfort zones and make the relevant personal changes for becoming inclusive professional communicators.

The principal aim of LFC activities is to create safe, stimulating and relevant classroom environments where students feel comfortable using new concepts and techniques for communicating. Several strands of professional skill development are addressed, including written communication, oral presentation, reflective practice, team building, inclusive communication and ‘Getting to Know Yourself’ – personal growth. Each strand develops professional skills with personal awareness and intercultural capacity. Strands are delivered concurrently across the study period using active learning experiences created in lectures, tutorials and workshop activities, as described in Section 3.1.

3.1 Underlying principles and application

This section explores the guiding concepts that underpin the LFC approach and the ways in which these principles have been applied in the classroom. The model is based
on respect for individual differences and their effect on the learning process. Respect is important because developing globally relevant intercultural competency involves personal changes beyond the usual development of intellectual understanding through critical analysis (Bourn, 2011). The complementary principles are tailored to fit each course and year level.

3.1.1 Principles

**Student-centred Learning** (Vermunt & Verschaffel 2000): respects the diversity present in every classroom and responds to the variation in styles and rates of learning. Students are encouraged to learn from collaborative experiences the elements they find most relevant, at their own comfortable pace. This approach encourages students to become life-long learners with ‘a flexible, versatile, self-regulated way of thinking and learning’ (2000:217). Conducting class discussions using a Conversational Framework is an example of Student-centred Learning.

**Conversational Framework** (Laurillard 2002): This style of facilitating classroom activities is based in iterative dialogue between teachers and students. Interactions are ‘discursive, adaptive, interactive and reflective’ (Laurillard 2002:86f) modelling the types of discussions teams can continue. When exploring intercultural communication, both student and teacher input is equally respected, with everyone’s perspective providing valuable information that can shape opinions and attitudes. Facilitators use their higher Rank to ensure the diversity in the group is fully represented by inviting culturally differing and less expressive members to speak.

**Transformative Learning** (Mezirow 1990): informs the change process for moving students from the ‘personal’ to the globally competent ‘professional’. Transformative learning involves ‘… reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting’ on the insights arising from this process (Mezirow 1990:18). This entails both learning and ‘unlearning’ as distorted assumptions about differences are corrected. In the process students develop awareness of their own and other’s beliefs and attitudes. They learn to reflect more critically on these perspectives and engage more freely in discourses that test the validity of transformed frames of reference (Mezirow 2003). Transformative activities also act as conduits for promoting effective connections among culturally differing peers (Kelly 2008).

**‘Futures Thinking’** (Kelly 2008): shifts mindsets toward sustainability. In engineering, Futures Thinking informs what it means to ‘take responsibility’ in a global workplace. A Futures perspective encourages students to move from a humans having dominion over the earth view to a systems-based approach in which they see themselves as ‘one significant element of a complex ecology and responsible for its health’ (Kelly, Smith & Ford 2012:5). Elements of Futures Thinking are woven throughout LFC presentations, most notably for inspiring students to engage in transformative learning.

**Sense-making** (Dervin 2010): promotes personal reflections and interpersonal inquiry. Activities that feature sense-making encourage students to consider all contributions and perspectives as valid and valuable (Dervin 2010). This approach initiates self-reflection and stimulates the change process (Kelly 2008). In LFC, sense-making activities such as interpreting the Behavioural Indicators of Rank and holding focused group discussions challenge common practices and stereotypes that arise in intercultural communication.
**Intercultural Learning** (Neuner 2012): Current theories in intercultural education inform how we engage culturally differing students in groupwork. In most educational settings teaching intercultural competence, is a topic of classroom activities but in this engineering context, intercultural competency is the means for creating effective teamwork. The notion of ‘interculturalism’ is relevant here because it ‘… emphasises the interactive dimension of groups, and their capacity to build common projects, to assume shared responsibilities and to create common identities …’ (Council of Europe 2003:34 in Neuner 2012). LFC activities place goal-oriented interactions at the centre of building intercultural capacity. Teams use focused group discussions and collective agreements to explore each other’s contributions and build intercultural understanding, relevant to team functioning.

‘Third Space’ Learning (Bhabha 1994) is an inclusive means of generating transformative learning experiences, changing attitudes and promoting effective connections among culturally differing peers. Third Spaces are intercultural spaces in which translation and negotiation of cultural discontinuities occur, meanings are interrogated and new understandings co-created. Third Space activities are used here for students to explore together the implicit cultural conventions within team dynamics. A new model of interacting is introduced which teams continue to apply in later discussions.

**Understanding Rank and Communication** (Mindell 1992): Power is played out in our personal lives through our daily interactions and relationships (Diamond 1996). In different contexts throughout life everyone has both high and low Rank in interactions. Knowing how we express our personal power, or Rank, and how this affects others, prepares us for building relationships. We introduce the concept of Rank from Process Oriented Psychology as ‘a conscious or unconscious, social or personal ability or power …’ (Mindell 1992:45) and introduce concepts about the behaviours and attitudes associated with both high and low Rank that occur in interactions (Camastral 2000). These concepts provide students with a framework for analysing their own interactions and act as a catalyst for enhancing intercultural engagement (See Section 4.2). Students are encouraged to use their Rank responsibly and inclusively, but are free to choose which behaviours and attitudes they change. They learn to identify and critically reflect on which attitudes and behaviours include or exclude team members and build common understandings about group dynamics.

**Reflective thinking** (Mezirow 2003): Developing reflective judgement is critical in personal change processes because it builds new knowledge out of personal insight (Boud & Walker 1998). In intercultural education, reflecting facilitates a shift away from previously held cultural stereotypes and toward understanding differences in their own terms (Kelly 2008). Reflective processes create lasting, pervasive change because they allow individuals to initiate their own learning and involve their whole being, intellect and emotion (Guirdham 2005:223).

The skill of reflecting is not innate for all students. We weave reflective thinking throughout the activities to develop this capacity progressively both in the classroom and in assessed written tasks. Focusing questions direct students to important points in classroom activities. Journals and blogs are scaffolded to prompt considered responses. Students develop their ability to think critically about communication and personal
behaviours. Their levels of personal engagement are indicated by the use of reflective thinking (what’s happening?) and reflexive thinking (how do I fit with what’s happening?) in comments (Kelly 2008:15). Over time, reflecting on group dynamics becomes an integral part of improving group functioning.

3.1.2 Applications

The Learning for Change model is continually evolving as additional courses necessitate new and specific activities. Table 1 at the end of this section, outlines the relationship between the underlying principles and a representative sample of activities. While each activity uses a range of principles, the following examples illustrate how we apply principles to create safe environments in lectures, tutorials and workshop.

Motivating students to think about sustainability and collaboration is the contextual background of all our class work. Students are more motivated to develop global competencies when they understand industry relevance. Current industry data is used to explain why globally relevant professional skills are needed and to introduce activities.

Understanding Rank is introduced on Day 1 of a first year course (SEP) to emphasise the importance of inclusivity at university. In their first SEP lecture, concepts about the use of Rank are linked with associated behaviours and attitudes. Using the Behavioural Indicators of Rank Handout (Camastral 2000), students examine their own experiences in small group discussions about times they have had high Rank and times when their Rank was low. With experience, students learn to recognise themselves in another’s response and attitudes change both within and between them (Mindell 1992).

Focused Group Discussions are an example of transformative learning using ‘Third Space’ interactions in which students learn about and from one another. This activity occurs after icebreakers, whenever new groups form at all year levels. Team members participate in focused discussions, beginning the process of transforming unconnected individuals into groups with common goals but differing contributions. Using the template provided, conversations involve personal introductions and course-specific questions. These conversations encourage all members to share personal information and explore diversity. Members become familiar with each other, deepening their subjective appraisal of self and others, and groups move beyond cultural differences to find shared meaning.
An early application of ‘Third Space’ interacting occurs during the **Beach Towel and Tennis Ball Activity**, which promotes understanding of covert expectations within groups. A towel and tennis ball are held between group members during a Focused Group Discussion. Students are directed to consider the role of the towel and tennis ball and observe group dynamics throughout the discussion. The towel and tennis ball act as focusing agents for members to experience how involved and organised they need to be when working in teams. The multi-tasking involved in holding the towel, watching the ball, talking about themselves, listening to others and making notes often surprises students, particularly if they have not lived independently and taken responsibility for themselves. The class debriefing that follows often generates discussions of new and important information about what independence and responsibility really mean in the Australian university context.

**Team Introductions** follow **Focused Group Discussions**. These short oral presentations are based on **student-centred, conversational** and **sense-making** approaches. A spokesperson then summarises the discussion and introduces team members to the class. These introductions showcase the group’s strengths, concerns and interests and develop oral presentation skills; creating a sense of team identity from the beginning. Presenting the team makes students visible and valued, establishing a collective culture that incorporates all members. Immediate formative feedback in class lays the foundations for all to develop confidence and presentation skills. The spokesperson role is offered to other group members in subsequent activities. When students see themselves as part of an identifiable team they are more likely to observe and reflect on team functioning, consider their personal responsibilities and contribute to team outcomes. Establishing collective goals and interests within teams also motivates students to learn inclusive approaches for working together.

**Discussing Leadership Scenarios** is an example of **student-centred learning** using a **conversational framework**. Here newly forming groups reflect on previous team experiences in **Third Space interactions** about one of three leadership styles – ‘Leader as Dominator,’ ‘Leader as Facilitator’ or ‘Leaderless’ (template provided). In the discussion that follows, the facilitator encourages the class to consider the range of opinions and experiences present in the room. All class members are exposed to new and different perspectives which can inform and
transform their beliefs and attitudes. Teams then consider which leadership style will best suit their personalities and purpose while negotiating a Collective Team Agreement.

Individual and Collective Team Agreements foreground intercultural perspectives, transformative learning and ‘Third Space’ interacting. These agreements are made whenever new teams form, as a foundation of agreed upon behaviours and attitudes for shaping team interactions. Each student records five things they personally agree to do in a Personal Learning Agreement (PLA) which then guides negotiations for a Collective Team Agreement (CTA). CTAs are lodged with the tutor and reviewed and changed as needed. This activity consolidates and guides the team’s identity.

Inclusive communication strategies are introduced throughout the program to enhance Intercultural Learning, using ‘Third Space’ interactions and a Conversational Framework. While understanding Rank motivates engagement, students also need appropriate communication skills to conduct intercultural interactions. Inclusive communication techniques are introduced in each course, building upon prior knowledge and meeting specific course needs.

For example, the Useful Tips for Inclusive Communication Activity applies a conversational framework and sense-making approach to create inclusive group discussions. A handout of other students’ ‘Inclusive Communication Tips’ for intercultural interactions acts as a prompt for reflecting about which strategies each student uses. This sets the scene for a class discussion in which experiences, opinions and more tips are shared. A sense-making approach is ideal for addressing a taboo topic such as ‘how we interact’ sensitively. Hearing about their peers’ endeavours to engage, challenges personal attitudes to intercultural engagement, cultural values and communication techniques without exposing the beliefs and experience levels of less accomplished students.

Reflecting is encouraged throughout, in classroom activities and assessment, with strong support in first year. Over two core first year engineering courses (SEP & EDI) students write 10 x 250 word journal entries. Progressive development is marked by shifting from Learning Journals in SEP, SP 2, to Development Journals in EDI, SP 5. Each entry is scaffolded by a series of topic related, open-ended prompt questions or

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statements which encourage personal interpretation and creative expression. A proforma (Appendix 3.3) is provided for students and teaching staff to guide both thinking and writing processes. Tutors give constructive feedback about reflective capacity, helping students to develop their confidence throughout the year.

Written communication skills are developed using a Student-centred, Transformative Learning approach to journal writing. The nature and style of writing tasks evolves across the program. Students receive formative feedback about English language usage and writing proficiency. Tutors can identify students who struggle with written expression early in the course and offer appropriate support, although some are uncomfortable assessing language needs.

Evaluating and Engaging: A Feedback and Feed Forward approach to evaluation is used which is future-oriented and student-centred. Student feedback is collected in every course for both evaluation purposes and to promote teachers/student communication. We adapted Minute evaluations (Angelo & Cross 1993, Appendix 3.4) to inform course delivery. These anonymous worksheets seek pre- and post- responses to ‘Things I have learnt from today’s lecture/tutorial …’ and ‘One unanswered question or comment I am leaving with is …’ (see Appendix 3.4). Responses and answers are posted online within the week. Students quickly realise that their input is heard and ‘feeds forward’ when tutors respond to identified difficulties early in the course. ‘Feeding forward’ stimulates trust and ongoing engagement and negotiation between staff and students.

Demonstrating experience: Students are encouraged to build a Professional Resource Portfolio ‘PReP’ of the LFC activities, handouts and worksheets they encounter throughout their program. Students consolidate their Reflective Thinking and Transformative Learning through observing their development of professional communication skills and global competencies throughout their portfolio. Employability is enhanced by presenting their PReP to prospective employers.

The relationship between the principles and activities is outlines in Table 1. The principles are listed across the chart linked to a comprehensive range of current activities (detailed in Appendix 3.2 – Inclusive Communication Activities Guide, Appendix 3.3 – Learning Journal Template, Appendix 3.4 – Minute Evaluation Templates).
Table 1 *Learning for Change* Activities and Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity (see Appendices)</th>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Student-centred Learning</th>
<th>Conversational Framework</th>
<th>Transformative Learning</th>
<th>Futures Thinking</th>
<th>Intercultural Learning</th>
<th>Understanding Rank &amp; Comm.</th>
<th>Sense-making</th>
<th>Experiencing &quot;Third Space&quot;</th>
<th>Reflective Thinking</th>
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</thead>
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<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focused Group Discussion (3.2, P11)</td>
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<td>Third &amp; Fourth Year</td>
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<td>W'place Culture Bubbles (3.2, P36)</td>
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3.2 Embedding ‘Learning for Change’

Unlike discrete courses that teach professional communication skills, this model embeds strategies across an entire degree program, incrementally building relevant and timely student competencies in each course. This approach is preferable because discrete courses in professional skill development are often dismissed by students as irrelevant to the ‘real’ learning of engineering disciplines. Strategic embedding has been shown to initiate transformative processes within students that help them to accept differences and change (Kelly 2008). An embedded approach brings depth and significance to the learning process by introducing concepts in line with the students’ maturity levels. For instance, Rank and personal responsibility is taught in first year, Rank in teams in second year, understanding Personal Rank and Rank in the workplace in third and fourth years.

With the ultimate goal of changing the culture of engineering practice, it is preferable to introduce Learning for Change from the beginning of engineering education, giving students the opportunity to build and practise their inclusive communication skills over several years. Embedding transformational learning approaches requires careful planning to introduce material at optimal times and give students enough opportunity to ‘productively struggle’ with threshold concepts that promote sustained personal change (Shulman 2014). Threshold concepts transform the way situations are understood by creating new awareness (Schwartzman 2007). Activities are sequenced to safely and comfortably build motivation, engagement, transformation and expression. Greater input occurs in earlier year levels when students are learning academic expectations but the same principles apply for the sequencing of activities at all levels. Figure 1, in the introduction, describes the embedding process within a workshop, within a course and across a program. Figure 2a and Figure 2b illustrate and describe the embedding process within courses, showing the personal and team development and the ongoing collaboration between LFC staff and course educators.
Figure 2a: Course embedding overview
### What

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Getting started</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Liaise with course developer re. range of course requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Design strategies to complement curriculum &amp; desired outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coordinate the process of embedding, follow-up and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Introduce concepts &amp; strategies to tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negotiate their ongoing support needs for explaining concepts and using strategies with students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1 – Team work foundations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Learn course culture &amp; expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Inspire/Motivate for Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create a Safe Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Networking/bonding – Explore self and others/together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Introduce threshold concepts about Rank and communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Evaluation – feed forward – prompt response</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a – Team formation &amp; development</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Agreements/negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ongoing peer assessment/negotiation of team experience (post-mortems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Further exploration of threshold concepts – lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationship between threshold concepts and group experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weekly team encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ongoing, timely support for team questions, issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **b – Personal/ professional development** |
| • Expand understanding of self & others using threshold concepts |
| • Reflection on current experiences – Learning Journals/Blogs |
| • Relationship between threshold concepts & personal experience |
| • Ongoing timely support for personal develop (learn online) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 3 – Reflection</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Students: Evaluation and feedback – prompt response to students online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff: Analysis and future directions; Research collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Figure 2b: Course embedding explanation**

### 4 Teaching challenges in Learning for Change

Teaching communication is unlike teaching other information. Each of us is an expert in our own form of communication. Helping students to become globally competent communicators involves shifting from a comfortable personal style of interacting to a more receptive and inclusive approach. Learning new concepts and practicing new ways of communicating can challenge personal authority and not everyone is willing to try.

Educators are presented with teaching challenges such as how to facilitate the use of new communication strategies, and how to promote ongoing inclusivity within groups. This section explains the way LFC addresses these challenges through:

- promoting interculturally appropriate personal change processes
- developing understanding of Rank in group dynamics
- promoting awareness of Rank status and encouraging inclusivity.

4.1 Promoting personal change

_LFC_ aims to create receptivity within and among students while respecting their differences in style and perspective. An important _LFC_ objective is to build upon each student’s strengths and understanding by helping them to realise what they already know, engage comfortably with new concepts and appreciate the differences present amongst them.

To enhance this process, a range of ‘threshold concepts’ about social and personal communication are introduced through activities. These transformative concepts are vital to the change process because they challenge entrenched attitudes and behaviours (King & Felton 2012).

Another key element is creating a safe environment for students to actively experiment with these threshold concepts. Safety is created by actively acknowledging that each person’s contribution is one among many equally valid but differently oriented perspectives. Their insights as ‘fellow communicators’ are valued in the co-creation of new knowledges.

4.2 Teaching about power and Rank

Power differentials can profoundly affect group collaboration (Sidanis 2008) and when cultural diversity is present, this is exacerbated (Sorensen et al. 2009). Exploring power dynamics in intercultural encounters is a recent area of enquiry which has not been well understood (Tropp & Pettigrew 2005). Most traditional studies focus on the effect of power as a societal force – a means of explaining how societies operate and the effect of power is usually only examined from the perspective of those with higher Rank (Saguy, Davidio & Pratto 2008). Examples include the Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) model, developed by Sorensen et al. (2009) in the USA and Canada, which encourages group discussions of power, illegitimacy and the status quo in the context of social change and the Critical Dialogic Approach (Nagda & Gurin 2007), which promotes relationship building across cultural and power differences, using critical discourse.

_Learning for Change_ examines the use of power differently. It focuses on Rank or personal power and explores how it is used in interactions between team members. A comprehensive understanding of the effect of Rank in communication is complex because it requires the ability to see events from two perspectives – that of individuals with higher Rank and of those with lower Rank. The Behavioural Indicators of Rank Handout (Appendix 3.3) is a conceptual framework provided to all students, which helps them notice their own and others’ behaviours and attitudes associated with Rank. Insight gained from these threshold concepts encourages students to adapt their personal responses and promotes a willingness to include others, summarised by one student as ‘Everyone at every rank matters.’(Male 2014)

All students receive the same conceptual understanding about Rank and communication, establishing a common language for discussing the responsible use of
power in teams. As a result, teams are better equipped for building relationships on shared understandings and experiences, and students are better prepared for moving beyond familiar communication styles to explore new ways of interacting.

Experience has proven the value of an iterative approach, incrementally building understanding about Rank in line with student maturity levels, across a program. Concepts that may seem threatening in first year can become self-evident by third year when students have more life experience. Although Rank concepts are recognisable in everyday interactions, exploring diverse views about Rank in classroom discussions requires thoughtful facilitation (Schupbach 1999). Many tutors need to reflect on their own experiences of Rank use to increase understanding and support student learning.

Student activities are designed to showcase the effect of Rank in team interactions. Inclusivity is promoted through the understanding that local students have higher Rank, because of their familiarity with local cultural conventions, whereas students new to the culture have lower Rank. By making visible these differing experiences:

… all parties have equal access to knowledge about previously unexplained communication dynamics. The objectivity that comes with knowing about underlying dynamics frees people to see them as only one way of communicating and this gives participants choice about how they want to respond to these conventions (Collett 2007:19).

At different stages of the program, concepts of Rank are introduced to:

- motivate attitudinal change
- increase understanding of interactive power dynamics
- increase awareness of their own and others’ personal behaviours
- explore responsible and inclusive uses of Rank.

A more detailed explanation of the effect of Rank on communication is available in ‘Coming Together: Power, Rank and Intercultural Interaction. Developing Inclusive Approaches in Higher Education’ (Collett 2007) and the Tutor Training Guide (Appendix 3.1).

### 4.3 Rank and Collaboration

Saguy et al. (2008) found Rank differences affect how students’ approach groupwork – group members, with higher Rank being more likely to search for commonalities in their interactions than members with lower Rank, who may be more interested in exploring power usage. When higher Ranking group members from the dominant culture look for similarities, their lower Ranking counterparts are excluded and communication between the two groups is affected.

Local students have higher Rank and greater advantage in group communications. Exclusion of students new to the culture, such as International students, occurs when local students use their Rank to maintain local social conventions without acknowledging the diversity present in a group. The lower Rank associated with not knowing conventions can create difficulties in contributing and feelings of
marginalisation. As newcomers, these students simply have less in common with members of the dominant culture.

Without understanding the effect of Rank on communication, those with higher Rank tend to make assumptions about the capacity of culturally differing group members and respond on the basis of such assumptions. In Steve’s example, at the beginning of this report, the higher Ranking locals interpreted international student silences as a lack of intellectual capacity. In contrast, for the lower Ranking international students, silence could either be a sign of discomfort or a culturally significant gesture of politeness. Misunderstandings arise by not looking beyond assumptions to explore culturally different interpretations. An unintended negative consequence is the discounting of personal strengths and abilities that students with lower Rank bring to the group.

However Steve’s astute observations show that some high Rank students can discern how power differences affect group communication. Saguy found that group members with higher Rank, although less willing to discuss their relative advantage, often changed their attitudes after discussing Rank differences. They became ‘... more willing to talk critically about the power differences between the groups’ (2008: 432).

Presenting the effect of Rank from both perspectives during team formation can significantly impact team performance. In 2011, Sitnikova, Kelly and Collett found a positive correlation between including LFC Teambuilding activities and effective team collaboration in Systems Analysis, Design and Project Management (SADPM), a 2nd year project management course:

The percentage of students who engaged effectively with the Team Building experience rose from 78% to 87% across the two assignments. This was reflected in the higher grades they gained in Assignment 2. Interestingly, this percentage almost mirrors the increase in confidence figures. The higher percentage of reflective comments in Week 7 evaluation corresponds with introducing the material about the effect of Rank on communication. Week 13 evaluation reflective comments showed deeper consideration of their team experiences (Sitnikova, Kelly & Collett 2011:118).

Result showed the teams who worked effectively significantly raised their grades from assignment 1 to assignment 2, whereas students who did not collaborate showed less improvement:

There is a significant shift towards better results HD and D and a significant drop in P1, P2 and F. Students working independently also tended to improve but less dramatically ... The mean score difference for those with improved results is + 14.9483 in contrast to – 7.3783 whose marks decreased (Sitnikova, Kelly & Collett 2011:116).

5 Does this method work? An example

This section demonstrates how we have woven Learning for Change material into one of the most developed courses, Sustainable Engineering Practice (SEP) and the research methods used to assess if student engaged with personal change processes.

Diana Collett
5.1 Learning for Change in Sustainable Engineering Practice (SEP)

SEP is a core engineering course which has incorporated LFC activities since 2011, reviewing and substantially modifying material each year. This introductory course, taken by all first year students, promotes global competencies and professional skill development from the outset. Several complementary initiatives are delivered concurrently to challenge and expand conventional attitudes to engineering practice. These include:

1 Indigenous Content in Undergraduate Programs (ICUP) – explores cultural awareness and identity by incorporating Indigenous perspectives

2 ‘Engineers Beyond Borders’ project in developing countries – challenges parochial attitudes and promotes sustainability

3 Reflective Learning Journals – increases reflective capacity and improves written expression

4 Teambuilding activities, including Rank and inclusive communication concepts – build trust, confidence, intercultural capacity and collaboration.

Each strand develops global awareness and interculturality using active learning experiences. The LFC team focuses on oral and written presentation skills and teambuilding by developing:

… inclusive team skills through four common curriculum elements, that are scaffolded to suit [the] context and level: 1) Creating a safe environment, 2) Building intercultural capacity, 3) Providing appropriate resources, and 4) Providing feedback and feed-forward (Kelly & Collett 2014:2).

The 2014 LFC activities are summarized in Table 2 and then explained.
Table 2: Learning for Change Activities SEP 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Learning for Change in SEP 2014</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral/written comm. = black; Rank &amp; comm = red; Teambuilding = blue; Evaluation = purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Lecture – Week 1 (30 min)</td>
<td>Reflective Journal writing</td>
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<td>Rank &amp; Communication Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Tutorial 1 – Week 2 (90 min)</td>
<td>Icebreaker, Motivation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reflective Journal Writing</td>
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<td>Group introduction activity/report back</td>
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<td>Negative Brain Storm</td>
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<td>Belbin Inventory</td>
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<td>Personal Learning Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Tutorial 2 – Week 3 (90 min)</td>
<td>Inclusive Rank in Groups (ppt), (Behavioural Indicators of Rank HO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teams allocated by tutors</td>
<td>Beach Towel &amp; Tennis Ball activity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consensus Decision Making</td>
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<td>Collective Team Agreement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First Minute Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Individual Development Portfolio: Learning Journals (25%), Resume Activity (4%), Cultural Awareness Forum (6%)</td>
<td>Learning Journal Reflections x 5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submitted in Weeks 3, 6, 11, 13, 15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Formative feedback by Week 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Tutor support throughout</td>
<td>Support with Teamwork and Writing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SPARK Peer Assessment – moderating personal mark for group tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Tutorial 9 – Week 10</td>
<td>Presentation of Group Project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Final Minute Evaluation</td>
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</table>

1 Lecture One includes a thirty minute presentation about Learning Journals and Rank in Communication. A conversational framework is used to explore the skills and personal qualities students think 21st Century engineers need. As an icebreaker, small groups discussed personal Rank in different contexts. Using the ‘Behavioural Indicators of Rank’ hand-out (Appendix 3.2, p6) students share experiences when they had both high and low Rank.

2 Tutorial One inspires transformative learning for global competency and prepares students for teamwork foundations:
Students are guided quickly beyond ice-breakers into a focused group/team discussion, which a volunteer spokesperson summarises and presents. A ‘Negative Brainstorm’ activity identifies obstructive behaviours in a humorous way, before students complete a Personal Learning Agreement (PLA), stating five things they will do to help their teams succeed. They use these PLAs to create a Collective Team Agreement (Kelly & Collett 2014:3).

3 **Tutorial Two** is when teams form. Firstly inclusive use of Rank is explained, using a PowerPoint Presentation. The newly formed teams then use a ‘Beach Towel and Tennis Ball’ to create inclusivity in their Focused Group Discussions. Consensus Decision Making (CDM) is then explained and discussed using a handout (Appendix 3.2, p11). Consensus Decision Making is a threshold concept introduced to support the next discussion about a Collective Team Agreement (CTA). Teams use CTAs to negotiate important elements that will guide their team-functioning. Finally a Minute evaluation captures their comments about LCF material and the course so far.

4 **Individual Development Portfolio** Throughout the Study Period students write five Learning Journals, reflecting on the learning process and improving their writing skills (see Section 3.2 for detail about Journal writing).

5 **Ongoing support** is provided by tutors and the Course Coordinator throughout the study period. They reinforce key concepts, supervise team functioning and use regular peer assessment for encouraging reflection and honesty within team. This enables tutors to address emerging issues quickly. Individual grades for group projects are moderated by the peer feedback about each member’s participation.

6 **A final Minute Evaluation** in Week 10 captures student responses to their teamwork experiences and personal change.

**5.2 Evaluating Change in Sustainable Engineering Practice**

Student feedback has been used for improving delivery of the course overall and LFC material in particular. This data is also used to analyse how students engage with the change process. Over the years four different evaluation strategies, described below, have been used in SEP for assessing change factors, resulting in greater understanding about the students’ relationship to change.

**5.2.1 What students valued**

Data from pre- and post-minute Evaluations (Appendix 3.4) were collected from each SEP cohort. The 2013, Week 3 evaluation captured student responses to Tutorial 1 & 2
activities and the first three weeks of the course. The Week 10 evaluation captured responses to working in teams across the project.

In the Week 3 evaluation, students indicated which LFC activities and concepts they found new and helpful. The wide ranging LFC activities cater for the personal variation in experience, learning styles and cultural diversity found in each cohort. LFC activities were listed on the Minute paper and students ticked all the ones they valued. In 2013 there were 159 respondents (N=175). Table 3 outlines responses for each activity and Figure 3 shows percentages of students who found the activity helpful.

**Table 3: 2013 Week 3 Helpful Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. ticks</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. ticks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting other class members</td>
<td>89% (142)</td>
<td>Rank and communication</td>
<td>87% (138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The behavioural indicators of Rank</td>
<td>72% (115)</td>
<td>Discussing what works/doesn’t work in teams</td>
<td>70% (111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus decisions making</td>
<td>70% (112)</td>
<td>Personal Learning Agreement &amp; Team Agreement</td>
<td>69% (110)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 3 Helpful Activities](image)

This broad brush approach was validated by the high proportion of students (around 70%) who ticked many, but not the same, LFC activities as helpful. ‘Meeting other team members’ were most valuable (89%) for these new students. However learning about Rank and communication rated almost as highly (87%). Clearly most students valued dedicating time to finding out about fellow team members and learning concepts for explaining group dynamics.
5.2.2 Attitudinal change

A 2012 paired survey of student attitudinal change was taken across the study period. The survey showed that “… from the beginning of semester and the end of semester … some ‘highly significant’ and ‘significant’ changes have occurred in attitudes, towards culture… ‘(Kelly & Collett 2013:20). Overall, Australian class members increased their understanding of cultural identity, empathy for other cultures and their appreciation for the interdisciplinary nature of engineering. However, international students reported different shifts. They learned to appreciate the need for global competency in engineering (Kelly, Smith & Ford 2012). The fact that culturally differing class members respond differently to the same interventions and that attitudinal change relate to affiliation with the local dominant culture has shaped the input in subsequent courses. A range of activities are now included to cater for different cultural competency levels, including the introduction of and material about high and low Rank and cultural inclusion in order to increase understanding about the interactive dynamics between students.

5.2.3 Willingness to change

Willingness to change was also measured. Not all students are prepared to change their attitudes and behaviours. Improving written and oral skills requires a readiness to engage with new and different ways of communicating and the self-confidence to practice. Kelly (2008) began gauging attitudes toward change by analysing the tone of journal entries in her original 2000–2005 study (2008). Using her original coding, students in the 2012 SEP cohort were identified as those who willingly or grudgingly accepted new concepts and activities (‘Accepters’), students who were initially sceptical but later valued them (‘Converts’) and students who were antagonistic and resisting change (termed ‘Resisting’).

An example of Accepter comments is:

Our group consisted of three Australian students and three international students from Kuwait... it was hard to communicate with the Kuwaitis... But having international students as well as local students I believe was an advantage. Having different cultural backgrounds allowed each of us to contribute different ideas based on our own personal opinions. I believe this allowed us to come to a more successful final solution. (Male 2013)

Converts said things like:

... I did not expect to learn anything new. However the idea of rank within a group was a completely new concept to me... I can now see its importance; especially since at university I face a far greater degree of cultural diversity than I did at school. If the concept of rank is not given the attention it deserves, it would then be easy for subordinate group members to be left out, and any valuable contributions they may be able to give will be ignored. Now that I realise this I can see times where I may have failed in past to properly use my rank in a group to make sure every member is treated fairly (Male 2013).

and ‘Resisting’ students said things like:

... However, whether culture is defined as the way something is, or the way something should be, is irrelevant to the field of engineering. Regardless of where
The 2012 results were surprising. In her original study Kelly typically found 65% acceptors, 25% converts and 8–10% resisting change. In the 2012 cohort ‘... acceptance was 95% with only 2–3% presenting as mildly resisting, a dramatic increase’ (Kelly & Collett 2013:5). Several contextual changes possibly contribute to the increased ‘willingness to change’ (from 65% to 95% acceptance with only a few converts and no ‘Resistings’). Team work and intercultural work is built into the course content and process, with strong senior staff support for this work. We also make students aware that the engineering profession, and their employers, value professional skills. Students may be less resistant to attitudinal and behavioural change when they understand Rank and communication dynamics and the intended outcomes of using alternative desirable behaviours (Kelly & Collett 2013).

Personal development is a progressive and highly personal process, with students benefiting from repeated exposure to new concepts (Shepard et al. 2009:9). The need for an iterative approach is supported by evidence that some students take longer to change. In the subsequent course, Engineering Design Innovation (EDI), students continued using Rank and teambuilding concepts in their journal entries, with some acknowledging a lack of understanding about teambuilding concepts until they engaged in teamwork in this subsequent course. Personal development is a progressive and highly personal process, with students benefiting from repeated exposure to new concepts (Sheppard et al. 2009:9).

5.2.4 Sustained change

Whether students sustained a change in attitudes and behaviours across the Study Period was gauged by their comments in Minute evaluations (Appendix 3.4). In 2013, student comments about ‘one useful thing they had learnt’ were coded as Reflective, Reflexive or Neither for both Week 3 and Week 10 evaluations. Reflective statements express the nature of an experience, while reflexive statements indicate a relationship to personal beliefs, attitudes or behaviours. Reflective comments, such as ‘teamwork can make or break a project’ or ‘different team members do different jobs in a team’, show objective understanding of the material, whereas reflexive comments, such as ‘need to respect and trust members of team’, show insight into personal change. Reflexive thinking is used to ‘... guide and enable adult learners to reflect on and deconstruct the assumptions and beliefs that underpin their own everyday experiences’ (Segal 1999:730). Using reflexive comments signifies the relevance of the insight to the student, indicating a sustained personal transformation.

The Week 3 evaluations yielded 149 responses from a possible 175 enrolled students about a ‘useful thing I have learnt’. These were collated and coded as reflective, reflexive or neither. The same question in Week 10 yielded 101 comments that were coded and collated as shown in Table 4.
Table 4 2013 SEP Weeks 3 & 9 Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Reflective</th>
<th>Reflexive</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 3 comments (n = 149)</td>
<td>70% (105)</td>
<td>23% (34)</td>
<td>7% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10 comments (n = 101)</td>
<td>49% (49)</td>
<td>51% (52)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Week 3, over 90% students made either reflective or reflexive comments about LFC material. More than two thirds (70%) made reflective comments, showing many students were engaging with the material. The 23% who made reflexive comments were already analysing their personal relationship to the material. In the Week 10 evaluation, all respondents were engaging with LFC material and 51% made reflexive comments. This 28 percentage point increase in reflexivity was a significant shift. A χ² (Chi Squared) test for homogeneity showed χ² = 18.5802 (df = 2), with a significance at P < .001. Analysis showed a sustained shift in the students’ abilities to observe teambuilding and comment in relevant and meaningful ways. By Week 10, over half the students showed sustained attitude change, commenting about their personal relationship to teambuilding experiences both positively and negatively:

- Helped form group relationships and ease nerves of joining with people you haven’t had experience of.
- Were useful in establishing the boundaries of how we work without it being the ideas of one person stipulating how we work in a group.
- Some of [the activities] were a bit below what the majority of us found comfortable given our age, they seemed to be for schoolers.

The length and depth of comments also changed. In Week 10 students used approximately 2,700 words for 101 responses, whereas in Week 3 around 1,500 words were used for 149 responses. Students used 180% more words in the later comments to express two thirds the number of responses.

These findings suggest that within a short space of time the students developed their capacity to process experiences more thoroughly and gained confidence in writing honest, forthright feedback.

### 6 Benefits of the Learning for Change model

Sustainably embedding LFC initiatives within courses is no small undertaking. Over a period of several years, the curriculum and learning outcomes for each course change significantly. It takes enthusiasm, persistence, openness, patience and above all, the capacity to build ongoing relationships between and among both staff and students.

#### 6.1 Overall benefits

When teaching staff willingly apply LFC concepts in the classroom, they use their higher Rank to encourage students on the journey of becoming globally competent
graduates. Students observe the attitudes and behaviours of their teachers as representative of the university culture. When course educators reinforce messages introduced by ‘outside intercultural communication experts’ they are modelling how to embrace new and unfamiliar communication styles. These teachers continue to create safe spaces for exploring differences and provide invaluable feedback about professional skill development for teams and individuals. Through their actions they demonstrate that UniSA expects engineering students to set examples in their careers as globally competent, inclusive communicators.

Many benefits arise from a detailed approach to intercultural engagement and professional skill development. This model is:

- cost effective as initiatives are embedded within established courses
- sustainable as academic staff develop capacities for delivering and sharing the approach
- effective due to developing safe environments wherein all students are encouraged to move outside their comfort zones
- innovative in introducing threshold concepts for personal change
- distinctive in addressing previously unacknowledged issues like Rank differential, intercultural communication and inclusivity
- comprehensive in building effective team cohesion and team skills, with an increasingly complex skill base across the program
- interculturally responsible, as students use their Rank to include diverse perspectives
- reciprocal, in using a teaching style that builds new knowledge using both staff and students’ input
- student-centred and peer-oriented, with team members giving constructive feedback and mentoring each other’s capacity building
- transformative in shifting student attitudes toward global perspectives and developing associated skills for global competency.

6.2 Distinctive benefits

The use of Rank concepts as a catalyst for intercultural engagement is a distinctive element of this approach, extending beyond previous UniSA endeavours for promoting intercultural engagement in the classroom. The effects of Rank in groups are not simply named, but spelt out and linked with the expectation that students will use their personal Rank for the good of their teams.

Saguy et al.’s 2008 research showed that increasing Rank awareness prompted change in the attitudes and behaviours for students with higher Rank (ESB) but not for those with lesser Rank. In contrast, the LFC approach promotes attitudinal and behavioural
change for students with both high and low Rank (Collett 2014). Consistently, most students place high importance on understanding Rank. In the 2013 SEP Week 3 evaluations 87% of students (N=159/175) nominated Rank and communication as a new concept they value. In 2014, this result was replicated, with 86% of students (N=130/166) nominating ‘Rank’ concepts as valuable. In both cohorts, Rank ratings were a close second to the most highly valued ‘getting to know their team mates’.

The 2012 SEP Learning Journal entries about teamwork from high Ranking local students showed they were developing reflexivity and a willingness to change:

*I now think that my weaknesses in group work and presentation is that I need to be more welcome to other ideas, even if they are incorrect or do not fit the project, it needs to be discussed and analysed before judging it ...* (male, local, 2012)

and more bluntly,

*If you’ve got a higher rank, don’t be a dick.* (male, local, 2012)

However, students in the same cohort with lower Rank (international students) also gained insight into the impact of about how their behaviours on impacted group dynamics. These students’ journal entries showed that they were also willing to change:

*If I could advise myself in Week 1, I would tell myself .... to act as if I had a higher rank but without interfering with the team leader, in order to better communicate with my peers and accelerate the progress rate early in the project.* (male, International)

and

*I now think that my strengths in learning is listening to others and knowing what they are talking about properly instead of assuming it. But my weakness is also that I am really quiet at the start and do not put as many ideas as I do towards the end.* (male, international)

Generally speaking, understanding Rank helps students with higher Rank to listen more, and those with lower Rank to contribute more. Journal entries showed that many students were analysing their experiences and their own behaviours in terms of the benefits to team cohesion. Understanding the importance of inclusivity and reviewing their personal participation enabled team members to more willingly experiment with new ways of connecting. Raising student awareness about group dynamics acted as a catalyst for improving team communication because it empowered each person to make adjustments and try new strategies at their own pace and in ways that were comfortable and safe for them.

7 Conclusion

It is vital to acknowledge there would be no Learning for Change model without the ongoing support and encouragement of the Dean Teaching and Learning, and all the teaching staff we work with across the Division of ITEE. Collegial interest and support are acknowledged as essential for creating change in engineering education (Graham
2012:2) and our colleagues’ willingness to venture into new, often uncharted territories has not only been encouraging but critical to the model’s success.

In utilitarian terms, LFC aims to improve the employability prospects for UniSA engineering graduates. Whether domestic or international, these graduates gain a professional advantage from learning and practicing the inclusive communication skills employers want and developing the intercultural competencies needed in culturally diverse workplaces which are increasingly the global norm.

University study should help students to broaden their outlook on life. It is a time for exploring, engaging and experimenting with the rich diversity found in academic communities and an ideal opportunity to develop the intercultural understanding necessary for global competence. The LFC model uses transformative learning principles and concepts about Rank and inclusive communication as fundamental building blocks for establishing effective intercultural relationships between students.

Lasting attitudinal and behavioural changes can develop in all students through expanding their understanding of Rank and inclusive communication across their studies. Where Rank between students is concerned, there are always differing interpretations and levels of understanding about the same experience. The LFC model not only caters for these inevitable variations but develops awareness of and connectedness across differences because ‘everyone at every rank matters’.
References


Diana Collett


Article 3: Coming together: power, rank and intercultural interaction – developing inclusive approaches in higher education
Coming Together: Power, Rank and Intercultural Interaction. Developing Inclusive Approaches in Higher Education

Diana Collett
Abstract: Increasing global migration and interconnectedness presents us with the challenge of finding ways to incorporate diversity and its inherent potential for change. The higher education field exemplifies these global trends as international students from a variety of cultural backgrounds choose to study overseas. One of their important motives in doing so is the opportunity to gain intercultural experiences. Yet consistently they report dissatisfaction with the nature and frequency of their interactions with and among members of the host culture. Educational institutions face losing a lucrative market if they do not pick up the opportunity to engage differently with this diversity. The challenge is to facilitate interactional experiences that will improve working relationships and provide potential for ongoing collaboration between all students and between students and staff of all backgrounds. University of South Australia recognises the potential of inclusivity in developing qualities of global citizenship among all students and is researching critical elements that make a difference. This paper explores alternative interactive strategies being developed at UniSA that explore the effect of differing worldviews on interaction among international and local students and staff. This inclusive model is based on Process Oriented Psychology which emphasises change through increasing awareness among participants. It discusses the critical role of intercultural interaction in developing awareness about cultural assumptions and expectations of themselves and others, and how these shape ongoing and future interactions. Central aspects that have previously received little attention are the role and impact of rank in determining a dominant communication style and how each person’s culturally defined understanding of power and rank impact their ability and choices to contribute in any given context.

Keywords: Intercultural Interaction, Higher Education, Power, Rank, Process Oriented Psychology

Introduction

The rapidly changing face of global interconnectedness in the twenty-first century requires not only new and inclusive understandings about people, culture and community but also new methods of interaction that reflect and promote these understandings. Central to this endeavour is the need for new approaches that embrace what Edward Said (2004:45) describes as ‘the slow seismic change in humanistic perspective’. In particular they need to incorporate the shifting orientation between the public and the private through understanding more deeply how the public and the private are linked in intercultural interaction.

The following paper explores this interface between the public and the private in communication with particular emphasis on the relationship between international and local students in the higher education sector. It contributes valuable new understandings of these communication patterns. Using the Process Oriented Psychology perspectives on rank and power, it describes the ways in which the culturally determined rules of engagement and differing forms of rank impact meaning making and mutual understanding in intercultural interactions. New approaches for inclusive interactions that respect these inherent complexities are outlined with a view to future development and research.

The Significance of Culturally Differing Understandings in Communication

The contribution that personal interpretations of rank, culture and context make in understanding communicative behaviours has been overlooked in the literature about intercultural communication. Generally speaking, ‘culture’ is considered as an homogenous factor, implying that all members of a particular culture subscribe to cultural values in the same manner. In so doing the literature spearheaded by eminent sociologists such as Hofstede (1984, 1997) and Gudykunst (1998) fails to recognise the significance of personal interpretation in the understanding of cultural values.

Embracing the changing relationship between the private and the public requires the ability to recognise and adapt to the fact that each person’s relationship to their cultural values, ie public values, is mediated through their personal or private perspectives.

With regard to the relationship between rank and interaction, references to date have typically focused on the binary split between the dominant and the oppressed (Guirdham, 2005; Carr, 2004) and the added complexity of cultural differences is omitted.
For instance there is little or no consideration of way rank differentials influence interactions between those who are fluent in the dominant communication style and those who are not. Differing interpretations of power and rank are relevant to communication for their influence on the personal or private interpretations of beliefs that are generally assumed to belong to the public realm as cultural values.

Kraidy (1999:472) calls for enquiry into the "messy reality" of power differentials 'as they manifest in everyday life; an enquiry that leads to understanding about 'how' power dynamics are perpetuated, rather than 'why' and 'in whose interest'. With cultural research now exploring the nuanced experiences of individuals as they encounter the interface between cultures (Bhabha, 1994, Appadurai, 1996, Jamieson, 1998, Kraidy 1999) it is timely to extend this inquiry into the relationship between power rank and intercultural interaction.

Goffman (1959:236) states 'Life might not be much of a gamble, but interaction is.' By this he is referring to the fact that communication is essentially an interpretive process and there are no guarantees that the messages sent from one participant will be interpreted as intended by the receiver. In intercultural contexts, differing cultural assumptions all but guarantee that the messages sent from one participant will be interpreted differently by the receiver. Goffman determined that all interactions are underpinned by unstated patterns in communication, i.e. rules of engagement, that are based on shared codes of behaviour. In intercultural contexts participants have differing understandings of these rules of engagement leading to differing interpretations of communicative behaviours.

This occurs because people adopt their notions of power as they develop relationships with those around them, beginning in childhood but continuing throughout life. They internalize these notions as the rules of engagement they then use in their interactive behaviour. These culturally specific rules situate individuals in the consensually determined order of social importance. They function to preserve the culturally specific rules of engagement they then use in their interactive behaviour. These 'tacit assumptions' depend on participants having similar cultural and experiential histories to inform their understandings about what are and are not relevant rules of engagement (Denzin, 1989:107). The tendency to gravitate into relationships with others who have similar cultural perspectives and maintain friendships over time, where they develop a shared history of experiences, is testament to the ease with which tacit assumptions facilitate communication.

However when people do not share a common cultural background, i.e have 'discontinuous historical realities' (Bhabha, 1994:217) tacit assumptions are not relevant. The rules of engagement used as premises for ordering behavior cannot be meaningfully assumed.

Difficulties arise as people automatically make tacit assumptions about another’s communicative behavior without realizing that these assumptions cannot meaningfully facilitate the communication process because of the lack of shared history and/or similar cultural understanding. Typically participants strive to understand each other through the use of these assumptions without exploring or negotiating the differences in the rules of engagement being employed. They try to overlook any moments that feel uneasy between them rather than recognizing that these moments may be signals of valuable differences that could be meaningfully explored.

To date attempts to increase understanding of cultural differences in intercultural communication have tried to explain aspects of culture as if there is one homogenous response by all individuals (Hofstede, 1984, 1997, Gudikunst, 1998). The use of cultural generalizations enables concessions to be made for cultural difference. This practice is becoming increasingly problematic in a world where the relationship between the individual and the collective is not static. Each person’s interpretation of their cultural underpinnings is navigated through their heritage and their experiences. It is the lack of negotiation of these personal differences that can lead to massive misunderstandings as the following example illustrates.

I conduct orientation classes for newly arrived international students at university. In one exercise for post graduate students we explore the rules of engagement they have used in their previous university, comparing the differences and explaining what is expected in Australia. At the beginning of this year I shared this exercise with two groups, both of which contained students from China. In the first instance the Chinese students stated that students have the highest rank in the university whereas the second group outlined a structure with the President of the university at the top. Recognising the rank of the president was clear to me because this person ultimately makes the decisions that shape and run the organisation. When I asked for an explanation for why they thought the students had most rank, the first group stated that this was because they were paying for their education. One of the Chinese students in the second group, who had been a university lecturer, explained that students who can now afford
to pay for education have a sense of entitlement borne of the prestige associated with this wealth in today’s China. This entitlement informs the rules of engagement the students in the first group were using even in the Australian university. Clearly there is not a shared cultural consensus between the two groups of Chinese students and to assume one would be misleading.

Variation in usage of rules of engagement directly affects the behaviours and expectations of individuals. I have been involved in several instances where some Chinese students have demanded to be passed in a course because they have paid their fees. Now that I am more aware of possible rules of engagement that support such expectations of a university, I can better understand what previously appeared to be a baffling demand.

The practice of relying on cultural generalizations to inform intercultural interactions also fails to recognize the critical role that negotiating differences can play in developing inclusive and relevant understanding between those involved. The above illustration emphasizes the importance of making explicit individual differences in the interpretations being used in order to create better understanding. Such exploration between participants enriches interactions through providing specific information about expectations and assumptions directly relevant to the circumstances of the interaction and its context.

Strategies that make explicit the various rules of engagement are central to inclusive intercultural communication. It is through negotiating these differences, not ignoring them, that their potential to create shared meaning and mutual understanding unfolds.

Why have these differences remained hidden until now? Goffman (1959:21) provides a possible explanation when he outlines the role of engagement that prohibits disclosure of difference in interactions. He stated that the development of a ‘working consensus’ between group participants is based on two critical premises: each person has unchallenged authority regarding comments about their private domain and there is a tacit agreement to avoid open conflict about definitions. Under these conditions silence about difference, keeping to the known and safe, is preferable to offending anyone.

This practice however has the unintended consequence of perpetuating the rules of engagement of the dominant communication style at the exclusion of deeper understandings that reflect the differing cultural values present. Research into how these rules of engagement are changing in the current shift between the private and the public is called for and timely.

### Rank and the Dominant Communication Style

Another factor that perpetuates this practice is the impact of rank on communication. Researchers in Process Oriented Psychology (Mindell, 1995, Diamond, 1996, Camastral, 2000) have studied personal behaviour to describe the impact of rank differentials upon individuals in interactions. They have outlined common dynamics found consistently during intercultural interactions in a wide range of cultural settings.

Camastral (2000) states that, in the Process Oriented Psychology framework, those with rank take for granted their capacity to dominate communication. Their dominance is evident through their ability to determine the place, time and communication style of an interaction. They are often unaware of exactly how their behaviour perpetuates the style with which they feel comfortable and the inequity this creates for the ones who are marginalised. Those with less rank, on the other hand, are obliged to comply by observing the rules of engagement of the dominant communication style. They are well aware of how the behaviours of the dominant group perpetuate these communication advantages in both access and fluency.

She also points out that the marginalised are required to translate their contribution into the communication style of those with rank. In so doing, they are forced out of their comfort zone while perpetuating the comfort zone of those with rank. This means they are the ones to make psychological adaptations to the social ordering. Individuals respond differently to such pressures – some thrive with the challenge while others develop a sense of hopelessness. The variation in adaptive responses is reflected in the fact that, despite being highly successful in their previous studies international students attain both the best and the worst grades of the entire university student body (GCEQ, 2006).

Strategies that seek to explain the complexities of intercultural communication can work towards addressing these rank imbalances. By making transparent some of the practices participants actually experience, all parties have equal access to knowledge about previously unexplained communication dynamics. The objectivity that comes with knowing about underlying dynamics frees people to see them as only one way of communicating and this gives participants choice about how they want to respond to these conventions.

Discussion of the differences, on the basis that all styles are relevant and appropriate, will encourage more equitable access to expression for all participants. After all communication is the interchange of thoughts, opinions and information (Macquarie Dictionary, 1982: 243) and it is through exploring
difference and encouraging negotiation that common meaning and mutual understanding develop.

Western Communication Style in Higher Education

The Australian tertiary education sector is an arena where cultural difference, with all its complexities, is clearly manifest. Australian universities are having difficulty grappling with the seemingly insurmountable transition problems of international students from differing cultural heritages (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Dalglish & Chan, 2005, Bodycott & Walker, 2000). At University of South Australia alone there are students from over 50 different countries with an even wider variation in cultural perspectives when you consider their personal affiliations—such as Indians from Gujarat or Kerala or Chinese from Beijing or Szechuan etc.

The need to improve interactive capacity, along with intercultural awareness, is receiving increasing prominence as a significant factor in the frenzy to maintain high levels of onshore international student enrolments. (Marginson, 2006). In this competitive academic environment, were discrepancies in understanding impact the learning goals, interactivity and global competence for all, international and local students have a lot to gain from exploring alternative interactive styles.

Australian universities adhere to a teaching style based on a Western communication style that both attracts and precludes students from other cultures. They are attracted because this style is the lingua franca of the powerful cultures throughout the world. Understanding the modus operandi of the Western communication style is a passport to future global success. They are precluded because of the inability of those using the Western communication style to value and effectively include the contribution of their cultural diversity (Bodycott & Walker, 2000:87). As Camasstral pointed out the rank of the Western communication style all too frequently perpetuates lack of awareness of the ways in which its use dominates over those who are not fluent in understanding its rules of engagement.

I will define the Western communication style as the direct, linear and descriptive style that is used in conjunction with the academic orientation of Western universities. Through centuries of development it has evolved as the vehicle of delivery serving the requirements of the academic environment. It facilitates the educational methodologies of debate and comparison favoured in the Western education system. For example the common style in Western tertiary classrooms emphasises imparting, understanding and reflecting upon contemporary knowledge in a specific field. Interpretations associated with personal experiences and reactions are often seen as outside the public arena and not encouraged.

I acknowledge there are limitations in developing such a narrow definition as it mistakenly conveys a sense of uniformity between Western cultures. It excludes many culturally differing styles that could also identify as ‘Western’ such as the French style or the Australian perhaps. In reality there is no homogeneous Western communication style, each language being a vehicle of cultural expression conveying a richness of nuances and specificities and adapting to ever-changing contexts and climates.

For the purpose of this article however, the Western academic style described above is relevant to this discussion because international students require mastery over this vehicle of communication as a passport not only in their education but to all that such an education promises for the future. None the less, gaining this passport comes at a price. The process of adopting one style means forsaking aspects of themselves that may not be expressed adequately in the new style. This can be a significant loss for individual personality and self esteem. Many international students talk to me of their experiences of inadequacy, shame and silencing when they realise that their version of English is not well understood. Even when they have spent years learning English prior to arrival they are quite astonished at how difficult it is to converse with the locals.

The Western communication style, perpetuates Western rules of engagement. These rules influence who speaks, when they speak, what they say and how they position themselves. Its use in the Australian university context implicitly dictates the mode of communication in all educative settings. While this is inevitable, failing to make explicit its rank differentials means the significance of the process of marginalisation is not addressed adequately for its impact on the educative experiences of students, in particular international students. The impact of feelings of exclusion and the long-term effects upon ongoing relationships of not being able to adequately convey one’s thoughts are important areas for future research.

Feedback given during intercultural communication sessions suggests that local staff and students at ease with the Western style are aware they have an advantage of rank. They may also recognise a responsibility to be inclusive of those who are marginalised. However they interpret this responsibility as a need to inform “the others” of the appropriate rules of engagement of the Western style. They are thereby attempting to create inclusion on their own terms. A more embracing model would be for locals to use their rank to encourage discussion of alternative styles and perspectives which incorporate all parti-
participants’ relevant rules of engagement, expectations and assumptions.

Here is an example taken from a series of intercultural communication classes I conducted for postgraduate business students. These classes are comprised of two distinct groups of students - highly articulate, older, local students with managerial experience and younger, newly graduated, inexperienced international students, studying this degree as a point of career entry. Class discussions about the impact of rank across cultures revealed very different responses from members of the two groups. In-class feedback, after culturally mixed small group discussions, revealed both the unconscious use of rank by members of the local group and the marginalisation of those from differing cultural heritage.

In every instance the group feedback was conveyed by a local student who commented that the group did not discriminate against the international students - on the contrary, locals took much time and effort to explain what is expected of the international students in Australian business interactions. They believed they were being inclusive in the reporting process by soliciting agreement for their comments from their international student group members. At no point did the local students consider the relevance of exploring with the international students their actual experiences or expectations.

An alternative interpretation of this reporting behaviour would be that in seeking consensus with the international students while reporting to a lecturer, the local spokesperson is co-opting this agreement to bolster their relative rank in the interaction with the lecturer – a conversation where they have less rank. Such agreement by the international students can be seen as compliance with the dominant perspective not, as asserted, consensus among all group members.

A truer indicator of the degree of exclusion students of differing cultural heritage experienced during these encounters is the fact that at no stage during the feedback were these students asked to speak personally and local students did not see any problem with speaking collectively on behalf of all group members.

The self-reported experiences of the international students in the groups gave a very different perspective. Certainly they acknowledged coming to Australia in part to learn about appropriate behaviours for the Western business culture. They also spoke freely, in the classroom and in evaluation, about the extent and impact of their feelings of marginalisation in these experiences. Notably they commented on the way they further internalized this sense of exclusion as a personal inadequacy; a conclusion that led to diminished self-esteem, further undermining their courage to speak out. Despite their awareness of this problem they expressed a lack of skills to overcome it.

Such marginalisation can have many and varied consequences for the educational experience of international students. Consider the common practice of assessing student class participation on their verbal contribution. This practice constructs situations which marginalise both the students with little knowledge of the rules of engagement and those from cultures where verbal participation in class is considered rude. A common university response has been to offer education to these marginalised students in verbal presentation skills.

Teaching presentation skills is an important step because it makes these rules more transparent. In addition, there needs to be time provided for recognition and incorporation of the personal implications for those who are new to this culture or culturally constrained. In effect these students are double bound. They report a sense of great discomfort because in order to succeed in the West they must fail their cultural selves: if they speak out in oral presentations they go against their cultural understanding of the appropriate rules of engagement - if they don’t, they will be penalized by a loss of marks. Acknowledging these internal tensions poses the question - is it reasonable for the Western academic system to grade students on their capacity to stretch beyond their cultural comfort zones? There is currently no way to take into consideration the unfair advantage this gives to local students with greater communicative rank.

The above examples clearly show that students who do not share the social rank of the dominant culture, are undoubtedly at a double disadvantage. Firstly they are excluded by their lack of familiarity with the rules of engagement of the Western style. Secondly, the unconscious, unintended use of rank to maintain a status quo prevents any consideration of the experiences of those with differing cultural understandings. The assumption that all students must learn the rules of engagement of the Western communication style serves to perpetuate the status quo. Blind acceptance of this assumption has prevented those with rank from addressing the implications for those who are marginalized and therefore face a steep learning curve.

Recognising the importance of addressing communicative imbalances is a constructive way to use the rank of the Western communication style. With this in mind, educators can design more inclusive interactive strategies favouring shared meaning over Western perspective.

Incorporating the input of all requires clear acknowledgement of the fact that the dimensions of rank and the rules of engagement are not fixed determinates reflecting only the Western perspective.
Educators can encourage exploration of the complexities differing understandings present for intercultural understanding as an alternative to the current status quo where they are either ignored or reduced (Crichton et al. 2004). A more valuable use of rank is to create an inclusive interactive scaffolding with which to promote mutual understanding specifically relevant to the particular interaction and context. Understanding that is instrumental for developing ongoing, working relationships. This represents a practical approach to increasing internationalisation, intercultural competency with tangible skills in intercultural relating for the development of global citizenship.

**Expanding Notions of Rules of Engagement in Communication: The Importance of Rank**

Paradoxically, the direct and open qualities of the Western communication style, provide a suitable framework within which to developing inclusive models. This style favours practices that can deal with differences such as explanation, exploration, examination and making explicit that which is implicit. It is not the Western communication style per se that is problematic, merely the inherent unexamined power balances and cultural assumptions.

Some rules of engagement are essential for academic success in the Western system and are therefore not negotiable. These are the rules involved with critical thinking, analysis and the ability to debate. Rules which pertain to interpersonal engagement, such as greeting behaviours and collaborative strategies however, vary across cultures. By exploring differences in these rules and incorporating greater understanding of how rank interfaces with communication, we are creating ways for the spaces between cultures to become more explicitly understood and meaning can become open for negotiation.

The generally accepted definition of rank as social status or ‘the power derived from socially defined value systems’ (Diamond 2004) is unidimensional. Its dominance in Western cultures has led to the assumption that social rank is the only ‘legitimate’ form but this is blind to other forms of rank which incorporate the development of personal power. The expanded definition of rank developed in Process Oriented Psychology encompasses personal attributes and is therefore more relevant for explaining the complexities of interpersonal communication. In this definition rank is ‘a conscious or unconscious, social or personal ability or power arising from culture, community support, personal psychology and/or spiritual power’ (Mindell 1995:42)

Mindell’s definition is particularly relevant in communication because it accounts for the use of personal powers that cut across the style of those with social rank. These forms are available for all participants, independent of their social status. Diamond (2004) discusses two forms of rank of particular relevance to educational interactions. These are psychological rank (qualities developed through self reflection about experiences) and spiritual rank (the inner conviction borne out of deep personal religious or spiritual alliances). These forms of rank are developed within the individual as personal power that is adaptable across a wide range of contexts (Diamond 2004:15) enabling those with less social rank to have influence on their own terms.

Psychological rank develops with the insight gained from our personal experiences, such as examining communication skills or struggling with cultural disparities. The processes of coming to terms with differing expectations and assumptions, developing adequate understanding of the rules of engagement and expressing oneself appropriately are all instrumental in the development of personal psychological rank. Paradoxically, through their initial exclusion, those who are marginalised by the Western academic style must engage in the kinds of inner reflexive dialogue which develops personal strengths or psychological rank. Over time this can assist them to express themselves despite their lack of social rank.

Spiritual rank is relevant to communication because if encourages inclusiveness. Those with spiritual rank bring to interactions an understanding of interconnectedness that values all perspectives for their contribution to the whole. They display qualities of eldership to expand beyond one-sidedness.

Both psychological and spiritual rank are factors that shape each individual’s personal power. They are available for use in many social contexts. Social rank, on the other hand, which predominates in arenas where a material worldview is paramount. It is limited because its status and power relate only to that particular context and cultural orientation (Diamond, 2004:15).

Schupbach (1998) states that the net effect of rank on communication is cumulative, representing the combined impact of social, psychological and spiritual rank that is relevant for that particular context. The interplay of various partial forms of rank within a conversation is an important dynamic through which intimacy or connectedness between individuals develops. Each exchange provides valuable information with which participants are located within the rank matrix of the interaction. Remember the experience of listening to someone who communicates well and how this subtly raises our estimation of that person.

Now let us consider the forms of rank being employed in the original example of the Chinese stu-
Students who believed they have the highest rank in the university. It is evident that these students are equating access to money with social status but are unaware that this social rank has no currency in the Australian university system. Their ability to easily communicate their needs suggests that they have developed a strong sense of personal power or psychological rank with their inner reflexive dialogue being based on a sense of supremacy or entitlement. However their spiritual rank is underdeveloped as they show little awareness or interest in the perspectives of others.

Such an analysis of the combined rank variables provides a nuanced understanding of benefit to future interactions. For instance, if I were to engage with these students, knowing this would enable me to use my social rank as a member of staff constructively by including both theirs and the universities' perspectives in the discussion. Showing that I understand where they are coming from as well as how this is discontinuous with the Australian situation provides a sense of relativity with which to bridge the cultural divide. It creates a more equitable platform for negotiation for all parties.

On the other hand, if the Chinese students were to learn and reflect on the various forms of rank and rules of engagement they may recognise that there are more than one way to view situations. Recognising differences in rules of engagement and being willing to consider these differences will assist them to develop their spiritual rank and interconnectedness.

Towards Inclusive Approaches in Higher Education

Crichton et al (2006) found that engaging with the process of self-reflection and reflexive dialogue is extremely beneficial for developing an open attitude to intercultural communication. International students are currently in a position where they have to engage in more reflection than locals in their struggle to determine the relevant rules of engagement. In contrast, the need for such personal reflection is less of an imperative for locals and those who are comfortable with the Western communication style.

All students and staff can develop greater interactive competency through reflexive understanding about their rank and differences in rules of engagement. The process of self-reflection can be facilitated by making them aware of the ways in which these factors are embedded in communication. Providing a conceptual framework that focuses students’ attention on personal and psychological rank is a positive proactive alternative that can counteract the hopelessness that comes when social marginalisation is misinterpreted as a personal deficit.

Other benefits of this approach include:

- encouraging early participation of all participants on their own terms
- creating a supportive environment which normalizes the effect of difference
- establishing rank dynamics within a group that reflect personal capacities as well as differing social norms
- opportunities for inner reflection about the self and others based on stated information, not inference and assumption.

This can be accomplished through the use of introductory practices that foreground the personal and cultural differences among people from discontinuous backgrounds and provide opportunities for the relevant rules of engagement and rank differentials to be negotiated. The proposed introductory practices are based on respect for individual experiences as portrayed through the adult learning principles of Paulo Freire (1972) and are also consistent with the current global shifts in the relationship between the personal and the public (Said 2004, Bhabha,1994, Jameson,1998).

Such inclusive introductory practices are made possible through the use of an interactive scaffolding with three critical elements. These are 1) an awareness of the ways in which rank and culture interface in communication, 2) expression of personal position and 3) negotiation between perspectives.

Some suggestions of how this scaffolding can be created follow.

Setting Up the Interaction -Conscious Use of Rank

Inclusive interactions require forethought and advocacy because they do not conform to currently accepted communication patterns. Those responsible for designing the interactive environment will need to consider how to advocate for the significance of this approach and actively construct opportunities that facilitate inclusivity.

Aspects to be considered within introductory practices include:

- Seating arrangements where all participants can be seen equally
- Actively constructing culturally mixed groups.
- Providing education and advocacy to staff and students regarding the relevance of aforementioned elements for intercultural competency.
- Modelling and fostering an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity, open mindedness and goodwill in the interactive environment.
Theory Component

Two aspects are important here:–

• Explaining the importance of current interactions in developing intercultural competence in order to become global citizens, an increasingly evident necessity of future career success.

• A theoretical explanation of differing forms of rank and their relevance to communication in that context.

Providing Opportunities to Explore Notions of Relevant Rules of Engagement

This practice cuts across the Western communication style by foregrounding differences, rather than similarities from the beginning. These are opportunities for everyone to share and listen to relevant information about themselves through explaining what they see as appropriate or expect of others and themselves in this context. It enables participants to hear the salient interpretive differences between them and therefore better determine what is required for their ongoing interactions.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the nature of and relationship between personal experiences and interpretations of participants in intercultural communication. It offers deeper insight into how the previously unexplored dimensions of power and rank are critical in the development of inclusive approaches. Exploring the ways in which rank and rules of engagement structure communication provides insight into the relationships between culture, power and communication behaviours, with which to bridge the personal and the interpersonal that are relevant and timely for the changing interface between private values and public expectations.

This approach is central to developing communicative strategies that are neither reductive nor parochial (Said, 2004:50) but contribute to the creation of a global environment where collaborative engagement can mean working with similarities, differences and the deep-seated needs of all involved.

References


**About the Author**

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Diana Collett has extensive experience in intercultural communication having worked professionally with both refugees and international students for the past 8 years. Her studies in Process Oriented Psychology, an interdisciplinary approach to social change, have shaped her work as a psychotherapist and counsellor for almost 20 years. She is passionate about creating ways for people to interact which are mindful of the potential for marginalisation and encourage more authentic participation. The current study is part of her Professional Doctorate in Cultural Studies at University of Western Sydney.
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