Bridging the Gap - SinoOz:

Business Education Position Paper

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POSITIONING THE PROBLEM

To say that there is a mismatch between Australian and Chinese thinking is self evident. Identifying the two landscapes and looking for points where a bridges can be constructed becomes an imperative if collaboration is seen as desirable by both people groups. Personal experience has shown the range of difficulties that exist and it is a very fine line between success and failure when measured by mutual success and bilateral cooperation.

When reading this paper it is necessary to consider a number of participants and the paper is limited to higher education. Participants include: Universities (chancellery, teacher, students, and administrators); Education Agents and Intermediaries; Governments (ministries of education, immigration, etc.). These are the tangible participants but we also need to consider intangibles including: Enculturation; Systems; Policies and Agencies (i.e. drivers of changes +ve and -ve); etc. To consider each in detail in this paper is not plausible but awareness is important.

We will briefly highlight that any lasting bridge (i.e. value and emphasis of long term mutual relationship networks) between universities, and associate service groups, within the two nations requires two core aspects that rarely see the light of day in what would normally be master-servant business relationships - i.e. trust and equity - not seeking undue advantage or exploitation. We are also introducing in this position paper the concept of International Learning Complementation which we will define and discuss.

When considering your own experiences in the light of this paper: firstly, describe your own practice - good, bad, uncertainties, etc. then reflect upon what 'bridging the gap' would look like relative to what you are about to read. Such an exercise will show where we all can gain when observations are communicated - in our case at the 2nd International Forum of Business Education - 2007, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia.
**Australian view of the Cultures**

Australia is a land of diverse cultures and traditions being influenced by 'Western' culture. It is a nation of immigration but also contains a strong indigenous people. Recently there has been a prominent Asian influence due to immigration and proximity to Asia. Australians live an urban lifestyle around the green fringe, particularly the East coast. The cities are melting pots of the world's people groups (i.e. groups with similar ethnic and cultural background not necessarily location) and to look at the physical features, beliefs, language background will not enable you to distinguish an Australian. Australians view themselves as egalitarian (i.e. self reliance, a fair go, mate-ship, loyalty), individual and anti-authoritarian (i.e. distrust of the rich and powerful).¹

An Australian view of Chinese society sees tradition extending back for millennia and is represented by a major people group (Han) and a series of minority peoples. It is fair to state two core aspects stand out: firstly, that of face (e.g. mientzu and lien); secondly, reciprocal social networks (e.g. guangxi and ganqing). To be Chinese is to see society in terms of relationship networks and the individuals position within them (i.e. inside or outside), and the inherent responsibility that emanates from the relationship.² China is an emerging market economy with a strong growth; a large population, urbanised and rural; a single child and socialist politic.

**Chinese view of the Cultures**

Chinese culture has very strong patriotism. It is a kind of ethical culture, which is a pragmatic culture and focuses on Confucianism. Chinese culture pays attention on the individual inside cultivation and amicable relationships between persons. Chinese culture has strong speculation tradition, emphasising the importance of reason and wisdom, and stands for dialectical thinking. Chinese culture has a unique aesthetical sense and humanity spirit, and pays attention to the earthly life and cherishes life’s value. Chinese culture stresses rites and emphasises socially harmonious development.

Australia is a country with many different national persons, which is tolerant and lenient. Australia is a multinational country, there are more than 140 nations living on this land. The clear feature is its diversification. In details, Australian culture includes: aboriginal culture, immigrant diverse cultures: Caucasian main culture; country culture based on jungle spirits; and city culture. Diverse-culture reflects, in language, more than one language. Main language in Australia is English which during the developing process evolutes many different English variants, including aboriginal English, immigrant English and Caucasian English.


Cultural Pluralism in Business Education and Programs

There is a mismatch, remembering that Australians are 'individualists' and emphasise personal achievement at the expense of the group goals whereas Chinese are 'collectivist' emphasising family and work group goals. If we are looking for neat solutions and connections we delude ourselves. This is born out in differences in perceptions and expectations of teaching and learning styles. An awareness and intercultural understanding is a mutual responsibility but having said that how do you then achieve it.

Now consider a Globalised world view where values become fluid and where we are subjected to a cultural smorgasbord. Any wonder there are conflicts and misunderstandings, and retreat to a fundamentalist view of ones own values and the consequent measurement of others values (i.e. teaching and learning in our case) in terms of our view. Hofstede and Hofstede (2004) suggest that the world is full of confrontations between peoples, groups and nations and that understanding the differences is the starting point for change and collaboration. They further state that:

Every person carries within him - or herself patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting that were learned throughout their lifetime... As soon as certain patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting have established themselves within a person's mind, he or she must unlearn these before' being able to learn something different and unlearning is more difficult than learning for the first time. (2004:3)3

Equally cultural imperialism and cultural homogenisation are mutually opposed and we would contend are undesirable. This suggests a right and wrong organisational enculturation and that to operate in a new organisational culture requires this radical change. This need not be the understanding if we take a constructive and complementary perspective.

Hofstede in writing about organisational culture is suggesting that learners (in our case) move from their existing culture and convert to the adopting organisations culture. In practice this therefore is the problem in the existing study abroad systems and causes mobile students to regress to a one dimensional cultural fundamentalism that negates new value production and learning from an international study abroad experience.

For an education enculturation we are looking for the growth in individual's cultural pluralism and complementation not cultural subjugation and homogenisation, elitism or imperialism. We must recognise this dichotomy if we are to progress long term educational relationships and teaching of business programs. Unless we achieve cultural pluralism and complementation we need to question the value of study abroad programs. Are we simply looking to exploit the globalisation of the economy and education at the student and staff expense?

3 Hofstede, G and Hofstede, G 2004, Cultures and Organisations:Software of the Mind, McGraw-Hill NY.
Deficiency Focused Systems

At the course and subject level of a bilateral business program; how do we popularise integration of student and teacher learning experiences for both given the traditional and nominal stereotypes (i.e. international and domestic; didactic teaching; rote learners and copyists, etc.) within a common program of study? The backdrop to such a question is the 'ignorance' and 'deficiency' focus on learning approaches of individuals from ethnic and cultural backgrounds other than the domestic reality, which could already be multi-cultural. There is seemingly no motive to increase 'understanding' and sharing of knowledge and experiences. Rather, it is most probable to see stereotypical labels and assumptions being voiced, particularly when assessment and syndicate studies are required.

Secondly, why is it that students are differentiated based on their fee or visa category and upon their ethnicity - e.g. you're teaching 'Asian' students - and assume the stereotypical deficiencies accorded to such a group by students and teachers alike? Ethnicity and culture do impact learning and behaviour and can be objectively integrated across a learning group. This therefore requires an evaluation of skills that are required and the skills that are offered by the learner/s and create a mapping that draws the two into balance as a 'sufficiency' model and further integrated using the complementation approach.

For any implementation of 'deep learning' the various individual's learning approaches and norms need to be considered and may well require to be made explicit and augmented with exercises that engage latent skills and thinking models. At no point can ethnicity be denied but equally ethnicity should not be the prejudicial starting point that pervades much of the common 'understanding' and labeling of learners.

CONCLUSION

We are suggesting a Mutual Learning Complementation (MLC).-MLC is the ability for coincidental matching of unrelated individual's learning approaches/norms, and to seek empathy of context (ethnicity),theory (values) and practice (culture) across each individual's learning experiences in a generative and repeatable form^4 (Calway, 2007). To achieve this requires a fundamental readdressing of learning and teaching enculturation approaches at all levels, in particular between participating universities of a collaborative Business Education programs. If we 'internationalise' the curriculum we are only telling half the story; and being only half right is to be totally wrong.

^4 Calway, B.A. 2007 Curricula Internationalisation Working Definitions, Office of Associate Dean International Swinburne University of Technology, Lilydale.
REFERENCES

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