A Skilled Hand and a Cultivated Mind

A SKILLED HAND AND A CULTIVATED MIND

A Culture of Learning and Teaching at RMIT University

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture it is respectful to formally womin djeka (welcome) people to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander country or land. At RMIT we do this with the following acknowledgement:

'Luwaytini' by Mark Cleaver, Palawa.

"We would like to acknowledge Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations as the Traditional Owners of the land on which the University stands. We respectfully recognise Elders past, present and future."

At RMIT we recognise and respect the unique culture and contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring to our communities. We are also proud to provide study, cultural, & personal support to our Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students in their learning journey. We womin djeka

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The editors and contributors acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which the work for this volume has taken place. RMIT University's city campus in Melbourne, Australia, is on the unceded lands of Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation. RMIT University, and we all, respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors and Elders, past and present, and we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct the business of RMIT University.

The editors of this volume, *A Skilled Hand and a Cultivated Mind: A Culture of Learning and Teaching at RMIT University,* are all members of the Social and Global Studies Centre (SGSC). While the chapters reflect some key interests and areas of expertise of the SGSC theme group on Language, Culture and International Education (LCIE), to which most of the editors belong, contributors of chapters are by no means only of LCIE. Indeed, we are delighted to have contributing authors from well beyond the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies (in which the Centre sits), and beyond the College of Design and Social Context (in which the School sits). The editors would like to acknowledge

the positive and collegial environments which have made this volume both possible and so rewarding to bring together. Even though this volume took shape during the challenging years of 2020 to 2022, this volume served as a thread – one of many – that connected us and, we hope, will continue to connect us into the future.

We are also very pleased and excited that this volume is among the first academic books to published by our university's new publishing venture, RMIT Open Press. As an open access book, it is available online without cost, thus facilitating access to the insights of the chapters within. The editors of this volume are grateful to the assistance and support of the RMIT Library in bringing this book to their new platform. We also appreciate the fact that our university supports efforts towards open access publishing. The costs of creating a price-free book are of course borne somewhere, and we acknowledge that the RMIT's support of open access provides vital resources for such publishing. With specific regards to the present volume, the editors would also like to express their gratitude to the Social and Global Studies Centre for funding provided in 2022, which made it possible for this volume to be professionally edited.

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CHAPTER 1: A SKILLED HAND AND A CULTIVATED MIND: A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING PRACTICE AT RMIT UNIVERSITY

Chapter 1

A Skilled Hand and a Cultivated Mind: A Culture of Learning and Teaching Practice at RMIT University

Julian CH Lee, Maki Yoshida, Jindan Ni, Kaye Quek, Anamaria Ducasse

All authors from the *School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University*

Perita manus, mens exculta – a skilled hand, a cultivated mind. Today, RMIT University's motto captures the approach of RMIT University to teaching and research as well as it did at its establishment as the 'Working Men's College of Melbourne' in 1887. The approach has been grounded in practice and engagement with communities and industry,

guided by theory and research, and brought together by praxis – the unity of theory and practice.

Although knowledge acquisition is often achieved best through application, there is more at stake. In an age where information is being generated at incredible rates, where the quantity of data is exploding, where the knowledge and axioms that were once held as true become superseded in ever shorter periods of time, we have at hand a need for not only well-informed members of society but for those who know how to remain well-informed. This means people who can navigate the new and complex problems that their communities face, and who not only are able – but *feel* able and confident – to work thoughtfully, collaboratively and sensitively with others to address problems and create advancements. In short, while having knowledge is important, increasingly important is the ability to navigate the glut of information, to understand its origins, to consider it with both a rigorous eye, and with an eye to its applicability. This ability to apply knowledge in turn is a skillset, fostered through practice and an awareness of context and the reality that the experience of ideas and information can differ significantly.

Too readily the problems facing us are framed as ones to be addressed through technical or medical 'solutions', thus the contemporary emphasis on STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics. However, countless examples demonstrate that many such solutions flounder, or even create new problems because of inadequate attention to, and

thoughtful engagement with social context. This may result from many kinds of oversight, including overlooking historically embedded dynamics (e.g. Boulton et al., 2015); under-appreciating differences in cultural worldviews and values (e.g. Patel, 2013); failing to engage with a wide enough array of stakeholders (Green, 2016, p. 242 & passim; Bowman et al., 2015, p. 11); and being unreflective about one's own social position and how this plays into historical and cultural dynamics (e.g. Nadarajah et al., 2021, p. 4).

As the challenges that face local and global communities, and humanity in general, are becoming increasingly complex, how people become equipped to address these challenges in globalised world requires ever more consideration and reflection. Complex challenges require collaboration, often across national borders, and engagement with others who speak different languages and have different culturally informed worldviews. Not only is the need for collaborative success on many issues ever more important, but even the nature of success requires interrogation, for what success means to different societies and stakeholders can vary greatly.

Universities play an important role in providing the skills, knowledge and qualifications that set people – often young people – on the paths to addressing challenges and to fulfilling personal aspirations. Although it is tempting to think that what the university does is 'teaching', it may well be better to think about universities creating, designing and curating learning experiences – the experiences that cultivate various

forms of ability and personal growth. Weekly lectures and tutorials that take place in a subject over a semester are probably what most readily spring to mind when we think about university learning, but there are a great many other ways in which universities create learning experiences for students. These include study tours, micro-credentials, co-curricular activities with industry and community, engagement with place and Indigenous knowledge and enabling overseas exchange. However, the thoughtful designing of the conditions in which learning occurs go further than meeting formal 'learning outcomes' and choosing the content of particular subjects and topics. Learning is affected by the design of the built environment, the layout and furnishing of teaching spaces, and as is explored in this volume, it is to be found in the seemingly incidental moments of interaction before, after and during classes, where essential interpersonal connections develop and flourish.

How those of us who work in universities achieve our diverse objectives with students is something that requires constant reflection and evolution. While a given subject might have had the same 'course learning outcomes' for twenty years, the ways by which those outcomes are achieved constantly change. Students change, teachers change, the world changes, and the medium of instruction changes. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic made the latter change starkly apparent when, as explored by Julian Lee and several co-authors in Chapter X of this volume, teaching abruptly moved online over 2020 and

2021, but the trend towards a more online experience of university was occurring in any case (Young, 2023). Thus, remaining engaged in the scholarship of learning and teaching, and sharing learning and teaching insights and experiences, are fundamental to our objectives as practitioners at university.

The discussions in this volume draw on the research and reflections of colleagues at RMIT University. The volume emanates from discussions and research taking place particularly amongst members of the Language, Culture and International Education (LCIE) research theme group of the Social and Global Studies Centre. This centre, which is itself located in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies (GUSS), houses an array of diverse academic discipline groups including Global and Languages Studies, whose members overlap significantly with those in LCIE. Both the LCIE theme group and Global and Language Studies share common concerns relating to the learning, teaching and research of global skills (such as those articulated by Bourn 2018; Bell et al. 2020). These skills encompass a range of competencies necessary for thoughtfully engaging with global issues, global problems and the array of complexities that come with the diverse histories, cultures, languages and worldviews of people around the world. While these competencies are a focus of RMIT's 'pioneering' Bachelor of International Studies degree (Steger & Wahlrab, 2017, p. 48; Bell et al., 2020), subjects in which many of these skills are built are taught to students throughout the university.

These considerations of the importance of global and cultural competencies are not, however, just to be found in LCIE and Global and Language Studies. Indeed, they are university-wide concerns that have come to be distilled in one of RMIT's new core graduate outcomes: to develop 'ethical global citizens'. This graduate attribute has been articulated as the ability to "Communicate and collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds, with commitment to diversity, inclusion and respect, while actively contributing to a more sustainable world with an application of knowledge relating to Indigenous and globally inclusive perspectives. Actively participate in actions towards reconciliation and self-determination of First Nations."

So, while this volume emanates from LCIE and GLS, we have sought to bring into this volume contributions from colleagues and interlocuters on these issues from elsewhere in RMIT. Thus, we hear in Chapter 4 from Nick Brown and Tanja Rosenqvist on their work on humanitarian engineering; in Chapter 6 from Frank Ponte and Jennifer Hurley from the RMIT University Library on their work in initiating RMIT's open educational resource capabilities; Chapter 5 from Anna Branford et al. from RMIT's Centre for Educational Innovation and Development on their work on careers and employability; and Gabriella Karakas and Samantha Webster who write in Chapter 7 about their crucial roles as PhD student representatives in building and maintaining a

community amongst higher degree by research candidates during 2020.

The practice of learning and teaching at RMIT builds on a longstanding tradition of research and scholarship in educational practice (e.g. Tynan et al., 2019). Within this tradition, there is particular engagement with issues important in the cultivation of ethical global citizenship amongst members of the Language, Culture, and International Education research group in the Social and Global Studies Centre, as well as amongst members of the Global and Language Studies discipline area of GUSS (e.g. Harris Agisilaou & Harris, 2023; Harris Agisilaou 2022; Harris & Harris, 2019). Although the notion of global citizenship may be debated, and what constitutes an ethical global citizen likewise contested, these discussions have a relationship with the issues raised by movements towards 'decolonising the university'. While what it means to decolonise a university is also a matter of discussion and difference of opinion (Bhambra et al., 2020; Khoo et a;, 2020), Yaso Nadarajah has made noteworthy contributions to discussions of decolonising pedagogical practices in higher education (see Nadarajah et al., 2022a; Nadarajah & Grydehøj, 2016; Nadarajah, 2022b; Grydehøj et al., 2021). In a special edition of the *Island Studies Journal* that Nadarajah co-edited on the topic of 'Islands and Decolonization' (volume 11, number 2), Nadarajah et al. consider systemic issues in relation to the epistemologies with which we, as researchers and academics and teachers, engage.

In this article, Nadarajah, Elena Burgos Martinez, Ping Su, and Adam Grydehøj assert that:

> While knowledge can be liberating and emancipatory, it can also be oppressive and intimidating. The impacts of knowledge are always coloured by who is saying what, when, and for what reason. Interrogation of or engagement in epistemic processes such as 'decolonisation' can appear merely cosmetic when not accompanied by more fundamental transformations in attitudes and being. 'Decolonising' cannot be separated from epistemic humility and the need to decentre, to stand apart from one's own intellectual authority (Nadarajah et al., 2022a, p. 4).

Learning and teaching practices that engage in this decentring and which participate in epistemic humility are diverse. One of those dwelt upon both in this volume in Chapter 8 and elsewhere by Nadarajah is the study tour. With colleagues from Centurion University in India and from RMIT University, including Glenda Mejia of LCIE and Global and Language Studies, Nadarajah et al. describe a study tour with students from RMIT and Centurion engaged with elders and members of the Saora tribal community to build a traditional mud house. This article describes how their students "embark upon travel, jump into the mud, work with diverse groups of people, embrace unlearning and relearning, and open themselves up to the painstaking but decolonial process of what Tlostanova and Mignolo call "learning to unlearn in order to relearn" (cited in Nadarajah et al., 2022b,

p. 9). Their observations of the students' physical engagement with the building of the mud house and their social engagement with each other and their lecturers, affirm for Nadarajah et al. that study tours "can become valuable assets in this decolonial journey" (Nadarajah et al., 2022b, p. 16).

Likewise reflecting on field trips as a decolonizing learning experience is Peter Phipps who has regularly taken students on a multi-day excursion to the Lake Bolac Eel Festival in Victoria – an experience also facilitated by Nadarajah. There, students are directed to "learn from the eels" and are "immersed in deep experiential learning about community sustainability, reconciliation and Indigenous epistemologies on Country" (Phipps, 2016, p. 23). Commenting on the impact of the experience and of the wider process of disciplinary decentring, Phipps observes that these processes "challenge the established methods and truth claims" and "has also led to a re-evaluation of the largely oral and performative knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples, from 'ancient myth and legend' to living epistemologies which might make a critical contribution to contemporary human development" (Phipps, 2016, pp. 22-23).

The ways in which people engage with different knowledge systems vary in manner and depth. How such engagements may be advanced in a university context are the concerns of several chapters in this volume, such as that by Jing Qi, Wei Liu and Cheng Ma who reflect on the affordances of Instagram in Chapter 10; AnaMaria Ducasse who reflects on over two

decades of language teaching experience in Chapter 9; and Chantal Crozet, Kerry Mullan, Jing Qi and Masoud Kianpour in Chapter 2, who conducted research in relation to course with high and diverse enrolments of first year students, Intercultural Communication.

As these chapters point out, there has been significant thought given to how teachers in higher education can best enable students to gain insight into specific cultures, but also cross-cultural communication and the study of languages. As Jane Orton and Andrew Scrimgeour have argued, "the value and affordances of modern language study" should not simply be for 'training'; it should be "understood first and foremost to be potentially educational" resulting in "desirable cognitive and affective growth in the learner" (Orton & Scrimgeour 2019, 2). They go on to write that language learning should raise "students' awareness of the nature of language", including among many other things, "how it carries the power divisions that exist between groups", and "how it is open to being re-formed and made to serve new purposes" (ibid.).

The implications of language are best explored through the contributions of diverse scholarly disciplines. The academics who teach language and culture courses are often from diverse research backgrounds and thus bring a diverse array of disciplinary insights to their educational practice. Taking LCIE at RMIT, for example, members of LCIE are conducting research in fields including applied linguistics, language education, history, literature, global studies as well as

translating and interpreting (e.g. Lai, 2018; Mulayim & Lai, 2015; Lai & Mulayim, 2013). As Maki Yoshida and Jindan Ni have considered in Chapter 12 in this volume, university language teachers are often enthusiastic to implement their expertise in their different scholarly areas in language classrooms, with the goal of increasing language students' capacity to think independently and innovatively.

The study of other cultures and languages can foster beneficial habits of mind, including critical thinking. In the transcultural and transnational contexts, this can help with diminishing racism and dissolving cultural stereotypes propagated by media – both traditional and social media – which are interwoven with everyone's daily life. As John Downing and Charles Husband write in their discussion of the impact of media on people's understanding of race, "The attributions made to others through racial stereotyping have their effect because they are credible, not because they are true" (Downing & Husband, 2005, p. 6). In this context, a well-informed and nuanced language teacher is important to enable to engage with that language's societies and cultures in a way that simultaneously acknowledges difference and challenges stereotypes. This cross-cultural critical thinking skill can be developed in classrooms to improve academic performance, and, more importantly, to promote a life-long skill for the benefit of the whole society. Language courses in universities delivered by academics from a wide range of disciplines in social studies and humanities are excellent sites for the

cultivation of intercultural respect and critical thinking, which are keys to inclusiveness.

The political aspect of language and culture education is not anything new, though it is highly relevant in our complex, globalised world. Accordingly, educators in the field are required to acknowledge that their pedagogical choices are deeply associated with their political positionality (Kubanyova & Crookes, 2016) in relation to issues including, but not limited to, race, class, gender, sexual orientation and disability. Being keenly aware of this political positionality, Glenda Mejia (Diaz et al., 2022) and Maki Yoshida (2023) of LCIE and Global and Language Studies challenge the gendered linguistic norms in Spanish and Japanese language classrooms respectively, and endeavour to promote more inclusive learning environments for teachers and students of diverse gender and sexuality. In line with the mission of the Social and Global Studies Centre (SGSC), the members of LCIE and Global and Language Studies are keen on delivering "transformative research for social justice", as it is phrased in the 2018 mission statement of SGSC.

These cross-cultural skills which contribute to the development of ethical global citizens can be developed through the learning and teaching of specific languages, but also through the study of intercultural communication more generally, which can build "intercultural competence". Intercultural competence has garnered burgeoning attention as one of the key graduate attributes in higher education

worldwide and resulted in the design and implementation of courses in intercultural communication (Diaz & Moore, 2018). Intercultural competence has been referred to "as representing a wide-ranging set of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills useful in dealing with the increasing diversity (cultural, religious, socio-economic, etc.) of the world in which we live, and the pressing global challenges confronting us as a result" (Diaz and Moore, 2018, p. 84). As the coordinator of the course Intercultural Communication (ICC) at RMIT between 2015 and 2022, Chantal Crozet focuses on both language and culture and incorporates a critical perspective into the course. As described in Chapter 2, her teaching aims to nurture students' critical awareness of the role language plays in perpetuating essentialized and static views of a particular culture.

ICC also cultivates the competence to challenge generalizations reproduced in everyday interactions. This approach is deeply associated with foreign language education as well, where students are provided with an abundance of opportunities to encounter new language and cultural norms and negotiate language and identities vis-a-vis their existing worldviews. Whereas such an approach in ICC and foreign language education contributes to nurturing students' sensitivity and empathy towards 'the other', and competence to act as ethical global citizens, it requires, as we learn in in Chapter 2 from Crozet et al., a deeply 'political and ethical level of engagement' of teaching staff and students.

While it might seem obvious that culture and language are thoroughly intertwined, many people – teachers and students alike – objectify language and remove it from its socio-cultural context when they envisage how it is learned. Claire Kramsch's point on cultural context for meaning-making is three decades old but remains pertinent:

Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them (Kramsch, 1993, p.1).

As noted before, the practical and engaged characteristics of learning and teaching in RMIT mean that we in Global and Language Studies recognise and respond to this; our teaching of language seeks to develop the skill to decode language and culture in their combined state, not as discrete entities.

Today, there are more people worldwide who are bilingual than monolingual (Wigglesworth & Oshannasy, 2021). In Australia, there are 400 languages in use. Therefore many RMIT University students learn a new language and culture after having had a range of previous contacts with other languages and cultures; few would claim a strictly monolingual or monocultural heritage as they learn an additional language. Although we note the various career advantages of learning

additional languages, we encourage our students to learn them from a position of genuine intercultural exchange and not as a neo-liberal 'feather in one's cap' extra skill for the job market (Hellmich, 2017). In other words, we offer language learning to open up to cultures, not only to open up markets.

Being bi- or multilingual and multicultural ourselves as academics, the global challenges we reflect on as practitioners in LCIE and Global and Language Studies encompass, but are not limited to, how to connect learners with our research and aspirations for social justice. This can happen through our thoughtful interactions with learners, the teaching materials selected from different perspectives, and assessments that look outward globally and connect to real world processes.

The intersection of political, cultural and global elements of learning and teaching at RMIT is evident, where an evolved conception of praxis – the bringing together of theory and practice – is drawn on to achieve our diverse objectives with students. The emphasis on praxis at RMIT takes form, most obviously, in the focus on applied learning and the conscious articulation of the real-world relevance of what we teach. Yet, for many, 'praxis' is central to what we do, not only in the sense of promoting graduate readiness or employability, but as a principle underpinning the learning cultures we seek to create with and for our students. That is to say, amongst our colleagues, praxis can come to mean both the bringing together of theory and practice *and*, more particularly, the

application of the theories we teach in the pedagogical approaches we use.

As a university committed to social justice in a variety of forms, there are any number of cases which point to this heightened conception of praxis which centres on 'practising what we teach' (Copp and Kleinman, 2008, p. 101). As described earlier, in the teaching of Yaso Nadarajah (Nadarajah et al., 2022b) and Peter Phipps (2016), praxis meets pedagogy via the use of study tours to not only teach students subject matter on decolonisation but to decolonise the learning experiences themselves. Another case in point is Glenda Mejia's course, Global Mobility, which encourages students to develop a critical reflexivity in exploring questions of migration, place, and belonging. In the course, Mejia works to create a learning environment which explicitly moves away from the hierarchical structure of educators instructing students on what they need to know, to a culture of knowledge-sharing in which learners and teachers are positioned as equals in their capacity to engage in knowledge exchange. Lectures are renamed 'sessions' to emphasise the potential for dialogue and Mejia frequently begins her written communications with students by stating that she 'greets' them with 'respect', 'peace' or kindness', underlining their value as participants in the course as she asks them to explore the inherent value of the perspectives and experiences of others in the context of global migration.

On the issue of gender equality, Kaye Quek's course titled

Global Feminisms is an example of similar pedagogical attempts to realise praxis in the classroom. Quek draws on the insights of Copp and Kleinman (2008), and of Tompkins (1990), who observe in their respective works that students learn at least as much about how to counter sexism from the interpersonal exchanges and learning environments created by their teachers, as they do from the materials we provide and present in class. Reflecting on Tompkins' (1990, p. 660) ethos that 'What we do in the classroom is our politics', Quek seeks to promote a feminist sense of community amongst the cohort through activities such as 'Feminist Book Club,' which aims to instil a sense of belonging in the class and to derive a shared commitment to explore the issues at hand in good faith. At the same time, the learning culture that is promoted seeks to consciously problematise traditionally masculinist modes of interaction (e.g. aggression, competitiveness, the absence of listening) as key to ensuring respectful exchanges even in the context of spirited debate. In a world that can feel remarkably unsafe for those at the margins of patriarchal power structures, the course seeks to facilitate and prioritise the sense of 'safety' of its participants through an approach that puts (feminist) theory into pedagogical practice.

Conclusion

The issues addressed above are recurring themes in the chapters in this volume. All chapters reflect on the experience of learning and teaching, whether it is through study tours, a postgraduate-led online community, the infusion of career

development learning into the teaching practices at RMIT University, or the role of our library in spearheading open educational resource use as learning materials – everyone ranging from students to academics to curriculum design specialists and senior management contribute to the cultivation of a holistic and transformational learning environment.

And while RMIT University's emphasis on career readiness leads us to focus on praxis, learning does not *only just* prepare students for the world of work. An ethical global citizen is a holistic person that both emerges from a complex world and is also able to engage with that world in an informed and practical way. This engagement takes many forms, including engaging with local and global issues, with professional practices and workplaces, and with a whole array of diversities including those of culture and language. The learning experiences where these engagements occur are intended to build various important competencies – what we might refer to metaphorically as 'a skilled hand'. The praxis which is core to RMIT University's approach to learning and teaching, however, also fosters 'a cultivated mind', which is critical to developing the 'ethical global citizen' of the present and the future.

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CHAPTER 2: EDUCATING CRITICALLY ABOUT LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: WHAT AND WHO IS AT STAKE?

Chapter 2

Educating Critically about Language and Intercultural Communication:

What and Who is at Stake?[1]

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Abstract

This chapter reflects on the literature on Critical Language and Intercultural Communication Education in light of learnings gained from designing and delivering a course titled 'Intercultural Communication' over four years to large cohorts of first-year tertiary students in Australia. It is based on a qualitative research project which involves the analysis of two sets of data: a) ethnographic notes from teaching staff meetings, tutors' interviews, and tutorial observation, and b) student formal and informal feedback surveys as well as focus group discussions. The chapter explores what and who is at stake when teaching and learning about language and intercultural communication from a critical perspective. It unveils from a praxis perspective (theory informed by practice and vice versa) the deeply political and ethical level of engagement that is required of teachers, the kind of metalinguistic and metacultural knowledge, as well as the kind of disposition towards critical thinking and reflexivity, that are

called for when teaching and learning in this domain in an Australian tertiary environment.

Keywords: criticality, education, intercultural communication, interculturality, language, reflexivity

Introduction

This chapter is a contribution to the emerging research on Intercultural Communication courses (cf. Eisenchlas & Trevaskes, 2003; Hatoss, 2019; Yi-jung Hsieh, 2019) which have now become a mandatory component of many degree programs around the world, including in Australian universities (Diaz & Moore, 2019). It aims to provide insights into the practice of teaching a course on Intercultural Communication in Australia with a focus on language, exploring to what extent its orientation in terms of content and pedagogical approach aligns with the key tenets of the literature on Critical Language and Intercultural Communication Education. It is based on a qualitative research project on an existing Intercultural Communication course taught in an Australian tertiary environment, coordinated by the first author (Crozet) and co-taught with a team of casually employed tutors. This project originally sought to understand the reasons behind the highly polarised student feedback on the course.

Sections one and two explore the course coordinator's positionality and elaborate on what we mean by 'Critical Language and Intercultural Communication Education'. It does so as a way of providing a rationale for the choice of

content and pedagogical approach for the course under scrutiny. The first two sections also identify the nature of the other three authors' contributions to the article. Section three provides background information on the course and presents the study. Section four discusses learnings from teaching the course for the first author, informed by the study's findings and the input of the other three authors, highlighting the kind of challenges that are at stake when teaching and learning about language and intercultural communication from a critical perspective. It unveils the deeply political and ethical level of engagement that is required of a course coordinator and teaching staff, the disposition towards critical thinking and reflexivity required of both teachers and learners, as well as the kind of metalinguistic and metacultural knowledge that are called for from a praxis perspective in this domain. Section five offers concluding remarks and prospects for further research.

First author's positionality and nature of the other three authors' contributions

In Australia, academics in charge of Intercultural Communication courses in a university context base their curricula largely on their own and varying disciplinary expertise, typically: psychology, communication, linguistics, anthropology, and in more recent times, applied linguistics. As noted in the literature, as more applied linguists are now appointed to teach in both foreign languages and Intercultural Communication, increasingly stronger connections are made

between the two areas (Diaz & Moore, 2019; Martin, Nakayama, & Carbaugh, 2014; Roby, 1992).

As noted earlier, the first author (Crozet) is the current coordinator and lecturer of the course. She has a background in French and Spanish literary studies, applied linguistics, and the teaching of foreign languages. Crozet's research has contributed to the development of language and culture pedagogy in Australia from a critical intercultural perspective since its emergence in the mid-1990s (Crozet 1996; 2016; 2018; Crozet & Diaz, 2020; Diaz, 2013; Dasli & Diaz, 2017; Kohler, 2015; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat, & Crozet, 1999; Lo Bianco & Crozet, 2003; Mullan, 2015; 2017). This body of literature evolved from concerns regarding the lack of teaching culture in verbal interactions, prompted at the time by growing interest in cross-cultural pragmatics and Conversation Analysis. It evolved over time to include the teaching of all other aspects of cultural content closer to contextual knowledge embedded for instance in history, literature, food, gender, or film studies (Crozet & Diaz, 2020). Crozet's teaching background and research interests explain the focus on culture embedded in verbal and non-verbal human interaction for half of the course in question.

The second author (Mullan) has a background in applied linguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics, differing interactional styles, and the teaching of French as a foreign language from a critical intercultural perspective (see references above). She

participated in all stages of production of the research project, from its initial framing, through to the data collection for the study and the co-writing of the article with the first author.

The third author (Qi) and fourth author (Kianpour) participated in the initial framing of the study including its rationale, research methodology, data selection and data analytical framework. Their insights were particularly valuable in these initial stages: Qi has a background in international and transnational education, sociology of education and education equality, language education and teacher education; and Kianpour researches social psychology, sociology of emotions and intercultural communication. Kianpour was also a tutor in the course in 2019 and assisted with the focus group data collection. Both also provided feedback on the article's drafts.

On Critical Language and Intercultural Communication Education

We refer to '*Critical* Language and Intercultural Communication Education' by way of signalling that the theoretical backbone of the article sits within the body of literature with a particular focus on what Dasli and Diaz (2017) coined 'the critical turn' within language and intercultural communication pedagogy at large.

We are well aware that scholars with a common interest in interculturality in human interaction for educative purposes come from various sub-areas of education and research. These sub-areas are not limited to the teaching of 'foreign languages' and of 'intercultural communication'; they also include

'intercultural education'. 'Global stars' in interculturality, as referred to by Simpson and Dervin (2019), are associated with these different sub-fields of education. Michael Byram and Claire Kramsch's research, for instance, is anchored in foreign languages education, whereas Milton J. Bennett and Geert Hofstede's work is associated with Intercultural Communication education/training. By contrast, Fred Dervin and colleagues'research is anchored in intercultural (compulsory and higher) education. These distinctions help explain the different nuances and emphasis found in the literature, not only on the meaning of 'interculturality' and of 'criticality', but also in terms of the importance given to language/linguistics in the definition and use of these concepts. Ultimately, regardless of the sub-field they associate with, researchers and practitioners in the field of language and intercultural communication education are informed by their selection of literature. They not only decide what interculturality and criticality mean to them (Dervin, 2016), they also decide how they want to engage with it in education.

The critical pedagogical approach of the Intercultural Communication course under study is based on our understanding of 'criticality', broadly defined by Dasli and Diaz (2017, p. 11) as aiming for "... the development of individuals' cognitive skills and attitudes (e.g., critical thinking, self-reflexivity) and as an overarching pedagogical framework where the term acquires additional ethical, social and political connotations".

One definition of 'interculturality' which resonates closely with Crozet's approach to teaching Intercultural Communication is echoed in Abdallah-Pretceille (2006, p. 480):

> No fact is intercultural at the outset, nor is the quality of 'intercultural' an attribute of an object, it is only intercultural analysis that can give it this character. It is the look of the beholder that creates the object and not the other way round.

At the core of Abdallah-Pretceille's (2006) insight is the notion of interculturality as primarily 'analysis' – that is, the ability to question, reflect on, and interpret an object, and by extension, human interactions in their varying pluralistic contexts. These are the key aims of the course, which prompted the research project that inspired this chapter. We use the word 'pluralistic' as inclusive of language, culture, class, language, religions, gender, and any other factors which can affect the interpretation of meaning in any given situation. Above all, interculturality to us signals 'a process, something in the making' (Dervin, 2016, p. 1). A course on intercultural communication is an ideal place to make this processing as critical for students as possible. Whether it ultimately contributes to their political and ethical engagement for greater social justice remains to be seen.

In support of her concept of interculturality, Abdallah-Pretceille (2006, p. 468) suggests the use of "culturality" rather than 'culture' to refer to "cultural processes in the light of

their generation of behaviours and discourse". Culturality in this sense is a way of recognizing that individuals have the agency of being and acting according to their chosen codes of reference. However, defining 'interculturality' necessarily refers specifically to interaction between different groups of people which have 'an essential kind of difference", without which there would be no relevance to speak of 'interculturality' (Mikander, Zilliacus, & Holm, 2018:42). This does not exclude the recognition that people are not totally bound by culture, nor that they experience and use cultures as liquid rather than static entities (Bauman, 2004; Verschueren, 2008). For these reasons, the course under scrutiny does not shy away from using the concept 'culture', albeit from an interpretive perspective which favours inter-subjective understanding.

The course objectives and content aim to support the development of interculturality as broadly defined in the official description of the course objectives:

> [...] to equip students with the knowledge, skills and critical thinking to enable them to communicate, negotiate and continue to learn across diverse social and cultural settings, as well as to prepare them for work, study or research in intercultural environments. It aims to provide students the opportunity to develop an enhanced awareness of their own social and cultural background/context and how that can impact on intercultural communication and processes.[2]

Knowledge, skills, critical thinking, and self-awareness are key to these objectives and will be discussed further in light of the study's findings.

There are no uniform approaches to Intercultural Communication university courses in Australia. Commonly, Intercultural Communication course coordinators use a textbook as de facto curriculum. However, after evaluating a number of textbooks and finding none with sufficient focus on both language and culture in an Australian context, and none suitable for students without a language or linguistics background, the coordinator chose not to use a textbook in order to better align the course content with the objectives she had set. This meant compiling a list of essential and supplementary readings from multiple sources (a total of 60 readings), updated each year.

As mentioned earlier, the first part of the course focuses on culture in language largely based on discourse analysis theory (i.e., cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics, as well as conversation analysis). Metalinguistic knowledge is used in this case as critical tools to unveil the dynamic relationship between language(s) and culture(s), in order to better deconstruct it, rather than to reinforce essentialist views of either (see Dervin & Liddicoat, 2016, for further illustrations of this perspective). In doing so, a good deal of time is spent on distinguishing between essentialist and constructionist approaches towards culture, helping students understand how everyday language is used, often uncritically, to perpetuate generalised

characteristics of a particular culture and how knowledge of intercultural communication can challenge this process.

The second part of the course focuses more specifically on key factors in meaning-making processes. It addresses interculturality in the context of discussions on avowed versus ascribed identities, as well as individual agency, from an intersectional perspective. It considers the relevance of gender, race, and social class – based respectively on discourse and gender theory (see Kendall & Tannen, 2001), racio-linguistics (Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016), and sociolinguistics – within the power dynamics of intercultural human interaction. The challenge is to keep a focus on how such variables (gender, race, class, and identity/individual agency) affect intercultural communication in situations where an essential linguistic and culturally based difference is present. As students are now more and more accustomed to exploring intersectionality in their respective undergraduate degrees, they often bring to the course some prior background knowledge in this area. However, doing language and culture work from an intersectional perspective as reflected in real intercultural human communicative acts, as the course aims to do, is not easily achieved.

Throughout the course, both Indigenous-Australian and Anglo-Australian are used as the two main sets of cultures of reference from which other cultural systems are explored from a critical intercultural perspective. One week is dedicated to Indigenous and Anglo-Australian communicative styles,

largely based on research conducted in this area in legal contexts (Eades, 2004, 2008; Bowen, 2019; Gibbons, 2003), and another week to aspects of Indigenous-Australian cultural systems as relevant to intercultural communication more broadly in Australia (Alia, 2014; Hattersley, 2014; Heiss, 2018; Moore, 2016).[3]

The first author does not claim to be an expert in all areas that are touched on in the course, but her educational vision for it encompasses them all. Where possible, guest lecturers are invited to speak, especially for the second part of the course.

Having situated the first author's stance within Critical Language and Intercultural Communication Education and towards the course, as well as the contributions of the other three authors, the next section provides further background information on the course.

Background information on the Intercultural Communication course

This section provides further general information on the course, including information on student profiles and the teaching team in 2019 when the study was undertaken.

Overview

Intercultural Communication is a twelve-week first year core course for six undergraduate programs in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University in Australia, reflecting the now worldwide recognition of the importance of intercultural communicative competence in graduate attributes (Hua, Handford, & Young, 2017). The

course was delivered face-to-face in 2018 and 2019 when the data were collected, but in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19, the course was delivered online with asynchronous lectures and synchronous tutorials.

Student cohort

While the majority of students are full-time first-year students aged 19, the course also attracts some older and some part-time students. In 2019, there were approximately 3.5 times more students identifying as female than male (411 vs. 116) Almost all the students are domestic, but the course also attracts some international and exchange students. Domestic students also represent a range of circumstances and characteristics: many are from an apparently Anglo-Australian background and many are first- or second-generation migrants from an array of culturally and linguistically diverse communities; a very small minority have an Indigenous-Australian background and other students may be fairly recently arrived migrants or refugees from various countries. The rich multilingual and pluricultural diversity of student backgrounds is not visible from student enrolment records. The various undergraduate degrees also demand different ATAR[4] scores for admission into their program, so, although there has been much debate in the Australian press in recent times about the relevance and reliability of this score as a predictor of student success at university, to some extent it remains another variable in the student cohort.

Out of the 527 enrolled students in 2019, most were

enrolled in the Bachelor of Criminology and Psychology (149). This was followed by the Bachelor of Legal and Dispute Studies (96), the Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) (95), the Bachelor of International Studies (90), and the Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) (52). Students from other programs across the university make up 38 of the enrolments, with 8 enrolments from the Diploma of Languages (currently being discontinued). Students' diverse academic interests account in part for the different expectations they have of the course.

What this complex diversity of student profiles means in practice is that course content, assessments, the lecturer, and tutors all have to take into account a range of disciplinary interests and expertise, maturity, existing knowledge and/or life experience, English (and other) language proficiency, cultural backgrounds, and so on, to a greater extent than many other courses.

Teaching team

The 2019 Intercultural Communication Course (ICC) teaching team included eleven tutors. The coordinator selects the tutors based firstly on academic qualification (minimum Master's level) combined with their main research interest, which includes language and/or culture as a guiding principle.

Teachers have long been acknowledged as key players in the success of any educational undertaking, and research on intercultural communication courses has demonstrated teachers' key role in modelling intercultural communicative

capabilities in and beyond the classroom (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Wiseman, 1991; Lee et al., 2012). Taking this into account, the tutors, where possible, must have had substantial direct experience with people from diverse cultures, in either their personal or professional life, ideally both.

Weekly meetings are held for the whole team where tutors share their and students' experiences from the preceding week's tutorial, followed by an overview and discussion of the lecture and tutorial activities for the following week.

The above background information highlights the challenges of delivering the course: catering for extensive student academic, cultural, and linguistic diversity; supporting and nurturing an equally diverse group of tutors; and teaching without a textbook.

The study

The rationale for the study originated from the end of semester Course Evaluation Surveys (CES) in 2016 and 2017 which showed quite polarised views of student satisfaction with the course under the current coordinator. In order to address these concerns, and for quality assurance purposes, a pilot study was undertaken on the course in 2018. It was led by the two first authors: the coordinator/lecturer of the course (Crozet) and a colleague who did not teach into the course (Mullan). The primary aim was to try to better understand the diverse student responses to the course. Preliminary data were collected in the form of the usual annual informal and formal (anonymous and optional) student feedback surveys, as well as

tutorial observation and tutor interviews undertaken for the purposes of this project. The collection of student feedback and tutorial observation were as described below for 2019.[5] In addition, in 2018, the tutors were asked the following questions:

1. What did you think of the course overall?
2. What were the most challenging aspects for you as a tutor?
3. Do you have any comments about the assessment scheme?
4. Do you think that the reading logs improved students' quality of engagement in class discussion?
5. Do you think that the course content is appropriate for a 1st year course?
6. What can you say about your experiences of students' responses/ attitudes towards tutorials' activities?
7. Would you change anything in the course?
8. Would you get rid of some content?
9. Would you add any new content?
10. Do you think that the course should have a follow-up course (such as 'Intercultural mediation and dialogue')?

The data were analysed to identify the main themes, strengths, and challenges of the course, leading to the formulation of

the following research question for the larger 2019 project and the focus of this paper: *What and who—in other words which aspects of society, identity, and self are at stake when teaching and learning about language and interculturality from a critical perspective?* Answers to this question were viewed as the first step to initiate changes to the course addressing particularly the complaints of the most dissatisfied students. The following sections describe the collection, analysis, and findings of the data.

Data collection

We collected primarily qualitative data for this study, as detailed in Table 1. Data from the 2018 pilot study are included for information since they informed the direction of the 2019 project but are not included in the analysis and discussion of the findings, unless stated. The 2019 data were obtained from several sources, to strengthen the findings from the pilot study and to enable us to delve more deeply into the data: notes from tutorial observations and weekly teaching staff meetings; qualitative comments in the mid-semester informal student feedback; qualitative comments in the university prescribed formal CES; and student focus groups. The range of data and participants go some way towards counteracting the necessary caveats around the subjectivity and representativity of (optional) student feedback. The small quantitative dataset comes from the responses to the Likert Scale questions in the CES. While the student formal and informal feedback surveys are administered annually in this

course, the other sets of data were collected specifically for this study.

Table 1. Data sets

2018 pilot study (678 students)	
Notes from tutorial observations	14 tutorials observed
Notes from teaching staff meetings	13 meetings
Tutor interviews	14 tutors
Mid-semester informal feedback	51 responses
CES	161 responses
2019 study (528 students)	
Notes from tutorial observations	11 tutorials observed
Notes from teaching staff meetings	13 meetings
Mid-semester informal feedback	22 responses
CES	147 responses
Student focus groups	4 x 60-minute focus groups with 17 students

The 2019 data collection is explained below.

Notes from tutorial observations

The course coordinator observed one tutorial each week. The aim was to observe every tutor at least once, noting how they engaged with students, how the tutorial material was dealt

with in class, and to observe the students' engagement with the activities and discussions, as well as to record any noteworthy student comments.

Notes from teaching staff meetings

The course coordinator took notes at thirteen weekly meetings with herself and fourteen tutors (the first meeting was essentially a training session before the start of semester). The aim here was to collect important observations from the tutors about the course, and any challenges they and students had encountered.

Mid-semester informal feedback

In Week 6, students were asked for their feedback on the course content, assessment, lectures, and tutorials using the GoSoapBox Student Response System. This is not a university prescribed collection of feedback, and the quality (and quantity) of responses vary, but overall, this has been found to be a useful way to improve the course immediately where possible, with the added benefit of potentially improving the end of semester CES scores. The questions were as follows:

1. What do you think of the course content/readings/videos?
2. What do you think of the assessment tasks?
3. What do you think of the lectures?
4. What do you think of the tutorials?

Course Evaluation Surveys

In Weeks 9-12, students are asked to complete the CES. Seven standard Likert Scale questions are asked to ascertain their overall percentage of satisfaction with the course and the teaching staff:

1. The teaching staff are extremely good at explaining things.
2. The teaching staff normally give me helpful feedback on how I am going in this course.
3. The teaching staff in this course motivate me to do my best work.
4. The teaching staff work hard to make this course interesting.
5. The staff make a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work.
6. The staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work.
7. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of this course.

In 2019, the coordinator selected seven further Likert Scale questions from an extensive bank of additional questions:

8. I consider what I learned valuable for my future.
9. I learned to explore ideas confidently with other people.
10. I was able to put the time required into completing

the work required for this course.

11. In this course students were encouraged to form and express their own ideas and opinions.
12. I worked hard in this class.
13. The material provided on Canvas helped me with my studies.
14. I listened to the online lectures.

In addition, students are asked the following standard two open-ended questions:

What are the best aspects of this course? What aspects of this course are in most need of improvement?

Results are indicative of students' views as a fifth of students (125 out of 527) completed the survey.

Student focus groups

Four 60-minute focus groups were conducted in week 12 by three different tutors, who were briefed by the coordinator on how to run them. Seventeen volunteer students were interviewed (in groups of three to five) about their expectations and experience of the course, and the learning they felt they had achieved, as follows:

1. What did you expect to learn at the beginning of this course?
2. How would you describe your learning experience in this course in relation to your expectations?
3. Has this course been useful to you? If yes, in what

ways?

4. Which topics in this course did you enjoy or dislike? Why? Could you give some examples?
5. Has the course confirmed or challenged perceptions of yourself and others in any way? Could you share some examples?
6. Do you think this course will help you in the future to communicate interculturally more constructively than you had been able to before? Why or why not?

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

An inductive content/thematic approach was used to analyse the data in this study. Content or thematic analysis is used frequently in the social sciences to make replicable and valid inferences by systematically examining patterns and interpreting and coding textual material to determine recurring themes. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) define thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data'. This approach was chosen as it was considered the best way to capture the researchers' evolving understanding of the students' and tutors' experience of the course through the data collected throughout the semester. The first phase of analysis involved identifying recurring initial themes under 'Student feedback', 'Tutor feedback' and 'Tutorial observation'. Similarities were then

identified between these initial themes and final themes were established. The research questions and the identification of themes were driven by the data and constantly revised and refined.

The first two authors led the initial analysis of the data. Initial themes (in light of all findings) were later discussed and finalised in collaboration with the third and fourth authors, who also provided feedback on the final discussion.

Study findings and discussion

Findings are presented under four main themes: 'Reality check: the impact of the general teaching and learning environment'; 'Low initial expectations and polarised satisfaction'; 'Intercultural communication at work'; and 'Disposition towards engagement, critical thinking, and reflexivity'.

Reality check: the impact of the general teaching and learning environment

The impact of the general teaching and learning environment is seldom addressed in the literature, yet it amounts to real challenges teachers and students have to face. Physical and 'digital' disruptions, fluctuating attendance, level of preparedness and engagement, and level of English proficiency were the key factors impacting on teaching and learning found in the data.

Physical, 'digital' disruptions and fluctuating attendance: Class attendance is not compulsory at RMIT University, with a sizable impact on the quality of tutorials for all students.

It is particularly noticeable in a course on Intercultural Communication which requires robust class discussion aiming to nurture critical thinking and reflexivity over the length of a whole semester. Many students hold part-time or full-time work and find it difficult to attend all their classes. Decreased attendance, as the semester progresses and students have more assignments to submit, was also noted. Coupled with work commitments, assessment submission deadlines affect class attendance.

Class observation showed that in most tutorials, some students arrive late and leave early without prior notice. Others leave the classroom to go to the toilet or take a phone call and use their mobile phones and laptops for purposes unrelated to the course (e.g., browsing the internet, answering emails). These disruptions are a recurring topic of discussion at the weekly tutors' meeting. Tutors who respond to digital disruptions and prohibit the non-course related use of devices tend to have more engaged students in the classroom. This is despite having to deal with some students who resist being asked to not make use of devices for non-course related purposes.

The fluctuating tutorial attendance was not only mentioned by tutors, but also students: *'I found the fluctuating attendance to be disruptive to the constructive and effective running of the tutorial; [this] coupled with a non-essential attendance policy renders the whole idea of tutorials obsolete'.*

Preparedness and engagement: The lack of preparedness for

tutorials was mentioned by both tutors and learners for different reasons but all linked to the quality of class engagement.

Class observation showed that most (but not all) tutors owned the course content, showed evidence of having prepared for their tutorial (having listened to the lecture and done the reading) and brought their own academic knowledge and personal experiences to class discussions. Those factors contributed greatly to their ability to successfully engage students. Tutors who appeared bored and unengaged with the course content and tutorial activities (as noted by some students), tended to be those who conducted their classes in a more teacher-centred fashion, and were consequently less successful at engaging their class. In one tutorial, a very engaged student was clearly dissatisfied with the tutor's inability to engage more critically with the tutorial activity and to answer questions on the reading for the week to their satisfaction.

Students' comments on their tutors were divided. The ability to motivate students, being helpful, stimulating, and passionate about the course, as well as creating a safe class environment for discussion were seen as important qualities:

> 'X was a fabulous teacher. His passion for the subject and course content was contagious and made me want to work harder'; 'This course also held really intriguing discussions, and X always created a safe space for us to share our thoughts and opinions without judgement'.

Conversely, negative comments from students included a perceived lack of knowledge from tutors, not being engaged themselves with the course content and not knowing how to engage students:

> The tutor doesn't seem to have an in-depth knowledge of the texts'; 'My tutor didn't know how to make other people talk'; 'My tutor often seemed kind of bored and this meant the people in my class were not particularly motivated to attend classes and contribute to discussion'; 'X could interact with the class more rather than sitting behind his desk for the whole workshop.

New tutors reported they had a great deal to learn themselves in order to be ready for their tutorials as a lot of the course contained content new to them. Most felt the course covered too much too quickly, that it could easily be split over two semesters, and that students needed more time to engage with new concepts.

Group dynamics varied enormously and did not appear to be linked solely to tutors' ability to engage the class, but rather to student profiles and individual dispositions towards the course. For example, some tutorials offered in the evening attracted more mature-age students who attended more regularly and welcomed robust critical debate, in turn attributable to their higher level of maturity.

The above findings show the importance of tutor and student preparedness in order to engage with the course

content, albeit critically. They also show the importance of training tutors on how to engage a class, since most tutors in the course have no training in pedagogy. Tutors' weekly meetings aim to provide pedagogical support, albeit in a limited way due to time constraints.

Level of academic English proficiency matters: all tutors reported on the majority of students needing more support in, firstly, simply reading, secondly, in reading critically, and thirdly, in academic writing. They also noted that Generation Z students (so-called 'digital natives'), the majority in the course, appear to partially read online materials rather than pages of reading from a book or articles. Getting students to read a weekly reading of 20 to 30 pages is therefore the first challenge. The first assessable task for the course is 'Reading logs', which aim to provide an incentive for students to engage with the weekly readings and to train them to reflect on them critically, including taking notes. Students in the study reported mixed feelings on the reading logs, finding them too time consuming and/or finding that, because the logs forced them to do the readings, they led to increased satisfaction with the course content and tutorial discussions, as they increased their capacity to engage critically.

Tutors commented specifically on students whose first language was not English, namely international students, or domestic students who arrive in Australia with low English proficiency, meaning that they were unable to read academic texts as easily as a native speaker might reasonably be expected

to, nor were they able to engage in tutorials critically. Some students (native speakers of English) reported on the hindrance of having students in their tutorial who could not engage in discussion at a level they expected in an academic environment due to their low level of English proficiency.

Knowing how to mark assignments written in poor English was also mentioned as a challenge for tutors. One international student from China contacted the course coordinator asking for different criteria in marking their work. The issue of English proficiency is highly political and seldom overtly recognised for the impact it has on teaching and learning practices. Support for reading and writing in academic English is built into tutorial activities but only to a limited extent. Tutors regularly refer students who need extra support to academic English support services.

The above findings illustrate the many challenges that need to be addressed on an on-going basis as part of the general learning environment and running of the course. The next challenge the teaching team face is students' low initial expectations from the course.

Low initial expectations and polarised satisfaction

Students' wording of their expectations at the start of the course speaks to the general lack of recognition, in public discourse, of intercultural communication as an academic subject of value in its own right. Unlike knowledge of world languages (e.g., Chinese, Arabic) which can be perceived as added value giving access to a global elite (Barakos & Selleck,

2019), knowledge of intercultural communication, on its own, is usually not perceived as such. One of the first challenges tutors face when starting the course is students' negative attitudes towards it.

Although the majority of students appeared to not really know what to expect, others said they expected little from it or were surprised by its content: '*I had really low expectations*'; '*I thought the course appeared very basic*'; '*I expected it to be a bland topic – I was completely surprised*'.

Several students commented on their lived experience of interculturality, which contributed to their initial devaluing of the course, until they appreciated its academic value, as illustrated in the following student's comment:

> I had really low expectations… I come from a very intercultural background so it was frustrating to have to do this course, it's compulsory. I have a personal interest in this topic but I've never studied it in an academic setting but this course got me to look at it from an academic perspective and really get that historical, scholarly background to a lot of the topics. Really great to be given all this wealth of knowledge and great articles to go back to and be able to refer to and take my understanding to the next level.

Levels of satisfaction with the course were very polarised. They could not be related statistically to students' areas of study as responses are anonymous, and only some students made that connection explicit in their feedback. However,

students from the same discipline sometimes provided opposite responses, for example*: 'I very much viewed it as a kind of toolbox course. I am doing social work and that's about human interaction and about talking to people'*, versus *'How this is a core subject for social work is beyond me'*.

The most recurring positive adjective was '*interesting*' ('*very/extremely interesting*'). Other positive comments included '*stimulating*', '*eye opening and very useful for everyday life*', '*extremely fascinating and relevant to my studies'*, *'mind-blowing course, makes you question not only the world but yourself*.' Such positive comments often accompanied high levels of satisfaction with the course content and structure, the type of assessments, and readings. These findings suggest that despite initial low expectations, for some students at least, the course delivered positive learnings.

Negative comments tended to be linked to a perceived lack of connection with a student's area of study, dissatisfaction with the assignments, amount and content of reading, as well as new terminology: '*This is the most useless content for my course, there is no correlation, shouldn't be a core subject for international studies course, and too many assignments'; 'very very dry content, not interesting at all, very complex terminology'*.

Many students appreciated the practical outcomes: *'a very practical course where I could apply the theories in a more practical way, that I could actually use in my day-to-day life'*, while others felt there were none: *'it would have been*

interesting if the content was practical and applied to real life scenarios'.

It is difficult to fully interpret students' polarised views without being able to correlate them with the actual versus the intended content delivered in the lectures and tutorials. Nonetheless, class observation and also ethnographic notes from the tutors' weekly meetings suggest that at least the tutors' interpretation of the course content and their approach to tutorial activities impact greatly on the kind of learnings students take home. Students' positive predisposition to critical thinking, self-introspection, and to dealing with complexity, as well as simply to diligent study, also impact on the quality of learning. In the above students' comments, 'useless content' is also associated with 'too many assignments' and 'very dry content' to 'very complex terminology'.

Intercultural Communication at work

The reference to tangible knowledge that can be learnt and applied in a work context echoes other students' comments above describing the course as a 'toolbox' and as 'useful' and 'practical', learning to potentially challenge essentialist perceptions of culture:

> Often the content from this course was in mind when I was at work and communicating with people from different cultures and in a way this new understanding helped me feel more comfortable when speaking with different people; ultimately it provided

> very useful knowledge for any future careers as well as everyday communication settings.

Some felt that the course overgeneralised cultural traits. Others wanted more concrete culture-specific examples, while others deplored what they perceived as a lack of accounting for variability and individual agency in intercultural communication:

> 'Most of the facts and knowledge obtained are general'; 'The content can be very dry e.g.: The French speak this way, English speak this way, too much generalisations, doesn't take the individual into account';
>
> Personally, I found the content very strict and not accurate because it is all about justifying why cultures do what they do which is not taking the individual into account. For example, having a visual impairment means I am ALWAYS being grabbed, pushed, pulled, and snatched by members of the public. They believe they are being helpful but in what culture is physically touching someone okay?

One exchange student mentioned what they perceived to be an Australian pedagogy which they were not accustomed to: *'Sometimes the course content is not easy for international students to understand. The information is presented in an Aussie way rather than a universal way'.* It is difficult to know what this student means by 'Aussie way' versus a 'universal way' of teaching but it points to the need to take better

account of students' different educational backgrounds and address these overtly as potential spaces of discomfort to explore.

It is clear from the above analysis that despite the course intent to: a) not essentialise cultures and take account of variability as well as individual agency; and b) to focus on interculturality as primarily criticality and reflexivity, extra care and time (as suggested by tutors) are needed, at least for some students, in approaching the necessarily very nuanced and complex content that a course on intercultural communication calls for.

Disposition towards engagement, critical thinking, and reflexivity

Tutors described the course as *challenging*, *promoting intellectual growth and introspection*, *complex*, *rigorous*, *stimulating*, and with a *clear narrative running throughout*. One tutor referred to it as 'a hard in a good way course'. All also agreed that the more subjective aspect of the course (self-reflection) was the most difficult for students, but also the most rewarding. They noted that the course requires a level of maturity that is beyond some students, who in turn found the course confronting, or they resisted criticality and introspection, *'being too rigid in their thinking'*, expecting the course to focus only on the 'other' and not themselves. Some tutors reported that a student occasionally left a tutorial in anger or disagreement, which points to the highly sensitive and challenging practice of learning and teaching intercultural

communication, and the fact that it is a fluid dynamic process which changes over time. Tutors also noted that halfway through the course, *'things come together'*, *'the penny drops'*, and students start to engage more critically in class discussions.

Group dynamics varied enormously and did not appear to be linked solely to the tutors' ability to engage the class, but also to student profiles and individual dispositions towards the course. As well as the mature-age students who welcomed critical debate, students appeared most engaged when relating their own personal experiences and sharing light-bulb moments during tutorial activities. For example, in the week on identity, in one tutorial a student shared that after listening to the lecture, doing the reading, and watching the video for that week she had finally been able to start feeling more comfortable with being 'Chinese-Australian'. Another referred to the course as having supported her to 'own' her dual identity:

> Another thing that I really like is that I feel a lot more comfortable in myself. At the start of this course when X asked my class what do you identify as, I said a white-washed Indian and now I think I have a lot more ownership of my identity. I can be two things. I don't necessarily have to pick and choose. It feels like before I was taught about all this it felt like I had to pick and select.

Some students valued being given the opportunity for deeper, reflective, more 'personal' learning which they noted

impacted positively on their own development: '*... the content makes you change what you think, even though you don't realise that's how you think. It's really good, a personal kind of learning*'; '*mind-blowing course, makes you question not only the world but yourself*'.

A very small number of students voiced their discontent with what they perceived as racism towards Anglo-Australians and othering and/or over-victimisation of other groups: '*Don't make all whites evil and Aboriginals misunderstood*'; '*This course often presents as anti-Australia, anti-white, and anti-Christian*'; '*In class, people from other cultures were often singled out to provide their experiences, creating a sense of "othering"*'. These comments align with tutors' pointing to careful consideration always needed in the way the course content is approached and, regardless, of the challenges in dealing with the array of responses it can trigger in students.

Catering for all possible students' responses to the course in advance is not possible. The tutors' meetings, however, provided a space for debriefing what occurred during tutorials, and discussing future strategies to support students, as well as the teaching team (course coordinator and tutors), in always developing further the capacity for practising interculturality as part of attending as well as teaching a course on Intercultural Communication.

Conclusions

Findings from the study provide rich insights into a range of issues covered by our research question: *What and who—in*

other words which aspects of society, identity and self are at stake when teaching and learning about language and interculturality from a critical perspective? We propose speculations rather than conclusions, as we are well aware of the limitations of the project and the need for further research.

Our study shows that there is much at stake in teaching and learning a critically oriented intercultural communication course. Core issues are the commonly disruptive learning and teaching environment; students' initial low expectations of the course; what ought to constitute knowledge in intercultural communication; and the ability and willingness to engage criticality by all involved (course coordinator, tutors, and students).

Our findings clearly show that there is no ideal learning and teaching environment where all students and tutors are 100 percent committed to the course. Many disruptions and inadequate levels of preparedness are outside the course coordinator's immediate control but need to be taken into account in terms of what can be realistically expected from the course delivery. Overcoming students' initial low expectations from the course is another challenge the teaching team has to address. The notion that there is something to learn about how language and the fluidity of culture work together in shaping not only others' worldview, but also one's own worldview, is new to most students, who have no critical not awareness that they live in language and culture. As tutors noticed, 'the penny drops' for many students halfway through

the course. One way of supporting more students to see their selves among others as Holliday (2018) suggested, would be to build more consistent activities tied to the different weekly topics with that specific aim. This also supports the finding from tutorial observation that students appeared most engaged when they shared intercultural personal experiences they can relate to the course.

Students' expectations of practical learning outcomes can be associated with their implicit understanding of culture as factual knowledge that can be learnt and later applied. However, we cannot assume that all students hold essentialist views of culture. Firstly, some students complained about what they perceived to be cultural overgeneralisations. Others, perhaps more accurately, understood that although the course does make statements about different cultures, it also considers variability and individual agency in the critical interpretation of all human interaction. It is important to understand that when Holliday (2018) warns against teaching essentialist blocks in Intercultural Communication courses, it does not imply that no cultural categorisation is ever possible. Acknowledging that different and knowable cultural categories (e.g., Western, Eastern, Indigenous) do exist ensures that power struggles between them are not ignored (Manathunga, 2015), a point which is highly relevant in a course which takes a critical perspective on intercultural communication.

Juxtaposing students' perceptions of tutors' performance

with tutors' comments on challenges, engaging students critically was shown to depend greatly on tutors' disposition towards the course, including pedagogical aptitudes. Understanding students' learning is also crucial to successful teaching in critical Intercultural Communication courses. Although our data do not allow us to extrapolate on students' backgrounds, it is clear that they all come to the course with very different social, cultural, and linguistic capital. This is most obvious in the comments made by international students who struggle with English proficiency and the Australian educative culture. It is also relevant to tutors' comments that most students (despite their background) need more support in reading and writing in academic English.

Students, tutors, and the coordinator all bring their diverse capital, histories, personal sensitivities to the course. What our study clearly shows is that a critical approach to teaching the course calls for a conscious practice of critical intercultural communication between teaching staff and between teaching staff and students, in itself requiring high political and ethical engagement. It involves recognising that a critical Intercultural Communication course is what Bourdieu (1991) would call 'the space of relations' imbibed with symbolic power play. What does this awareness imply in terms of improving the course?

If the aim of a critical Intercultural Communication course is to transform 'mirrors into windows' (Huber-Kriegler, Lázár, & Strange, 2003), that is, to move students from introspection

to an openness to other possible forms of selves in order to function better among different others, further understanding of the different factors involved in this process is crucial. Our study represents a first step in this direction.

There are several limitations in our study which further research will need to address. More research is needed on students' backgrounds, their educative, linguistic, social, and cultural capital, not only to better assess the impact on their ability to engage in the course but to assist in re-imagining the course from a transcultural pedagogical perspective (Song & Cadman, 2012). This would include reconsidering the course content and pedagogy from non-Western perspectives and seeking to engage students and the teaching team in non-Western systems of knowledge and of learning, including Indigenous-Australian systems.

When designing the course, the coordinator was inspired by the literature on critical language and intercultural communication education. Future research could consider assessing the course's intent versus its actual content and delivery, i.e., lectures, tutorials and course assessment, an area not explicitly considered here, yet one which greatly concerns students. Future research could also examine the ongoing professional development required for tutors, aiming to make intercultural communication not such 'a hard in a good way course' to teach.

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Notes

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[2] In addition, the university offers several microcredentials in

the area of cross-cultural awareness (primarily from the realm of business): 1/Building Cultural Intelligence; 2/Cultural adaptation; 3/Cross-cultural communication; 4/Cultural differences and similarities; 5/Global Cultural Awareness (Internship); 6/Diversity matters. We are encouraged to promote those which we see as the most relevant for this course (numbers 3, 4, and 6) on the learning portal. We ask students who choose to undertake any of these microcredentials to approach them with a critical eye.

[3] The references mentioned in this paragraph correspond to the readings listed in the course for those weeks.

[4] The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank is the primary criterion for domestic student entry into undergraduate courses in Australian public universities.

[5] Ethics approval was received on 25 June 2019: CHEAN A 22224-05/19.

CHAPTER 3: GLOBAL SKILLS: ARTICULATING THE INTERNATIONAL STUDIES SKILLSET AND ITS VALUE

Chapter 3

Global Skills: Articulating the International Studies Skillset and its Value

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Abstract

While the popularity of International Studies as a discipline reflects the attractiveness of the field of study and its utility in an age of globalisation, students of International Studies, like many social science and humanities students, struggle to articulate the suite of skills and competencies that they have developed during their tertiary education. Although concepts such as "soft skills", "enterprise skills" and "21st century skills"

have been of use, we argue that "global skills", as outlined by Douglas Bourn, is a more comprehensive articulation of the International Studies skillset. In this collaborative article, we 1) describe the field of International Studies and its virtues; 2) outline the problem of arts students' difficulty in articulating their skillset and professional value; 3) introduce Bourn's concept of "global skills"; 4) contribute to the concept of "global skills" by elaborating on the need for critical self-reflection of one's subject position and by outlining the value of systems thinking; 5) provide a reflective case study that illustrates how the 'global skills' as the International Studies skillset was highly valuable for one graduate's cross-cultural engagement. We conclude with final remarks on the value of International Studies per se.

Keywords: International Studies, Humanities, Global Skills, Employability, Careers.

Introduction

The field of International Studies is one of considerable popularity for university students in Australia and elsewhere. It is an interdisciplinary field in the humanities and social sciences that holds understandable attraction to students who are interested in world affairs. This includes those students who wish to make a positive contribution to the many and diverse issues they read and hear about, and which impact their own lives and the lives of others near and far. However, like many students and graduates of the arts, humanities, and social sciences, those in International Studies have sometimes

found it difficult to be able to articulate the skillset they have developed during their degree. From the perspective of a careers educator (as one of this article's authors is), the ability to articulate one's skillset is significant not only in terms of conveying the value of that skillset to potential employers, crucial though that is. It is also a matter of the student's or graduate's capacity to perceive their own professional identity and the unique and valuable assets they have to draw on as they consider opportunities, navigate challenges, and develop and evolve in their careers.

This collaboratively authored chapter highlights the personal and professional value of International Studies, and also commends the concept of "global skills" as outlined especially by Douglas Bourn as relevant to students and graduates of International Studies. We believe that enabling students and graduates of International Studies to be able to explicitly express their competencies will be of considerable value to them in their career journey, as well as enable them to personally appreciate what they have accomplished through their studies.

To do this, we briefly discuss International Studies as a field of study and some of its virtues in Section I; in Section II we outline the "problem" of humanities and social science students' common inability to appreciate their career-relevant skillset; in Section III we introduce Bourn's "global skills" framework; in Section IV we consider some of the potentially problematic elements of the concept of global citizenship

which constitutes Bourn's global skills, and advocate for a critical self-awareness of positionality and the value of systems thinking; and in Section V we look at a case study of how one of the present authors undertook a thesis in International Studies *in situ* in Indonesia and effectively made use of the International Studies skillset. We conclude the article with brief final remarks.

International Studies

A degree in International Studies can be regarded both as a "generalist" degree and yet also as a specialised degree. It is general in the sense that unlike some other degrees where there is a clear imagined career destination – such as if one were to study journalism, podiatry, law or accountancy – the avenues for future work that International Studies makes possible is broad and seemingly unspecific. As alluded to in the previous section, this breadth and non-specificity can make the skillset developed in International Studies seem diffuse and hard to articulate, and therefore be undervalued, even by students of International Studies – a situation that this article addresses.

However, International Studies can also be viewed as a specialised degree, and seeing it as such is important to affirming its value. The fields of International Studies and Global Studies – which this article will treat as synonymous – are inherently interdisciplinary, and at some universities subjects that contribute to an International Studies degree are a bricolage of existing courses from other disciplines including (but not limited to) history, anthropology, political science

and gender studies. This may contribute to a sense that International Studies is diffuse and, in a sense, "undisciplined" – an issue to which we will return in Section IV of this chapter. But key to International Studies is the frame of reference it deploys. Whereas psychology's frame is the psyche (of ostensibly the individual), and sociology's frame is a society, International Studies of course has an international and global frame of reference. This frame of reference is one that requires the cultivation of ways of thinking and cognitive dispositions that enable International Studies students and scholars to competently grapple with the issues they have at hand.

The international or global frame of reference requires an understanding that governments, policies and laws can differ profoundly from one country to another, and that each country has different histories and relationships with other countries, and furthermore these relationships can shift again depending on which political party is in power. And then, requiring perhaps an even greater level of sophistication, is the appreciation of culture and cultural difference. Differences in worldviews, values, and cosmologies can be considerable and can be difficult to fully appreciate. However, an appreciation of such differences can just be the start, because a further layer of nuanced understanding is required to appreciate the fact that individuals from a given society rarely embody all the traits associated with culture of that society.[1]

Encounters with these differences can challenge deeply held beliefs about right and wrong, and put into question things

that seemed true thus far. In this sense, cross-cultural encounters are a source of insight, but also questions, dilemma and even confusion. Issues of cultural relativism can be difficult to navigate, even for scholars with decades of cross-cultural experience. And then, overlaid upon this is the issue of linguistic difference, and the fact that foreign language competence is important in developing sophisticated insight into another society.

Skills developed through the study of the above may well be conceptualised as "soft skills", a term that speaks to their important capacities for adaptability and flexibility across divergent careers, situations, and applications. However, the quality of "softness" can also seem to signify a certain amorphousness, a lack of tangibility, and an absence of rigor and strength. This second set of associations would misrepresent the value, and even the nature, of the international or global frame acquired through study, which is a complex, disciplined mindset that is both rigorous and informed. Another challenging aspect of its seeming "softness" is that it can be regarded as "unfixed", though not because it lacks form, but rather because it is in a state of constant engagement and evolution. It even has aspects that are meaningfully characterised as modes of imagination, as in Orgad's assertion that "global imagination is cultivated by a process of ongoing construction of views, images, understanding, desires, and scripts about the world" (see Bourn,, 2018, p. 116). Compounding all of these challenges

is the peculiar reality that these skills and capabilities, however strategically acquired and cultivated, may not be easily articulated or even fully perceived by those who can claim them among their professional assets. We consider this phenomenon in the Graduate Case Study in a later of this article.

Although the skills discussed in this article can sometimes be considered as nice-to-have rather than essential, we maintain that their utility cannot be seen as inferior to so-called "hard skills". The evidence for this is to be found in the many failed ventures and projects that floundered not because the engineering blueprints were faulty, or the objectives ignoble, or technology inadequate. Rather, the failures speak directly to the need for a better informed and more nuanced engagement with local context and the array of stakeholders needed to make a success of it (e.g. Chouinard & Hopson, 2016) – an issue to which we also return in Section IV of this article. Thus, although an International Studies degree can seem general in the sense that the skillset is used in an array of endeavors and areas of work, it is also specialised because the higher order understanding and competence developed through International Studies are focused on a real, specific tasks in the international arena.

And yet, as with other humanities and social science students and graduates, articulating this skillset for International Studies students can be, and has been, challenging. Although concepts such as "soft skills",

"enterprise skills" and "21st century skills" have been important in filling that breach, students in fields like that of International Studies have, as we will now see, sometimes struggled to understand the job and career-relevance of the skills they have developed.

Arts, Humanities and the Social Sciences: The Career (Dis)Connect

A 2013 study supported by the Australian Government's Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) revealed that Bachelor of Arts (BA) graduates across Australia do not appreciate their own skillset and harbour concerns about their employability (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013). Led by researchers at the University of Adelaide, the study gathered insight on the issue of BA graduates' employability from the perspective of the graduates themselves, the academics that taught them, and the companies that employed them. Among the discipline areas covered in the study were International Studies, politics, history, and international relations, thus the report's findings are highly relevant to this article's discussion of interdisciplinary field International Studies.

A significant finding of the study is that while BA degrees are designed to equip graduates with highly desirable skills, including critical thinking, problem solving and communication, the graduates themselves are not aware of these skills (or not adequately appreciative of them) and fail to highlight them to potential employers. Instead, the participating graduates in the study believed that employers

prefer graduates of vocational disciplines whose training explicitly aligned with the needs of certain industries. The comparison was commonly drawn between BA graduates and engineers.

The study focused explicitly on the perceived employability of individuals who possessed an undergraduate qualification in the arts and, while it noted that an undergraduate qualification in the arts should not be just viewed as a "job ticket" (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013, p. 135), students, academics and employers all noted that there were ways to address employability issues for BA graduates. The study sought recommendations from the three stakeholders – the students, their teachers, and their potential employers – with a view to understanding how best to enhance a Bachelor of Arts graduate's chances of attaining employment post-graduation. The recommendations include explicitly defining and assessing key graduate skills, providing training in CV writing and interview presentation, and democratizing professional practice opportunities, among others.

The employers surveyed in this study hail from the top three employer sectors of BA graduates: educational institutions, government departments, and retail or wholesale businesses. This list from which the study draws (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013, pp. 204-205) represents a variety of sectors that do not necessarily require employees to possess postgraduate qualifications. While some areas of work in International Studies require postgraduate qualifications, and indeed this

study indicates that a subset of BA graduates pursue graduate studies, this study seeks to address the relative employability of BA graduates based on the skills learned in their undergraduate degree.

As the study clearly shows, individuals with a BA qualification possess the skills desired by their top three employer sectors and can obtain employment in these sectors without a postgraduate qualification. Importantly, this study highlights the disconnect between this reality and the students' perceived ability to obtain employment and, indeed, their employability in general. The study seeks to address the perceived unemployability of BA graduates by addressing some of their, and their potential employers', key concerns: namely skills recognition, skills demonstration, and performance in recruitment processes. It might be worth noting here that the notion that students should "study something else" was *not* one of the recommendations, indicating that the issue is not so much the arts, humanities and social sciences, but how the degree and its graduates fit into the labour market or how they are able to articulate the relevance of their skills.

To understand how these recommendations might address the issue of BA graduate employability, it is first important to understand what the "issue" in fact is. The OLT study asserted that the term "employability" is loaded, inconsistently defined, and ever evolving. For the purpose of the study, the researchers defined "employability" as 'achieving and demonstrating

appropriate knowledge, skills and attributes to obtain initial employment, maintain employment and move to new employment if required' (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013, p. 21).A simple way to measure the employability of BA graduates is to consider the proportion of graduates employed. When doing this, the OLT study found that 77% of the participating BA graduates were employed at the time of the study (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013, p. 70). This proportion of workforce participation paints a picture of a highly employable degree. Why, then, is the employability of graduates of degrees such as International Studies periodically up for debate? The way graduate employment outcomes are reported can have a dramatic impact on how employable graduates from various disciplines look on paper. Two commonly used metrics are (1) proportion of full-time engagement among a cohort and (2) time elapsed between graduating and attaining full-time employment (Lindberg, 2007; Pennington & Stanford, 2019).,

If the OLT study looked only at the proportion of graduates *full-time* employed, that 77 drops to just over 50% (Pennington & Stanford 2019). Furthermore, the study neatly displays the issue of time: the longer after graduation one measures workforce participation, the greater the percentage of the cohort one finds engaged in full-time work (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013, pp. 71-72). This points to an important point: if a metric for employability is regarded as related to achieving full-time employment in the shortest possible

amount of time post-graduation, BA graduates can sometimes not fare well. For a term with diverse definitions, discussions of employability can paint an unduly bleak picture for BA graduates. We believe this ignores the individual and social benefits of part-time and casual engagements, and the myriad reasons why a graduate might initially take these roles. It also says nothing of job satisfaction. Acknowledging these deficits in the concept of "employed" and "employable" acknowledges the changing world of work and the reality that full-time roles may not be available, cyclical, or, indeed, may not be initially desirable for many individuals.

The OLT study's discussion of employability for BA graduates highlights an important variable: one's ability to achieve and demonstrate the appropriate skills to attain, maintain, and change employment. Employers surveyed noted that, specifically, recruitment choices are made based on a candidate's "fit for the role", but that, more broadly, there are several key skills that they desire in a candidate. The top desired skills are, among others:

1. Oral and written communication skills
2. Problem-solving skills
3. Teamwork (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013, p. 144).

Ideally, candidates would be able to articulate and demonstrate these skills to employers by undertaking work integrated learning, having previous work experience, and studying two

majors to enhance subject-matter knowledge (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013, p. 156). However, while the graduates were able to identify in themselves the same key skills that employers desire, they believed that the best way to demonstrate their employability is by undertaking further study, taking practical classes on employment provision, and integrating their arts subjects with those from technical disciplines (Harvey & Shahjahan, 2013, p. 156). This indicates that graduates (and probably their teachers alike), while aware of their skills, may be under-valuing them, and are not able to demonstrate them effectively to employers. This chapter seeks to contribute directly to this problem.

The OLT study demonstrated what is quickly becoming common knowledge: that employers are looking for graduates with what have been often termed "soft skills". Generalist degrees, such as that of International Studies, are where these skills are taught in abundance. Soft skills have undergone several incarnations in recent times, with "enterprise skills", "employability skills" and "21st century skills" gaining popularity as concepts that cover similar ground to soft skills. Philip Hanlon, the President of Dartmouth, advocates a rebranding of soft skills to "power skills" to demonstrate their true potential (Agarwal, 2018). Semantics aside, soft skills are in high demand.

While concepts such as "enterprise skills" and "21st century skills" have sought to outline more clearly the career-relevance of skills, some of which were captured previously as "soft

skills", there has emerged another concept that captures even better the skillset cultivated during an International Studies degree. In Section III, this article will present Douglas Bourn's concept of "global skills" as a fitting articulation of the skillset of students in International Studies degrees. Bourn's work on global skills has the potential of enabling students and International Studies teachers to understand and frame their competencies in more career-relevant ways and gain a better appreciation for an important skillset which is also easy for a student to take for granted and under-appreciate. While this articulation is particularly useful for students of International Studies, it is not limited to them. Indeed, according to Oxford University, global skills are becoming "essential" for individuals and groups to have meaningful and productive engagement in schools, workplaces, and society in general (Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 6). By undertaking a degree focused on developing expertise in global skills, BA graduates, and International Studies students in particular, are well equipped to succeed and serve in an increasingly globalised society. And it is to these global skills, and what constitutes them, that we now turn.

Global Skills

The use of terms such as "21st century skills" or "soft skills" are often prescribed as competencies that can be effectively applied in a contemporary professional setting. However, globalisation is not just economic; it has social, cultural, and political dimensions as well. Graduates are living in a world

that requires them to meaningfully engage with the world around them. As Douglas Bourn argues, there is now a need to accurately locate skills needed "within the context of globalization" (Bourn, 2018, p. 114). Although there are other authors who have discussed the concept of "global skills", Bourn has gone furthest in articulating and promoting the term in recent years (see Kraljevic, 2018).

Bourn's development of the concept and framework of "global skills" relies on the acknowledgement not only of the changing world of work, but the different economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technological phenomena that are interacting with one another. As global skills are able to acknowledge these interdependent global forces, they equip students with a broader awareness of what globalisation actually entails and how they might respond to it. In the context of our discussion of the utility of global skills as a conceptual framework for articulating the competencies of International Studies graduates, Bourn presents a framework for this in Chapter 6 of *Understanding Global Skills for 21st Century Professions*. The seven key abilities he describes as constituting global skills are:

- Ability to see the connections between what is happening in your own community and in the communities of people elsewhere in the world.
- Recognition of what it means to live and work in a global society, and of the value of having a broad

global outlook which respects, listens to, and values perspectives other than one's own.

- Ability to understand the impact of global forces on one's life and the lives of other people, and what this means in terms of a sense of place in the world.
- Understanding of the value of ICT [Information Communications Technology] and how best to use it, in a way that is self-reflective and critical, that questions data and information.
- Openness to a continued process of self-reflection, critical dialogue, and questioning of one's assumptions about the world.
- Ability to work with others who may have different viewpoints and perspectives, being prepared to change one's opinions as a result of working with others, and seeking cooperative and participatory ways of working.
- Confidence, belief, and willingness to seek a more just and sustainable world (Bourn, 2018, pp. 124-125).

The present article cannot undertake the detailed elaboration of these traits that Bourn does in his book. However, we note that it is likely that many International Studies students, despite having accrued the abilities above explicitly and implicitly through their studies, would not realize that the above are valued by employers.

We also note that the concept of "global skills" is an advance beyond technical competencies or a code of conduct to be applied in a meeting room or workplace, although they are vital there too. They encompass "social forms of interaction" and the "ability to understand and make sense of the world around us" (Bourn, 2018, p. 2). As global skills embrace technical, interdisciplinary and social skills, they essentially address more than just the "needs of employment" and address "all aspects of society" ((Bourn, 2018, p. 2). Thus, not only will graduates be required to work under conditions created by globalisation, they will also need *to live* in and with those conditions. The incorporation of both *working and living* reinforces the need to understand one's own role and position in the global environment.

Due to its emphasis on globalisation, the development of global skills for International Studies students and graduates is underpinned by a "global outlook". As students are encouraged to envision the world as a network of symbiotic relationships, consisting of people and practices in other contexts and locations, they adopt an approach to learning that seeks to understand the viewpoints of others and how they interpret their realities. Further, as International Studies students are better able to understand "what is happening in the world" they can consider their role and contribution within it, and indeed the appropriate role of their organization of employment (Bourn, 2018, p. 190). A result of this reflection can be said to be the development of a sense of global

responsibility or "global citizenship", to which we return in the following section. Crucially, this develops the ability to explore the complexities of the world and to see oneself as a member of a global society. As graduates encounter issues of social justice, equity, and environmental challenges (Bourn, 2018, p. 290), they may well consider their own wellbeing, but are able to consider the wellbeing of their community (in whatever way they wish to define this), communities in other areas of the world, and global wellbeing for generations now and into the future.

It follows then that what are considered necessary contemporary skills should no longer be measured against their "efficiency" in some form, but rather, how graduates "make sense" of the world (Bourn, 2018, p. 18). International Studies students and graduates become active participants in the experiences they encounter, are able to identify some of the broader processes at play, and reflect upon how a situation came into being. Drawing from Ulrich Beck, Bourn notes that global skills are not just *what* people learn, but *how* and *where* they learn too. To this point, Bourn argues that global skills rely on a shift "beyond interculturalism" and mere exposure to other cultures. By practically engaging with and reflecting upon intercultural experiences, students who develop global skills, which would include International Studies students, are able to recognize that "cultural norms are not generic and context matters" (Bourn, 2018, p. 146). Awareness of different beliefs, experiences, and perspectives, and identifying how

these have been shaped by historical, cultural, or socio-economic factors, is needed to contribute to authentic interactions. Developing the skills to engage with such diversity, such as the "unfamiliar" or the "other", also positions the individual in the exchange and forces them to consider their own role and contribution to the world. This process of self-reflection ensures that encounters with others are meaningful and equips graduates with the skills to collaborate well in diverse teams and environments.

As they reflect and challenge their own knowledge, individuals who have developed global skills are able to develop and employ critical thinking. The significance of critical thinking as a global skill is amplified as technological advances driven by globalisation begin to rely on new tools for communicating and sharing information – such as the Internet or social media platforms. Familiarity with ICT may be a requirement for most jobs in the contemporary world but utilizing such tools in a responsible and ethical way needs more than competency. Rather than focusing on "how" to use such tools, Bourn emphasizes that a significant consideration emerges on "how best" we might use them (Bourn, 2018, p. 127). By utilizing critical thinking, those competent in global skills are able to make assessments about the significance of digital tools, and ask questions about how and why we use them; what their effect is as a mode of communication; how are narratives constructed and framed; and how information may be received and what responsibility the author/user has

in that process. Further, when this process is guided by a sense of global justice, those who possess global skills are able to understand an issue in both its local and international contexts, and to appreciate the diversity of stakeholders who need to be engaged when addressing that issue.

Bourn's global skills uphold the values of global justice, which will align well for many International Studies students. Global skills are not only set within a globalised world; they address the impact of global processes on people and societies. They rely on reflection, introspection, awareness of others, and acknowledgement of one's own positionality. These are important regardless of whether the decisions under deliberation are focused on the self or one's place of work. Underpinning these skills is a "sense of visioning" on how to achieve a "more just and sustainable world" (Bourn, 2018, p. 189). As students consider how to improve quality of life, their "ability to see" connections between the local and the global allows for a wide lens view of world issues. Ideally, this empowers graduates to effectively engage in society and feel confident about creating positive change (Bourn, 2018, p. 125). Because it is the case that the only constant thing in life is change, and that change is necessary in any sphere, from business, to politics, and society, we now turn to how International Studies students and graduates can understand their place as agents of change.

Global Citizenship, Positionality, and Systems Thinking

Understanding change and seeking to influence change in a positive way in any organization requires a sophisticated understanding of the wider context. This in turn requires analytical tools to facilitate a systematic assessment of that context and the most important elements to consider, which may not necessarily be the most obvious ones. Also beneficial would be a disposition towards seeing oneself in a global context as a global actor.

One element of Bourn's exposition on "global skills" that can resonate well with International Studies is the emphasis on global citizenship, a concept that has gained increasing traction with diverse organizations ranging from Oxfam to UNESCO (Bourn, 2018, pp. 4-11, 100-101). Bourn writes, "If one term has become the symbol of this movement to promoting learning and engagement for global social change, it is global citizenship" ((Bourn, 2018, p. 271). This term, he goes on to note, puts an "emphasis on new forms of citizenship that take account of our globalised multicultural world, in which people work across cultures and economies around the world" ((Bourn, 2018, p. 271).

However, "citizenship" can potentially be a problematic concept because within national contexts it has tended to revolve around questions of rights rather than rights *and* obligations. Reference to global citizens can also conjure images of people of privileged categories and fortunate circumstances gaining access to the lands and cultural experiences of others, while those others have little in the way

of similar opportunity, and indeed may face hostility should they seek entry as asylum seekers, refugees, or other kinds of migrant.

We do not suggest that Bourn advocates for a naïve conceptualizing of global citizenship. Nevertheless, we wish to emphasize that an important theme in an International Studies education must be a critical awareness of what is often termed positionality, or one's subject position. Teaching this in any context will be challenging and potentially confronting (Hankins & Yarbrough, 2009; Torino, 2015). In a context like Australia with a settler-colonial history and thorough-going displacement of Indigenous peoples from their lands, and both cultural and human destruction (Lee et al., 2019, pp. 47-70), these important discussions can generate feelings of guilt among young people (Halloran, 2007). And where students aspire to make the world a better place, a critical exploration of the history and practice of international development can also confound and cripple those aspirations.

Part of the process of working through this is a critical reflection on our "good intentions", where they come from, at whom are they directed, and the shape they take (Mathews, 2020). But while this reflection needs to be critical, it should not imply that the result of this reflection is to dispense with them, as implied by the idiom that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions". In cross-cultural and development contexts, what is intended as beneficence can be characterised, often quite fairly, as being paternalistic, patronizing, and

depending on the ethnic and national background of the person, possibly stemming from a "white savior complex" (Pailey 2020). For those with the desire to be of service but who have become aware of the problematic dynamics of "international development", and the need to be self-aware of one's privilege, and the importance of avoiding contributing to problems, finding a route through this fraught terrain can be very difficult. This is especially the case when admonitions – the need for which is not being doubted here – outline *only* what is problematic, and seldom give directions on what can be positively accomplished.

While there is some virtue in a "solutions-focused" approach to some problems, the increasingly popular phrase does reflect the common linear equation:

> problem + intervention = solution and better situation

The straightforward fix to complex situations (that can *appear* simple) is deeply ingrained in many people and is the basis of many industries and companies whose products are framed and sold as fixing life problems, and is also to be found in the good intentions behind aspirations to fix other nations' problems. In an article titled "Western do-gooders need to resist the allure of exotic problems", Courtney E. Martin writes that, "There is real fallout when well-intentioned people attempt to solve problems without acknowledging the underlying complexity" and meanwhile domestically in the US "we've got plenty of domestic need" (Martin, 2016). But

Martin's conclusion is not that young people should not engage with others beyond their national borders:

> ...I'm not arguing that staying close to home inoculates kids, especially of the white, privileged variety, like me, from making big mistakes. But don't go [overseas] because you've fallen in love with solvability. Go because you've fallen in love with complexity. Don't go because you want to do something virtuous. Go because you want to do something difficult. Don't go because you want to talk. Go because you want to listen (Martin, 2016).

An enlightening exposition that addresses issues around the apparent solvability of other people's problems is Clare Talwalker's chapter "Fixing Poverty", in which she describes her experiences in teaching students at UC Berkeley. She notes that many of her students have arrived "at college having already taken up arms for a particular cause" (Roy et al., 2016, p. 122). With respect to her class on poverty, Talwalker writes:

> What can it mean for a student to care about poverty as a general and global problem and to seek ways to redress it? Care of this kind—the kind that comes from the embrace of universal problems and generalizable moral positions—is itself a sort of power and privilege, and it tends to lead people to solutions—utilitarian solutions—that are not attentive to the things that are distinctive about a place and a people (Roy et al., 2016, p. 124).

As part of her class, Talwalker emphasizes an engagement with issues of "power, place, and history", and she seeks to draw students' thinking and focus away from utilitarian ways of thinking about "fixing poverty". Instead, she focuses students on developing a deep engagement with a community and its history. She also ensures students reflect on their positionality. She finds that when students do this, they imagine more sophisticated ways to engage with communities where poverty was prevalent. "In each case," writes Talwalker, "this meant backing away from a programmatic approach and a concrete goal and instead opening up to the unpredictability of what other people think and do" (Roy et al., 2016, p. 144).

A framework that seeks to guide users away from linear utilitarian thinking is systems-thinking, which Bourn commends (Bourn, 2018, p. 246). Systems thinking is a methodical approach to conducting a holistic enquiry into a phenomenon and which attempts to open up the focus to include the wider context in which it occurs, and to also shift thinking away from entities and towards the *relationships* between entities. For International Studies, the ability to think broadly and holistically is relevant, and a methodical approach to doing so is of great value. Systems thinking and the related field of complexity theory (Boulton et al., 2015) also have the advantage of being part of a tradition of academic thought that students and teachers in International Studies can connect with if they wish. At the same time, systems thinking is also commended by those seeking practical ways to approach

international projects through involving diverse stakeholders (Green, 2016). The theme of practicality in systems thinking brings some groundedness and inclusion that the concept of global citizenship can often seem to lack.

A patient, inclusive, and dynamic approach to engaging with others on projects and plans is of course not easy (Bowman et al., 2015) and would likely frustrate the desires of some people and organizations to "just get on with it". However, the long history of failed and misguided endeavors in international development and other realms is testament to the need for another route which systems thinking and global skills can help cultivate, and which can make significant contributions to the field of International Studies. The need for this is hard to doubt in a self-evidently global world where even intra-national and highly local issues are inevitably impacted upon by global forces and currents. Thus, cautious and critical international and global competencies are much needed in a context where bilateral and international engagement, cooperation, and sophisticated mutual understanding are crucial in so many domains, ranging from international security, to business and trade, to human health and welfare, to name but a few.

Graduate Case Study

How the global skillset and the competencies developed in an International Studies degree come together to enable students and graduates to sensitively navigate a globalised and culturally diverse world is of course tested when applied in

contexts outside the classroom. To illustrate this, this article will explore the experience of one of the chapter authors, Madeline McGarvey, who in 2019 received an Australian New Colombo Plan (NCP) Scholarship to undertake a research project in Indonesia.

As an NCP Scholar, McGarvey completed a semester at a university in West Java, wrote an Honours thesis on medical pluralism, interned at a maternal health clinic in Bali and studied Bahasa Indonesia in several islands across the archipelago. McGarvey recalls needing to draw on the skills that she cultivated throughout her International Studies degree, both during the application rounds of the scholarship program and whilst in-country.

In order to obtain the competitive NCP scholarship, McGarvey needed to have a clear understanding of her own skills and a capacity to clearly and convincingly convey this to panellists. In essence, she needed to have the terminology and the language – as advocated by Bourn (Bourn, 2018) – to express her core competencies. She remembers struggling with this at first as so many of the skills that she had developed were acquired both subtly and incrementally; they had become such a part of the self that she could barely recognise them, or remember a time without them. McGarvey recalls the utility of revisiting a journal-based assignment she was required to submit as part of a long-term internship, which constitutes a mandatory component of her International Studies degree. This assignment, and the compulsory internship *per*

se, had helped McGarvey to become an "active" and reflective learner, and to engage in practices of deep, critical and formative self-reflection, whereby the tacit knowledge she acquired was raised to a more conscious and explicit level.

McGarvey notes that in both her own application process, and several similar application processes that she has coached people through, there is a notable temptation for students to prioritize hard skills over soft skills. Students often name subjects that they have studied or essays that they have written, as a way of conveying their explicit knowledge, whilst neglecting to mention their implicit knowledge. If soft skills are mentioned, it is usually a passing reference to "written and communication skills", which fails to concretely capture their high-order processing and nuanced critical thinking abilities. Within McGarvey's peer group, there is a failure to articulate the value of what can be seen as a generalist degree; this is something that has been seen by McGarvey's own employers as a tangible advantage and who recognize – even if not explicitly – the value of global skills. These skills have allowed her to pivot between organizations, topics, and geographies. Before undertaking her program of study and research in Indonesia, McGarvey was neither well versed in maternal health care nor did she have an established knowledge of Indonesian culture. For McGarvey, although this caused initial apprehension, gradually realised that being work-ready (and research-ready) is less about *what* one already knows, and more about *how* one thinks. She brought into her Indonesian program

fundamental competencies regarding culture, language and society which she could readily leverage to become a sensitive and effective participant in her program of work, study, and research in Indonesia.

Being a generalist can come as a competitive advantage, especially in the complexity of the 21st century, where information, organizational needs, community desire and evidence-based practices are rapidly shifting, and where both employees and leaders need to be able to integrate new knowledge, quickly and meaningfully. The ability to handle the uncertainties of late modernity, and to act decisively yet thoughtfully in the face of ambiguity is a key global skill. It also dovetails neatly with another global competency: the ability to understand complexity theory and engage with systems methodologies. McGarvey was able to work on innovative, health care initiatives only because she was primed by her degree. Having spent three years considering the complex interplay of factors that contribute to intractable social problems allowed her to recognise and map place-based determinants and systemic barriers to community wellbeing, alongside her team in Indonesia.

In addition to having a "generalist" or versatile skillset and being able to understand systems thinking and complexity theory, being able to critically analyze is an indispensable global skill. McGarvey's thesis investigated the ways that global and local forces had shaped the discourses, beliefs and practices of a 21st century medically plural health setting. In order to

capture the creative, reflexive, and idiosyncratic manner in which local forces had accepted, integrated and rejected particular global flows, McGarvey needed to be able to watch, note, challenge and dissect that which was in front of her, and to filter her findings through an analytic lens.

She also needed to be acutely aware of her positionality and privilege, which we emphasised in this article in the previous section, especially when operating in cross-cultural contexts. McGarvey knew that in order to make a valuable contribution to the literature, and to uphold her research commitments to justice and beneficence, she needed to scrutinize her privilege and regularly examine her biases, and their implications. She needed to continually question the reasons for, and implications of, her research findings, asking herself whether her research accurately represented the community she was working with, and how her conclusions could, or could not, affect other people. Having taken subjects that explored issues of colonialism, ethnocentrism, and the problematization of development, meant that – although one can always be better informed – McGarvey was better equipped than she would otherwise have been to challenge her own assumptions and consider the assumptions of those around her. McGarvey is adamant that she would not have been able to exercise this level of self-reflexivity had it not been modelled to her by lecturers, tutors and peers throughout her International Studies degree.

McGarvey also sees emotional intelligence as a key skill in all spheres of global professional and personal life. This includes

the ability to understand one's inner world and the inner worlds of those they work with; the capacity to be sensitive to other people's needs; to listen deeply; and to communicate constructively. McGarvey found this skill invaluable when broaching emotionally charged conversations, navigating sensitive issues, and creating a sense of psychological safety with her colleagues, research participants and supervisors. It is what allowed her to receive invitations to conferences, to witness the work of midwives, to be invited to culturally significant events, and ultimately, to be gifted a personally and professionally transformative experiences in Indonesia.

Finally, McGarvey says that the adoption of a growth mindset was an invaluable asset for her, both whilst in Indonesia and upon her premature return home. She notes that the ability to frame experiences as opportunities for development, coupled with a commitment to staying open, curious and receptive to new ideas, is key to staying adaptable, resilient, and employable in our dynamic, global era. This case study exemplifies how International Studies degrees – with their emphasis on critical thinking, self-reflexivity and 'active' learning – can equip students to face the complexity and ambiguity of working life in 21st century.

Conclusion

In this article, we have outlined the importance of articulating and appreciating the particular skillset developed and championed by graduates of International Studies. More specifically, we have highlighted Bourn's concept of "global

skills" as a framework for capturing the competencies cultivated in students of International Studies, and further, have sought to contribute to the understanding of "global skills" by identifying systems thinking and critical self-reflexiveness as additional core components of such a skillset.

For the authors, the value in naming, describing, and indeed, celebrating the abilities and skills of International Studies graduates goes beyond the more immediate and perhaps, material benefits of doing so (i.e. in supporting and enhancing the employment outcomes of our graduates). Our argument comes at a time when, in our own local context of Australia (and elsewhere), the value of humanities and social science degrees is under siege. At the time of writing (late 2020), the Australian government passed legislation to "reform" tertiary education by substantially increasing the cost of degrees that (in its misguided view) lack career relevance. By contrast, degrees that are seen as "job-relevant" (largely "STEM" courses) would have their fees significantly reduced. In announcing the new policy, titled "Job-Ready Graduates", the federal Education Minister Dan Tehan (himself a humanities graduate) was quoted as saying that the government wanted to "incentivise students to make more job-relevant choices" (Horton, 2020).

The rhetoric surrounding the shift in policy in Australia speaks to the impoverished understanding of what it means to be 'job-ready' consequent of a university education, a perspective that is apparent in many countries today. Referring

to the US tertiary education environment, Tim Marshall points out that "[A] strictly technical education may carry a short-term promise (a job), but it also carries a long-term peril of not being well prepared for ongoing change. Instead of teaching students narrow skills, we need to prepare them with the skills to think, communicate, collaborate, design, and make their—and our—futures" (Marshall, 2018). As Marshall notes, in a world increasingly shaped by the transformative dynamics of emerging technology and innovation, what is needed are not only graduates who can develop such technologies but in addition – and perhaps even more so – those who possess the skills to critically understand and reflect on the meaning of these developments across local and global contexts.

In asserting the specificity of what may appear general, and in articulating the "global skills" needed for a globalised world, we therefore offer a much-needed counter-narrative to that currently being advanced by some in positions of political (and financial) power about the value of programs such as International Studies. In a world where even the most localised challenges are affected by the global, and imbued with added complexity as a result, the skills of a culturally competent, critically engaged, and justice-focused workforce are clearly worth investing in.

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Notes

[1] As noted by Sjoerd Beugelsdijk and Chris Welzel (2018), "Usually, it is impossible to replicate dimensions of cultural variation found at the aggregate level *across* countries in the same shape at the individual level *within* countries".

CHAPTER 4: CULTIVATING THE HUMANITARIAN MINDSET AND SKILLSET IN ENGINEERS

Chapter 4

Cultivating the Humanitarian Mindset and Skillset in Engineers

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Abstract

Engineers are well placed to contribute to contemporary challenges in humanitarian action and development assistance contexts. This is due to a combination of their skillset, mindset, and ability to consider and deal with complexity. However, for engineers to work most effectively, safely, and ethically in humanitarian contexts requires principles, mindsets, tools, and techniques that are often missing, undervalued or under-represented in mainstream engineering education. Humanitarian engineering practitioners often

address this gap by engaging in professional development as well as through humanitarian and development work. In Australia, Humanitarian Engineering Education has emerged to address this gap in university training. Experience in humanitarian engineering education at RMIT University has led to the development of several opportunities focussed on developing a humanitarian skillset and mindset that complements the students' main engineering discipline knowledge. The RMIT approach to humanitarian engineering is built around a four-stage learning: 1) becoming conscious, 2) becoming concerned, 3) becoming competent and 4) becoming challenged. This learning journey is supported by circular opportunities that either teach humanitarian engineering concepts directly or use humanitarian engineering as a context to teach mainstream engineering. From this teaching practice several lessons have been learned, including the importance of transitional concepts such as appropriate technology, to challenge mainstream engineering mindset to consider socio-technical interactions.

Keywords: Humanitarian Engineering, Engineering Education, Engineering Profession, Humanitarian program Development, Competency Development The role of engineering in development assistance and humanitarian action

The role of engineering in development assistance and humanitarian action

The engineering mindset and skillset is well suited to contributing to increasingly complex and urgent contemporary global challenges, including poverty alleviation and social justice, as well as progressing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN General Assembly (2015). Engineering underpins many essential services such as the provision of shelter, energy, water and sanitation. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres affirmed, "every one of the [Sustainable Development] Goals requires solutions rooted in science, technology, and engineering" (Guterres, 2018). In addition to working on longer term development assistance, engineers are also well placed to contribute to shorter term humanitarian action (e.g. disaster response) under the humanitarian charter (Sphere Association, 2018). Advanced engineering problem solving is valuable as complex emergencies require complex responses and consideration for long term consequences (Davis & Lambert, 2002, p.1).

Engineers have been working in the areas of development assistance and humanitarian action for many decades, with practitioners often extending their mainstream engineering mindset and skillset through practical experience and acquiring multi-disciplinary knowledge. This is important; Eichhorn (2020) shows that mainstream engineering thinking does not always translate well into development contexts and may lead to further entrenching colonialist approaches. There is a growing interest in identifying and recognising the

importance of this extended mindset and skillset and determining the best way they can be introduced to engineering students who are motivated by humanitarian and development work.

In Australia, the term Humanitarian Engineering is broadly understood to cover engineering actions from immediate disaster response, through recovery and stabilisation, to long-term community and infrastructure development, disaster preparedness, and capacity building (Greet, 2014; Turner et al., 2015). Whilst the term 'humanitarian' may have different definitions in other disciplines or countries and the engineering actions described may be called something else (e.g. 'global engineering' or 'development engineering'), humanitarian engineering is recognised in Australia, as demonstrated through the launch of a national community of practice (HECoP, 2022), dedicated education programs (Smith et al., 2020) and a unique field of research (ABS, 2019).

Why humanitarian engineering is needed

As humanitarian engineering matures in Australia as a field of practice, research and teaching, there is still a question of whether humanitarian engineering is a specialism. After all, isn't all engineering humanitarian in some way? In theory, it may be. Engineers Australia, the recognised professional body for engineers in Australia, begins its code of ethics with the paragraph: "[A]s engineering practitioners, we use our knowledge and skills for the benefit of the community to create engineering solutions for a sustainable future. In doing

so, we strive to serve the community ahead of other personal or sectional interests" (EA, 2019). From an engineering education perspective, the Australian Council of Engineering Deans states: "Engineers aim to design products, systems infrastructure and services that produce a safer, healthier and more sustainable world and hence improve the quality of life of everyone" (ACED, 2017). If these statements played out across the engineering profession, there may be no need for a humanitarian engineering specialism. Unfortunately, whilst the engineering profession creates significant benefit, its actions also contribute to the complex and urgent contemporary global problems. The engineering and social justice movement demonstrates that there are "still huge discrepancies among groups and individuals who are served by and benefit from engineering and technological developments" (Baillie et al., 2012, p. viii). Further discussion and debate are beyond the scope of this chapter, but the position of the authors is that engineering is not by default humanitarian.

From an engineering perspective, humanitarian implies human centredness and ensuring that the socio-technical interaction is considered as part of the engineering process (Mazzurco & Daniel, 2020). Whilst the socio-technical interaction is sometimes considered in engineering projects, engineers can fall into the trap of "either imagining that they themselves can accurately and adequately represent their end users' needs and wishes, or forgetting the end-user entirely"

(Baillie et al., 2012, p.11). This is not a new phenomenon. About fifty years ago, Ernst Schumacher, a leader in engineering and technology for development, said "Who we design for defines the importance of the solution, not the frontier of the technology" (Schumacher, 1973). The complexity of humanitarian engineering and the importance of considering more than technical factors becomes more apparent if we consider an example, say, the provision of an essential service such as clean drinking water. Providing clean drinking water to low-income rural communities is not simply about identifying a feasible technical solution. Factors such as land tenure, marginalisation, power dynamics, political priorities, and environmental challenges, all need to be considered as well, each of which can change over time (Cunningham et al., 2019). Importantly, such factors can also intersect and compound to make the situation even more complex (Rhodes-Dicker et al., 2022). Developing and implementing a long-term sustainable solution for clean drinking water requires deep engagement with community members who may be disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or marginalised as well as local government, private sector, and non-governmental stakeholders. The power imbalances involved can lead to complex risks and ethical considerations which humanitarian engineers need to be prepared for. Whilst ethics is typically covered as part of the competencies of a graduate engineer in Australia, the depth of their engagement with this topic may not be to the level required in complex

humanitarian and development contexts. Furthermore, Eliot and Turns (2011) found that students often undervalue the non-technical side of engineering.

In summary, for engineers to work effectively, safely, and ethically in humanitarian contexts requires principles, mindsets, tools, and techniques that are often missing, undervalued, or under-represented in mainstream engineering education curriculum. Accordingly, there is a need for a field of engineering education that introduces these additional mindsets, skillsets and toolsets. In Australia this is Humanitarian Engineering Education, and several university initiatives are already available, including at RMIT University (Smith et al., 2020).

Humanitarian engineering education at RMIT University

RMIT University (RMIT) has a historic link to the humanitarian engineering movement in Australia. In 2003, Danny Almagor and fellow RMIT aerospace engineering graduates established the not-for-profit, member-based organisation Engineers Without Borders Australia (EWB-A) with Almagor taking on the inaugural position of Social Entrepreneur in Residence at RMIT. The first EWB-A project was a collaboration with RMIT academics working on a wind turbine concept in Nepal (Bezar, 2006). Since then, RMIT has been involved in several EWB-A initiatives. These include the flagship education program 'The EWB Challenge', since its first edition in 2007 (Smith et al., 2018) and, more recently,

the EWB-A Humanitarian Design Summit (Smith et al., 2016; Daniel & Brown, 2018).

In early 2018, RMIT took the step to strengthen its humanitarian engineering education capability by creating a dedicated academic position, followed by another one created in late 2019. Specialist humanitarian engineering courses were developed and delivered at Bachelor and Masters levels, focused on experiential learning. Together, these initiatives resulted in the structured humanitarian engineering offering available to students today. This program has been converted into a new Minor in Humanitarian Innovation, to be delivered through the School of Engineering, commencing by 2026.

Teaching philosophy – learning through practice and failure

A teaching philosophy centred around students working alongside experts on real-world problems underpins the current and future humanitarian engineering education at RMIT (see also Huff et al., 2016). To inspire students not to be constrained by past engineering thinking, the teaching incorporates lived experiences from industry as well as ongoing action research projects. A broad range of learning activities has been utilised across the courses delivered. These include problem-based learning, scenario-based learning, experiential learning, and experimentation along with more traditional classroom-based activities. All these learning activities revolve around the idea that students need to develop the humanitarian engineering mindset, skillset, and toolset through learning by doing whilst being provided a safe space

to fail. This space to fail is very important but something that many students struggle with. Students may believe there is a single correct solution to the particular problem they are trying to address and focus on supplying the perceived 'correct' response to a lecturer, rather than actively developing the experimental, exploratory mindset required to grapple with the complexity inherent in the discipline. Put simply, there is a tendency to focus on the answer and not the approach that allows for similar problems to be solved in the future. Engineering students can also jump into finding a solution to a problem that does not exist or is poorly defined. Structured failure can lead to an appreciation of complexity of humanitarian and development contexts and support students to develop their humanitarian mindset.

Teaching and assessment are used in parallel to focus the students' attention on their approach rather than the solution. For example, students learn 'observation' as a discovery technique, and are sent out onto the RMIT campus and asked to put the technique into practice, say to explore the inclusivity of the campus. There is no desired target output, but when back in the classroom students reflect on the process used. This skill is then put into practice as part of experiential learning, for example, whilst on an overseas placement with a partner.

The teaching philosophy targets the switching of the students' perception of competencies away from skillsets (or toolsets) and towards mindsets. For example, students often

perceive risk assessment or the ethics protocol as paperwork to get out of the way as fast as possible. Yet, these competencies are mindsets needed for risk fitness and ethical fitness, to better suit humanitarian styles of working. We want graduates to have the combination of a curious and engaged mind, with the skills and tools for making a difference.

Teaching humanitarian content vs. context

At RMIT, the humanitarian engineering mindsets, skillsets and toolsets are currently taught directly through humanitarian engineering courses as well as indirectly through traditional engineering courses, referred to here as *content* and *context* courses respectively:

Humanitarian engineering *content* courses have learning outcomes related to humanitarian engineering competencies and students are taught tools, techniques, and contexts specific to humanitarian engineering, e.g. strength-based approaches and appropriate technology.

Humanitarian engineering *context* courses are traditional engineering courses, where a humanitarian scenario, situation, or context is utilised. In these courses, the intent is to teach mainstream engineering competencies using case studies or problem-based learning that relates to humanitarian action or development assistance.

An example of a humanitarian engineering *content* course is the 'Humanitarian Experiential Learning Project' – an elective available to undergraduate students at any point of their degree but recommended for second or third year students. In this

course, students are provided with an introduction into humanitarian engineering via video lectures and workshops on topics such as global development challenges, strength-based approaches, cross-cultural communication, human-centred design, social enterprises, market-based solutions, and failed humanitarian engineering projects. Halfway through the intensive course, students join an external partner on a real-world development project. Examples include travelling to Cambodia on a Design Summit with EWB-A or working with Pollinate Group in India through their fellowship program. The primary intention of this course is to introduce students to the humanitarian engineering mindset and skillset, and they might later relate these new skills to their overall engineering learning journey.

Another humanitarian engineering *content* course is 'Humanitarian Engineering', which is available to Masters-level engineering students. The course provides the fundamentals of the humanitarian engineering body of knowledge. Part of the course sees students engage in a scenario where they develop and test simple humanitarian technologies (i.e., for water treatment and cooking) to be used in a refugee camp. Students also engage in playing out a scenario. In the past, this has included developing a plan for conducting field studies exploring opportunities for improving access to rural drinking water, while working closely with a real-world client. Halfway through the scenario, students are informed that their project must urgently pivot in response to a natural disaster.

Engineering with practicing humanitarian engineers working for a real partner organisation adds to the realism of the scenario. The use of dynamic scenarios reinforces the value of the application of a humanitarian engineering mindset rather than trying to develop the correct answer.

In addition to the humanitarian content courses, RMIT offers several courses that use a humanitarian engineering context. A good example is the use of a resource constrained setting, namely informal settlements in Honiara, as a Problem-Based Learning site for students taking the course Urban System (a mandatory course for third year environmental engineering students). The context was part of an ongoing research project by RMIT academics which meant students had access to real world data and insights. As a humanitarian engineering context course, the main goal was not to teach humanitarian engineering skills, but for the students to learn about urban systems through a development context. Another example of using a humanitarian context is in the course 'Introduction to Professional Engineering Practice'. This mandatory first year course, open to all engineering students, uses 'The EWB Challenge' as the central Problem-Based Learning scenario. The EWB Challenge is a yearly competition developed by EWB-A to challenge engineering students to develop solutions for underserved communities. The intention of this course is to teach mainstream engineering competencies; it is not focused specifically on the humanitarian engineering body of knowledge. However, there

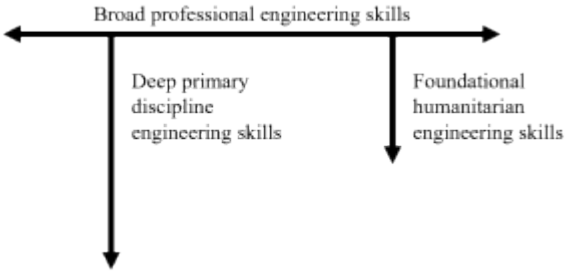
are elements of this course that are highly applicable to working in humanitarian contexts. Jolly, Crosthwaite, & Kavanagh (2010, p. 121) note that "One of the ways in which subjects containing 'The EWB Challenge' are different from others, is in their emphasis on teamwork, communication, social and cultural responsibility and liaising with external experts such as EWB staff and industry representatives". In both examples, challenging humanitarian contexts are used to build core engineering competencies. However, exposure to humanitarian contexts may lead to students seeking out additional learning opportunities for humanitarian engineering. Students doing their capstone and Master research projects at RMIT are also able to choose projects focused on humanitarian engineering and have more control over the level of context vs. content they explore. In most instances the content might be learning and applying a single tool or technique which fits within the limits for supervision time; connecting humanitarian engineering and the primary discipline.

In developing humanitarian engineering curriculum to date, it has been important to be aware that a single humanitarian content elective and a few humanitarian context courses are not sufficient to develop the full mindset and skillset practicing humanitarian engineers need in order to work effectively, safely and ethically. Nonetheless, they do provide an introduction or foundation for further study or professional development. As such, an important part of the

humanitarian engineering offering at RMIT has been for students to explore and reflect on the connections between their primary engineering discipline and humanitarian engineering. Through instruction and assessment, students are encouraged to reflect on how their experiences and learning can be applied in their own disciplines. Through such reflection, some students have concluded that they are not yet well suited to the challenges of work in humanitarian contexts, but they can take what they have learnt and apply it in their work as, for instance, an electrical engineer. Either way, throughout these courses, students build professional portfolios as they learn (Eliot & Turns, 2011), meaning they are better prepared to talk about their experiences in work settings.

Keeping in mind the relatively limited exposure RMIT students have to the complex field of humanitarian engineering, the working principle to date has been to nurture engineering graduates in the Pi shaped model of expertise (see also Barnacle et al., 2019). Named after the visually similar Greek letter, a Pi shape engineering graduate has deep disciplinary skills (e.g. chemical or civil engineering) as well as foundational humanitarian engineering skills. These skillsets are connected by a breadth of professional skills. This relationship is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Pi shape development of complementary engineering skills



With limited contact time, the foundational humanitarian engineering skill is delivered in such a way as to promote further curiosity in the field. This aligns with students moving to the second stage of a four-stage learning journey, developed by the authors, and based on existing humanitarian learning journeys (e.g. Perkins 2019):

Stage 1 – Becoming conscious: Students become aware of the complexity of contemporary humanitarian and development challenges.

Stage 2 – Becoming concerned: Students connect contemporary humanitarian and development challenges to their own discipline and professional and personal journey as they start to explore how they may contribute towards addressing them.

Stage 3 – Becoming competent: Students gain the competencies needed to develop innovative solutions to humanitarian and development challenges and test them in practice.

Stage 4 – Becoming challenged: Students step forward to contribute and try to work on a real-world

humanitarian and/or development challenge independently.

The understanding that in limited time it may not be possible to move a student through all four stages of the learning journey is both important from a learning perspective, but also from an ethical and safety perspective. Students need to be aware of their own learning pathway, their own progression, and their own limitations. There is likely a risk of harm if student believes that they, after an introductory course, are adequately prepared to immediately work in humanitarian or developmental contexts.

A Minor in Humanitarian Innovation

RMIT's humanitarian engineering team continue to develop educational initiatives with the Pi shape in mind (Figure 1). This means humanitarian engineering should not be an entire Bachelor degree program, but should be a complement to one. The introduction of *majors* and *minors* at RMIT had presented an opportunity for realising the Pi shape vision and to allow students to continue their humanitarian engineering journey along the four stages described previously. From 2026 or earlier, four humanitarian engineering courses will be offered as part of a new undergraduate 'Minor in Humanitarian Innovation'. The first half of the Minor will include two fundamentals' courses:

1. an existing course taught out of the international studies program

2. a new engineering course based on the learning activities of the existing humanitarian engineering Masters course

The second half of the Minor will include:

3. an existing experiential learning course
4. a new course on engineering for disaster management, community resilience and climate action.

Course number four has a domestic focus whilst also being more humanitarian action appropriate compared to the developmental assistance weighting in the other three courses. The expectation is that some of the course in the minor may be of interest to non-engineering students in the STEM fields and potentially even development studies and social science students as well.

Reflections, challenges, and lessons learnt

There have been several lessons learnt from developing and delivering education initiatives that cultivate the humanitarian mindset and skillset in engineers. These may be valuable to others interested in the subject or wanting to develop initiatives of their own.

Acknowledging limits: Presently students at either a Bachelors or Masters level have a single humanitarian engineering *content* course available to them as an elective. This

is just enough to provide a basic introduction to humanitarian engineering. Due to the risks involved in working in humanitarian contexts, without appropriate training and limited regulation and oversight, it is important that students are aware they are getting a *taste* of humanitarian engineering – they are not *becoming* humanitarian engineers. Students need to find safe ways to continue to build their skills before considering working in humanitarian contexts. We have actively engaged students in reflecting on their own competences and abilities at the end of each course.

The importance of gateway topics: When teaching humanitarian engineering, we experienced the need to provide gateway topics or themes to ease students into the inherent complexity and non-technical nature of development challenges. As an example, whilst slightly outdated as a development philosophy (see Schumacher, 1974), using the concept of indicators of 'Appropriate Technology', e.g. affordable, culturally appropriate, encouraging of local participation (Bauer & Brown, 2014; Murphy et al., 2009) helps engineering students transition to consider the importance of the non-technical requirements of a design. Once students are familiar with this way of thinking, we can move further beyond technology by, for example, considering the complex governance model a technology sits within or value of market-based approaches. The concept of appropriate technologies becomes a gateway topic – it provides a gateway between the strongly technical towards the highly social.

The one opportunity: The opportunity to visit or work in humanitarian contexts can be limited and might be best understood as a privilege. The rare opportunity for a student to gain exposure to a development context, say as part of overseas experiential learning trip, sometimes leads to students' charitable impulses overriding the critical, contextualised thinking and practice they learn in the course, and can impact on their actions with the potential to cause harm. As a broad example, we have witnessed students who wanted to take Australian-purchased supplies to a remote rural school with good intentions, and interrupt classes so they can feel like they have had a tangible benefit to the community, while ignoring much of what was discussed as part of the course.

Authenticity: Both authors are aware of examples where educators have tried to create humanitarian *context* courses but struggled to make them real or otherwise authentic. Often this is because the humanitarian scenario is forced into a very technical course with specific learning outcomes. For example, the educator may like the idea of teaching wastewater treatment using a humanitarian context to make the application of the learning more appealing. But students are left in a scenario where they are being primarily asked to demonstrate learning of a particular treatment technology. The specific technology may not be suitable for a humanitarian or development context and the case may further work to simplify the complexity of working in such contexts by making it purely a technical exercise. It is

potentially dangerous if the humanitarian context becomes inauthentic, but students believe they are solving a real-world humanitarian challenge. It may reinforce the idea that technology is more important than the people using it or the context it is located in.

Some final thoughts

Working effectively, safely, and ethically in complex humanitarian and development contexts requires principles, mindsets, tools, and techniques that typically are missing, undervalued, or under-represented in mainstream engineering education in Australia. Many Australian universities, RMIT University included, have filled this gap through Humanitarian Engineering educational offerings. At RMIT, our Humanitarian Engineering teaching philosophy has been centred around students learning through practice and failure in a safe space – safe for the students themselves and safe for the people they are learning to design for and with. Our students get exposed to humanitarian engineering through humanitarian engineering content and contexts, but they do not become expert humanitarian engineers, at least not during their time at RMIT. They become 'Pi-shaped engineers', who have a technical specialty as well as foundational (yet evolving) Humanitarian Engineering skills. They are guided through a four-stage learning journey; becoming conscious, becoming concerned, becoming competent and becoming challenged, at the end recognising their skills as well as their limitations as humanitarian engineering practitioners.

While humanitarian engineering currently forms a supplementary element of engineering education at RMIT and universities across Australia we would like for core elements of humanitarian engineering, such as social impact, human-centred approaches, strength-based approaches, and complexity thinking have greater prominence across mainstream engineering education – to the point where humanitarian engineering education may not even be required. Imagine if *all* engineers worked effectively, safely, and ethically in all types of complex situations, from humanitarian response to international development, from social housing, to mining, and urban design and planning. We only have to think back to the Juukan Gorge tragedy in Australia in 2020, to clearly see the need for social impact to form a foundational part of the engineering mindset. Sustainability has already, over the past 20-30 years, moved from being a discrete offshoot of engineering to being integrated into engineering education at large. The same could happen for humanitarian engineering, but not through the development of new humanitarian engineering majors. This may actually act as a deflection, with mainstream engineering not having to consider the social impact of engineering projects, as it is 'over there' if a student wants to learn more. The teaching philosophy (to practice and fail safely), the concept of a Pi-shaped engineer, the concept of humanitarian contexts vs. content, as well as the four-stage learning journey, all outlined in this chapter may offer pathways for ensuring all engineers

have the mindset and skills to work effectively, safely, and ethically.

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CHAPTER 5: ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY OF RMIT GRADUATES: REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE

Chapter 5

Enhancing Employability of RMIT Graduates: Reflections on Practice

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Abstract

RMIT University is engaged in the ongoing, evolving challenge faced by most contemporary universities to secure strong employability outcomes and career management skills for graduates. A key focus for addressing this challenge is the

use of strategically designed and developed curricula. Under the umbrella term of Industry Partnered Learning, RMIT educators embed a diverse range of initiatives, approaches and scaffolded experiences into the student experience. These include Work Integrated Learning (WIL) that has long been fundamental to RMIT's program design, Career Development Learning (CDL) embedded in assessments, and career-focused micro-credentials incorporated into curriculum. The development of Career Enrolment Data, now in use across RMIT, enables targeted insights into specific aspects of the effectiveness of these strategies, supporting their evolution. Further value is found in exploring and sharing new opportunities and innovations, acknowledging and celebrating successes, and evaluating Industry Partnered Learning embedded across RMIT's diverse curricula. These approaches support RMIT University's capacity and commitment to further enhance and strengthen the employability of graduates.

Keywords: Industry Partnered Learning (IPL), Career Development Learning (CDL), Work Integrated Learning (WIL), Career Enrolment data, careers in curriculum, student employability, graduate outcomes.

Introduction

Enhancing student employability and skills in career management is a key component of RMIT's curriculum design, and Industry Partnered Learning (IPL) plays a significant role. IPL is a recently developed overarching term

encompassing RMIT's industry engaged and informed learning and assessment activities, and co-designed curriculum. It includes Work Integrated Learning (WIL), Career Development Learning (CDL)[1] and other forms of embedded industry engaged activities. IPL extends beyond RMIT's categories of WIL (placements, industry partnered projects and WIL in simulated workplace environments) and broadens the scope to other forms of industry engaged pedagogies such as industry networking events, hackathons and entrepreneurial activities, industry mentoring, industry speakers and workshops. IPL's focus on CDL promotes student's self-awareness and proactive agency over their career management and planning.

Through a range of IPL initiatives, program teams are engaged in a continual process of enhancing their courses to ensure RMIT graduates are lifelong learners, ready for the changing world of work. This chapter reflects on the progress RMIT has made to improve student employability through IPL activities and initiatives. Throughout the chapter the authors highlight the challenges and opportunities RMIT educators face in their endeavours to integrate and scaffold employability focused strategies into their curricula.

The RMIT University Context

RMIT's complex approach to fostering and developing student employability has evolved through a range of historical strategies and interventions. In 2019, a process of program transformation set out to ensure the delivery of the student

experience promised in RMIT's Ready for Life and Work Strategy. The strategy set as priority that in 2020, RMIT graduates would be "widely recognised for their work-ready skills and sought after by recruiters and employers", able to "demonstrate and articulate their graduate attributes" and to "adapt to changing job markets" (RMIT, 2015, p. 11). The strategy also highlighted the integration of learning with work at every stage of the student experience, with a particular focus on ongoing industry engagement. It stated that "Work-integrated learning is fundamental to the design, delivery and review of every program" and that "Enterprise opportunities are widely available and embedded in program design" (RMIT, 2015, p. 12). Underpinned by increasingly clarified and supportive Program and Course Policy requirements, WIL and CDL have become more prominent across the student journey.

Throughout this period, WIL and careers-focused micro-credentials ('creds') have enhanced student awareness and agency in developing their employability, career readiness, and professional identity. Career and WIL cred completions in 2020 and 2021 averaged over 7,500, completed in curriculum or as co-curricular learning. These work-ready focused creds have provided scholarly careers education content that educators could embed into learning activities. The following quotes from students offer clear insights into the value they perceived in these careers focused creds:

"It was helpful in giving the advice to build a resume,

> I feel as though I have a much more professional resume to use in the future for job opportunities." (RMIT student reflecting on Job Applications cred, Semester 1, 2022)
>
> "I think everyone is afraid when confronting an interview since it can determine whether you will be accepted to the position you applied or not. For many who have not gained any experience in attending an interview, they are not well prepared so normally they would feel puzzled or unconfident about their answers. The course is essential for final year students and graduates since we could have more insights of what questions, information of the company, skills and knowledge we need to equip before the interview, how to make an impression and how to stay connected with recruiters maybe for another future apply." (RMIT student reflecting on Interview Preparations cred, Semester 1, 2022)

More generally, a range of enabling factors underlay the shift towards an integrated, university wide, whole-of-program approach to embedding employability and work readiness across RMIT curricula. These included a significant increase in staff engagement and capability building through WIL and employability professional development activities such as RMIT WIL Skills Yammer group, the WIL Community of Practice and national events and webinars via the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN). The evolution of

RMIT's commitment to ensuring career and work ready graduates is evident in a demonstrable increase in scholarly practice, including the involvement of RMIT staff in internationally influential WIL research and publishing, and leadership roles in organisations such as ACEN.

This sequence of developments also underlies Curriculum Architecture, a strategic initiative driving the refreshing of programs through a range of redesign activities and refocusing of program offerings. A key component underpinning the scaffolding and contextualising of employability initiatives is the requirement to embed IPL throughout early, mid, and late stages of every program. As the key Curriculum Architecture principles inform the revised Program and Course Policy suite, all new and revised programs will include scaffolded and contextualised IPL activities. This will require further staff capability building and professional development activities to continue the strategic uplift of these initiatives. Aligned with 2022 RMIT NEXT strategy (which has a nine-year long span, reaching to 2031), this process plays a key role in the university's commitment to "deliver lifelong learning in partnership with industry, governments and communities, co-creating education pathways and systems for diverse students in a transforming workforce" (RMIT 2022).

Industry Partnered Learning (IPL) and Work Integrated Learning (WIL)

Prior to the development of the IPL terminology, WIL has been a staple of the RMIT curriculum and student experience,

underpinned by the university's long history of industry engagement. RMIT's WIL procedure identifies WIL as a descriptor for a range of models and approaches to learning and assessment that integrate discipline theory, knowledge and skills with the practice of work as an integral part of program design.

Industry engaged WIL activities involve students interacting with organisations (industry, government and community) through discipline relevant projects and work placements. These WIL activities may be undertaken face-to-face, online or via a blended approach. To ensure the majority of RMIT's students have access to WIL, minimum WIL requirements in core courses ensure WIL is structurally integrated. Traditional approaches to WIL, such as placement and internships, are resource intensive and highly competitive as all tertiary education institutions scramble for industry placements. As a strategy for developing a scalable and sustainable approach to WIL, many RMIT programs incorporate industry partnered projects and other industry engaged approaches such as hackathons to ensure all students have opportunities to participate.

How are RMIT stakeholders benefiting from engaging in WIL?

Extensive research and scholarly literature highlight a range of benefits for stakeholders in WIL activities including industry partners, educators and students (e.g. Ferns, et al., 2021; Patrick et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2014). From the

perspective of industry and community partners, WIL represents unique opportunities both for recruitment and for addressing skills shortages by inviting direct input into the shaping of graduate outcomes, while also providing direct benefits to workplaces and teams in the form of tangible contributions made by students (Chillas et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2015). WIL provides partners with opportunities for professional development of their own staff as coaches, mentors and supervisors, as well as developing and strengthening their relationships with the university (AWPA, 2014). From the perspective of university staff, WIL creates opportunities to enhance professional networks, collaborative relationships and engagement with industry. Enhanced industry connectedness supports currency in educators' understandings of industry needs, practices, skills and capabilities, enabling industry-relevant curriculum design (Jackson, Rowbottom & McLaren, 2017; Sachs & Clarke, 2017). Numerous RMIT educators have developed deep partnerships with a range of industry partners that go well beyond the WIL relationship and have expanded into co-design of curriculum and research collaborations. Educator Dr Carolina Quintero Rodriguez notes, "Our relationship with our industry partner, Caprice Australia, is not just about providing internships and offering feedback to students. Caprice collaborates with me and my team to co-design the Bachelor of Fashion Enterprise and will continue to do so in future iterations of the program" (2022).

From a student perspective, as a key component of experiential learning, the strength of WIL is broadly understood through its capacity to connect theory with the practice of work, enhancing students' career awareness and understanding of the nature of the workforce (Silva et al, 2018). This value is reflected in the following account offered by a student following a WIL experience in the Bachelor of Fashion (Enterprise), also referenced above:

> 'Working with Caprice, has been such an engaging new experience. It has made our assignment feel more like work and has set a scene in my head for work mindset in my future career. I liked that we could present fresh ideas to people that were interested in the assignment work we were doing. It felt gratifying and inspirational. It was also so interesting to see the whole process of creating a garment, Caprice really showed us the work and efforts of a team working towards a goal.' (Student, 2022)

WIL also strengthens students' resumes and portfolios by enabling the inclusion of authentic experience and artefacts. This increases their opportunities for graduate employment in their fields of study, while developing and providing opportunities for them to demonstrate their transferrable skills, including problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, teamwork and professional communication. It also supports students' developing understanding of workplace structures and cultures, building their professional

networks and creating opportunities to review and develop career plans based on an experientially informed understanding of their chosen industry (Jackson et al., 2017).

Wrapping CDL around WIL

National and international research on enhancing employability in curriculum extends beyond the incorporation of a range of WIL activities in programs, moving towards contextualising, strengthening and consolidating these experiences through strategic use of CDL (Billet 2011; Jackson 2017; Jackson & Edgar, 2019). Jackson & Edgar (2019, p. 41) note that "reflection and feedback underpin any quality WIL experience" and that the fusing of these modes of learning provide "a rich resource for students to draw examples of how they applied theory in practice, developed and demonstrated non- technical skills, networked, and gained a better understanding of their professional self". In response to this scholarly research on enhancing student employability, RMIT educators are placing greater emphasis on this more complex approach by explicitly linking WIL and CDL throughout their curricula. The recent development of a suite of RMIT 'IPL in Action' snapshots showcase a range of approaches to this strategy, enhancing and adding value to WIL experiences by building in specific tasks including goal setting, purposeful preparation, reflection, networking and the mindful use of experience to inform future plans and experiences.

Career Enrolment Data

Historically, careers practitioners advocating for the

embedding of Career Development Learning into Higher Education curricula have faced the challenge of lacking data to support their recommendations and strategies. While the Graduate Outcome Survey (GOS) provides information on employment outcomes for graduates, the data is collected four months after graduation and often has low response rates. It seems reasonable to speculate that these well-known limitations have hampered support and advocacy for Career Development Learning in curriculum. The availability of new data, such as Career Enrolment Data, has enabled career practitioners to gain direct and new insights into the career readiness of students, playing a key role in promoting Career Development Learning interventions in curriculum. For example, as a response to government measures and pressure, many universities in the United Kingdom are using big data in the form of career registration to identify the career needs of their students (Cobb, 2019).

To gather this data, students are required to choose from a set of statements that reflect their career readiness and their engagement with professional experiences at enrolment and re-enrolment, providing time-specific snapshots of this high value data across all year levels. Career readiness data is then categorised into four phases of career readiness: Decide, Plan, Compete, and Sorted. Students also select options from a pre-defined list of professional experiences they have undertaken in the past twelve months. The approach enables the tracking of these aspects of students' career readiness progress throughout

their programs, identifying strengths and concerns relating to graduate employability (Cobb, 2019). The data adds significant strength to career practitioners' recommendations for tailored Career Development Learning interventions across a curriculum.

Following the success of the data in the UK, Australian universities have adopted the framework and renamed it 'Career Enrolment' data, with RMIT at the forefront. RMIT's Employability and Careers Education team uses the data to drive outstanding and innovative practice, informing its approach to developing initiatives and strategies in curriculum to enhance student employability. Strategic use of the data supports a growing focus on careers education, creating unique opportunities to:

- inform and support academics in tailoring targeted, cohort-appropriate employability-focused interventions
- track accessibility and effectiveness for specific student cohorts, including international students, SES and Indigenous backgrounds, supporting an outstanding approach to inclusivity and equity in careers education
- measure impact of interventions through pre/post snapshots, supporting a uniquely iterative, evolving approach to CDL

For example, RMIT's Master of Human Resource Management has embedded CDL relying on Career Enrolment data to inform and measure its impact. In the program's 'Entrepreneurship and Innovation' course, students engaged in a 'career modelling' intervention to encourage corporate entrepreneurship and the building of sustainable careers. The educator reflected, "Despite nearly 62% of our Masters of HRM students indicating that they were in the 'Sorted' and 'Compete' categories as part of the Career Readiness Survey, we found that in running the workshop with a small cohort of students, many more have begun to identify with the 'Decide' and 'Plan' categories, indicating that some may be returning to the 'drawing board' to reconsider their careers." The 'Professional Human Resource Management Practices' course embedded a CDL assessment after rising concerns about the international student cohort's career readiness. This intervention increased these students' career readiness, with an improvement from 21% in Semester 1 2020 in the 'Sorted' and 'Compete' categories to 46% within a year.

Following the successful use of the data, the Employability and Careers Education team sought to make it accessible to all RMIT educators. Accessibility is supported by PowerBI dashboard design, multimedia support materials and ongoing training, to foster an informed and collaborative approach to program design. This data not only identifies potential career development interventions within curricula, but also serve to

inform continuous improvement across RMIT. For example, the collection and analysis of work experience data for specific student cohorts (such as international students) highlight gaps and opportunities to target those cohorts with specific services including mentoring, volunteering, and WIL, supporting equity in enhancing student employability.

Increasing use of Career Enrolment data has demonstrable flow-on benefits to students, educators and services in tertiary education, including:

- Increased uptake of student facing career services, because of students' increased awareness of their career readiness and co-curricular support through the Job Shop, RMIT's drop-in service centre for student careers support
- Increased staff awareness of students' specific employability needs, the range of services available to enhance CDL in curriculum and co-curricular careers support
- Continuous improvement of service delivery as result of using the data to understand the uptake of co-curricular activities within the university
- A tangible context for careers support and services through a clear demonstration of the employability needs of their students, informed by scholarly practice
- Proactive requests from staff for careers education

support services to enhance their curricula

Limitations and future opportunities

A nuanced assessment of the reliability of Career Enrolment data might further strengthen the basis for its use. In her discussion of the limitations of the data, careers registration specialist Fiona Cobb observes the inherent potential for self-report bias (Cobb, 2019). In the context of organisational behaviour research, Donaldson and Grant-Vallone explain self-report bias as the under-reporting of behaviours regarded as inappropriate or undesirable by researchers and observers, and the over-reporting of behaviours deemed appropriate or desirable (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). Applied to Career Enrolment data, this explanation suggests the possibility that students could over-estimate their career readiness and experience, perceiving these assets as desirable. The data may also point to the possibility of students underestimating their readiness and experience to avoid an appearance of over-confidence or naiveté. For these reasons, and for others related to a simple gap in students' knowledge that prevents them from assessing their readiness in the context of a realistic current labour market, it seems reasonable to speculate that students could either over or under-estimate their career readiness. This creates grounds for strong caution in conflating the data with a measure of actual career readiness.

However, the unreliability inherent in self-reporting can also be the source of some key insights in the context of Career

Enrolment data. For example, when students report that they have not participated in an industry project, but records show that they have, this presents a high-value insight into a need for more explicit communication around the nature, value and basis of these industry engaged project experiences. Reflecting a further mode of useful unreliability, Cobb's account considers a complication within the seemingly ideal scenario of students self-reporting a steady increase in their career readiness. A downturn in their self-assessment might reflect not a regression in their readiness, but rather the development of an appropriately realistic understanding of their career prospects (Cobb, 2019), a key shift in thinking often associated with undertaking WIL activities. These are two examples of ways in which the unreliability of self-reporting data can also be a source of specific insight. Accessing and utilising these kinds of insights relies on processes of systematic cross-referencing with other data sources, such as the WIL Inplace database management system (the WIL data collection system for RMIT Australia).

A further point of interest regarding the self-reported nature of Career Enrolment data is research that indicates the inherent value of an individual's positive perception of their own employability – a measure necessarily gained via subjective self-assessment. In the context of graduate employability, Marilyn Clarke highlights the value of individuals' measures of their own employability, pointing to a connection between a positive outlook on one's own prospects

and a proactive, flexible and adaptable approach to job search. She goes on to note these approaches as particular strengths in contemporary labour markets (Clarke, 2018). Similarly, Cobb outlines a correlation between final year students engaged in career planning (the focus of most of the 'Career Readiness' statements from which the data is gathered) and those who find employment after graduation, particularly in graduate roles. She explains, "the three most important predictors of graduates moving into professional or managerial roles three years after graduation are having a plan; having done some research; having a targeted approach to job applications; and having undertaken unpaid work experience" (Cobb, 2019, p.18).

Part of the challenge for meaningful use of Career Enrolment data, then, lies in an open acknowledgement of its strengths and limitations. Cobb outlines a nuanced and strategic approach, mindful of erroneous conflations but also of possibilities for drawing the data into holistic analyses to inform strategy, policy and decision-making, as well as promoting events and services and supporting equitable access for students from at-risk groups (Cobb, 2019). Applications and analyses can allow for strategic interplay between students' self-reporting, well established research into conditions for strong career outcomes, and evolving social and historical contexts for study and career development. This approach is in keeping with Jackson & Bridgstock's understanding of employability as a 'multi-dimensional, lifelong, and life-wide

phenomenon that is malleable and driven by the individual yet encouraged and facilitated by HE [Higher Education]' (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021, p. 724).

Diverse approaches to IPL at RMIT

The opportunity for educators to access Career Enrolment Data has emerged in a culture of diverse approaches to Industry Partnered Learning, evolving across the full range of RMIT's disciplines, schools and student cohorts. The following brief accounts of approaches to IPL offer insight into this diversity, and also into the rich scope for the growing adoption of data-informed curriculum development.

- 'Global Careers' is a course undertaken by second year students in the Bachelor of International Studies and is developed and delivered by Associate Professor Julian Lee. The course engages students in a series of assessments that support a discipline-specific approach to the building of careers knowledge alongside the development of a range of tangible career assets.

The first assessment is a 'Self authored reference letter and email-of-approach for an internship', ensuring practical preparation for the common experience of being asked to draft such a letter when requesting it from an employer or teacher. Students submit an email of approach to the potential referee, a CV, and their own letter of reference as if written by that

person. Students regularly make direct use of these career artifacts in the semesters that follow.

Other assessments in the course guide students through the process of creating a magazine article based on their personal interactions with industry professionals, undertaking a career SWOT analysis involving research into the world of work in their chosen industry and reflection on their own state of career readiness, and formulating a career plan of strategies for acting on their insights.

- 'Professional Human Resource Management' is a course in the first year of the Master of Human Resource Management program. Its innovative approach to IPL was developed by Dr Alan Montague and later by Dr Beni Halvorsen in response to concerns about graduate outcomes for students, with a particular focus on international students.

The assessment engages students in the authentic task of reviewing RMIT's careers services, including a strategic critique of the website, resources and tools available to students. These include the CV reviewer, interview simulator and skills-matching tools. To develop their critique to a professional standard, students explore and make use of scholarly resources. To support the consolidation of their own developing skills and expertise throughout this project, they

are also required to submit a personal reflection on their experience of the task.

- 'Fashion Range Development' is a WIL course in the second year of the Bachelor of Fashion Enterprise. The course, designed by Dr Carolina Quintero Rodriguez, centres on a project undertaken with industry partner, Caprice Australia, in which students form teams to develop a fashion range, undertaking the full journey from consumer research to product development, to marketing. In addition to strategic checkpoints at which they receive feedback from the industry partner on their progress, and the inclusion of two career skills-focused creds, the course embeds two key assessments to support students with the process of recognising and articulating the skills they gain through this industry experience.

The first of these assessments requires students to write a reflection on their experience of the industry project, outlining their learning and considering its application for their future work in the fashion industry. The second develops a focus on the team orientation of the project, supporting students to reflect on their performance as team members, and to identify the contribution they made and the role they undertook. This work culminates in each student identifying skills they gained and strengthened during the project, with a view to inclusion in industry-ready job applications and interview preparation.

- Students in the Master of Project Management undertake the 'Project Management Leadership' course in their second year of study, drawing its focus on leadership skills together with strategic assessment-based learning of career development skills. Associate Professor Christina Scott-Young has created two key initiatives to support this learning. The first is the engagement of a series of industry guest speakers, including high achieving students working in Project Management and an early career expert. These speakers share their experience of the job search process and respond to students' questions.

The second is a sequence of three assessments. The earliest, supporting networking skills, involves teams of students approaching and interviewing managers in industry to explore the key attributes of an effective project leader. This is followed by an assignment in which the teams interview new workplace entrants to understand their preferred styles of working and management. Finally, each student develops a self-reflection report, assessing their own leadership attributes, creating an action plan to develop further skills, and a leadership strengths statement to be included in their resume.

- 'Media one' is a course undertaken by first year students in the Bachelor of Communication (Media) designed and developed by Dr Seth Keen. It focuses on its

partnership with a not-for-profit art gallery and the opportunity for students to interview prominent visual artists. These experiences culminate in students securing a personal work reference and potential social video publications in a professional context.

Working in groups, students produce content that contributes to documenting visual arts practice and reaching new audiences online. The project prepares students to use storytelling methods to prepare evidence of their job-ready skills, making use of the Folio e-portfolio tool, Portfolium, strategically integrating learning with professional experience that leads to internships and employment opportunities, and laying the groundwork for students to develop industry-ready resumes and portfolios in their final capstone course.

Conclusion

The diverse approaches outlined above create significant scope for exploring opportunities to implement and strengthen IPL. These are worth considering alongside recent research by Bennett et al. (2022) identifying a reduction in students' confidence that their degree programs were preparing them for employability and a professional career. This loss of confidence is potentially in line with growing complexity in students' understandings of labour market opportunities, competition and their own abilities. Implications include the need for clarity about the relevance of each learning and assessment task, and the importance of a contextualised, data-driven,

whole-of-program approach to informing higher education learning activities focused on career development. The study also highlights inherent tensions in the endeavours of higher education institutions to meet the immediate needs of industry while also ensuring that students develop the depth and breadth of disciplinary knowledge and expertise befitting a university graduate. The study points to the relevance of graduates' intellectual rigor and capacity for creative and flexible conceptual thinking to their ability to navigate and manage lifelong careers.

In response to these complexities, RMIT's approach to IPL, WIL and CDL will continue to support curriculum redevelopment to build students' awareness of their career readiness and their career management skills. The space is evolving to build strength through the use of data to underpin and inform initiatives, incorporate e-portfolios to support, demonstrate and articulate the student journey, taking an iterative approach to curriculum redesign. The strategic embedding of CDL further supports a proactive approach to enhancing students' understanding of the labour markets they will enter.

Reflecting on the ongoing evolution of RMIT's approach to enhancing student employability indicates a range of challenges but also an array of opportunities for further insight, development and innovation in this area. A key final offering for this discussion is to highlight the important role, as these opportunities continue to be explored, of sharing and

celebrating endeavours and achievements in IPL, WIL and CDL across RMIT. There is significant value in acknowledging the strength of the innovations and collaborations undertaken by educators, industry partners and learning designers, as well as the students whose careers are already underway as they explore the opportunities embedded in their programs. This proactive approach to support and recognition will continue to build a culture of creativity, innovation and currency in RMIT's approach to careers in curriculum.

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Notes

1 The standard definition of Career Development Learning is provided by AG Watts as follows: "Career development learning is concerned with helping students to acquire knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes which will equip

them to manage their careers, i.e., their lifelong progression in learning and work" (Watts, 2006).

CHAPTER 6: THE OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES CAPABILITY TOOLKIT: REFLECTIONS ON CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 6

The Open Educational Resources Capability Toolkit: Reflections on Creation and Development

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Abstract

There is a fast-growing global impetus to enhance traditional educational methods with open educational practices (OEP). In Australia adoption of OEP in the higher education sector is constrained by educators' lack of knowledge and skills needed to engage with this emerging way of teaching and learning. To progress the integration of OEP at RMIT University, Library staff produced the OER Capability

Toolkit as a professional development resource for teaching and professional staff. This tool has enabled the development and sharing of knowledge and skills required to find, evaluate and use open educational resources in teaching, thereby supporting teachers at RMIT and other institutions to engage in OEP.

Keywords: open education, open educational resources, professional development

Introduction

There is fast-growing global impetus to integrate open educational practices (OEP) with traditional teaching methods in higher education institutions, as evidenced by international collaborations such as the Open Educational Quality Initiative (Cronin, 2017; Open Educational Quality Initiative 2011). While there are active proponents of open education in pockets of the Australian education sector, OEP are yet to become entrenched as a core component of the industry (Stagg et al., 2018) and levels of awareness of open educational resources (OER) and open education are generally low (Rolfe, 2017). Educators' decisions about whether to engage with OEP are informed by their personal understandings of what OEP encompass (Cronin, 2017). To engage in OEP, educators need awareness of the potential for this new pedagogical approach to transform teaching and learning experiences (Baas et al, 2019). The wider establishment of open education is reliant on educators being supported by their institutions to adopt new practices (Open

Educational Quality Initiative, 2011; Bossu & Stagg, 2018). Other key factors that influence educators' engagement with OEP include personal knowledge of the availability and use options of OER, skills in finding, evaluating and integrating OER in course content, and peer adoption of open practices (Baas et al, 2019). Understanding the factors that promote the use of OER amongst educators is important because without the commitment of these key players in the industry to adopt open practices, barriers to students in accessing educational resources will persist. This is especially problematic for students with low socio-economic status and from minority groups such as migrants and Indigenous Australians. To address this need for awareness, knowledge and skills amongst educators, staff of the RMIT University Library developed the OER Capability Toolkit (The Toolkit), to support RMIT teaching staff to develop their capacity to find, evaluate and use OER in their course content. To encourage other institutions to customise the The Toolkit for their local needs, it was published with a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial (CCBYNC) licence. The impact of this initiative has gone beyond its immediate purpose. As evidenced by the 1090 online visitors to The Toolkit in the three months since its publication in July 2022, it has reached a broad audience. Moreover, it has raised the capacity of the authors, both in their knowledge of OER and open education more broadly, and in their skills in publishing open books.

Background

Open Educational Resources (OER) are digital and print materials for teaching, learning and research available in multiple formats. They reside in the public domain or have been released with an open licence permitting zero-cost access, use, adaptation, and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. (National Copyright Unit, 2022). Creative Commons licences (CC) are the most commonly applied open licences. The licence permissions are the characteristics which allow educators to share and adapt content to suit their specific pedagogical circumstances and needs of their students. The COVID pandemic forced widespread changes across the education sector, through the shift from face to face teaching to reactive online teaching. This shift was a catalyst for a spotlight on digital resources, including OER. However, the limited understanding of many educators about the intricacies associated with OER and creative commons licensing meant that resistance to their use continued. A common confusion was in relation to the distinction between the terms "open" and "free," with the assumption prevailing that all cost-free resources were OER. (Seaman & Seaman, 2021). To fully benefit from the potential uses of OER, educators need to understand how they can be used without breaching copyright. This means being able to identify resources that can be accessed online without payment but which are still protected by 'all rights reserved' copyright, and resources that are badged with CC licenses and can be used according to the particular CC license without first

seeking permission from the copyright owner. Baas et al, (2019) identify three key factors that hinder educator OER adoption and propose that addressing these areas will foster greater adoption rates. These factors are: awareness, availability and capacity; OER adoption; and, the need for support, as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Factors hindering educators' OER adoption*

Awareness, availability and capacity	*OER adoption*	*Need for support*
Educators select resources based on pedagogical benefit and assess OER digital resources as equal to all-rights-reserved copyright digital materials. Thus, not fully exploiting the potential benefits offered under the creative commons licences.	Educators might not be aware that they are using OER or they might unconsciously engage with OER by using resources from other sources (e.g. colleagues, previous courseware).	Librarians and other professional staff are required to take the lead on searching, selecting and curating OER, and increasing educators' awareness through structured training sessions.
Educators are not proficient at discovering OER and are limited by their knowledge of where to identify appropriate resources.	OER adoption is usually "as-is" to supplement course work. Adaptation of resources is less common due to lack of skills, thus limiting the fit between the OER and teaching style, course objectives and student learning outcomes.	Institutional policy on curriculum reform should be considered to promote a blended learning approach which supports the use and adoption of OER.
Once educators identify a suitable resource, they are limited in awareness and technical capacity of how to adapt OER.	Educators do not fully exploit the potential to adapt OER for their specific circumstances and student cohort's needs.	The integration of OER awareness training as part of onboarding of new teaching staff.

*Table 1 is adapted from: "Teachers' Adoption of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education" by M. Baas, W. Admiraal, & E. van den Berg, 2019, *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 1-11.

In early 2021, staff from the RMIT University Library Teaching and Research Team deliberated on how to address the lack of educator OER engagement, by focusing on capacity building, enhancing OER adoption, and support for teaching staff. Through a series of in-house discussions and review of the current literature, we decided on an OER capability toolkit for staff, as a capability-building initiative with the aim of increasing OER adoption amongst staff. As a comprehensive resource, the toolkit needed to address the foundational aspects of OER, Creative Commons licencing and open pedagogy, and be customized to the Australasian context. While there were several OER publications that covered this content, they all had a North American focus. The solution was to adapt one of these resources with customization to local Australasian audience with nuances in local language, and local case examples and media content. We anticipated that the toolkit would foster educators' interest, as new and bespoke local works create deeper engagement due to currency, affinity, and familiarity (Cozart et al, 2021). The first iteration of the Toolkit was completed in September 2021 and externally peer reviewed in February 2022. The published Toolkit has been accompanied by a series of online modules available to RMIT staff through the Human Resources

learning platform for staff. The OER Toolkit was published on 12 July 2022, on the RMIT Open Press platform.

Process

As a first step, a capabilities framework was developed to provide scope and direction for staff involved with the adaptation and creation of this work. This framework provided a clear structure aligned with RMIT University Library's draft Open Educational Practices Framework to ensure that minimum standards of competence for teaching and professional staff were addressed. We adapted the Open Educational Resources Competency Framework OER, a creative commons resource by the International Organisation of La Francophonie (IOF). Our framework defined the field of competence for each chapter with the associated outcomes to be achieved upon completion of each chapter. Table 2 below details the fields of competence for each chapter. Each chapter contained further subheadings with defining attributes and outcomes.

Table 2. The Toolkit structure: fields of competence for each chapter**

Field of Competence

1. Defining Open Education and OER
2. Understanding Open Licensing
3. Finding & Evaluating OER
4. Adapting, Creating and Sharing OER
5. Familiarity with open pedagogy principles and practices

**Another key resource, part of which were adapted for The Toolkit, was Abbey Elder's The OER Starter Kit.

Structuring the team

As this was the Library's first foray into adapting and creating a new open text, there was no benchmark on how this could be achieved. The Library did not yet have an authoring platform like Pressbooks with built in structures and processes, and compounding this conundrum was that we were all situated at home due to pandemic lockdowns, with no ability to meet in person. Having seen successes at other Australian university libraries in relation to publishing open textbooks, Frank Ponte was motivated to initiate a staff development project at RMIT. As Manager, Library Services (Teaching), Frank set about creating a clear structure and a series of meetings and check-ins within our online team environment (Microsoft Teams) and treated what we were about to embark on as a project with a clear start and end points, and tangible outcomes. Staff were selected based on

their knowledge of OER, although none had been involved in an OER creation or adaptation previously.

Meetings and engagement

Fourteen online meetings were arranged in 2021 for OER Capability Toolkit team. Meetings were monthly to begin with, shortening to three, then two weeks towards the delivery stage. A file structure in Teams was created emulating the fields of competence associated with the fields of competence framework. In addition, file storage locations for cover design, attribution statements, contributors, preface and glossary were created. The file structure within Teams served as an obvious way to allocate chapter creations. Staff were coupled and expected to present chapter development and ask questions at each meeting. Engagement with other staff occurred via the Teams channel and the online meetings served to clarify activities and as an opportunity for authors to seek guidance and report on their progress.

Outcomes

The process we undertook raised interesting questions about the creation and adaptation of an open textbook. The following section explores the key issues and reflects on the learnings that emerged from our project.

The library's role in open textbook publishing

The question of the Library's role in open textbook publishing came up regularly in our team meetings throughout this process. It was an issue that required careful consideration and a thoughtful and sustainable approach.

The literature told us that commercial textbook costs were high, and students did not often purchase prescribed resources set by academic staff (The National Union of Students, 2019). Academic staff, particularly in North America, responded by adopting, adapting or creating open works facilitated by university libraries who were taking a more active role. In Australia, due to a lack of funding and supporting policy, universities and Libraries are encumbered with the financial burden of publishing and are challenged by this aspect resulting in inaction. (Bossu & Stagg, 2018). However, CAUL (Council of University Librarians) recently developed a national project entitled: Enabling a Modern Curriculum to tackle this very issue where the focus is on three key areas of development:

1. Enabling a modern curriculum through Open Educational Resources
2. Enabling a modern curriculum through students as partners
3. Delivering a CAUL conference.

Three projects emanating from the broader project of enabling a modern curriculum will support a national approach to OER creation and adaptation, develop the requisite skills through a national OER professional development program and, create an advocacy toolkit that will support practitioner OER advocacy work. (CAUL, 2022). Sustainability was a

common thread in our discussions, and it prompted us to think about how the Library at RMIT would manage an open publishing program on a larger scale. How would we address funding, staff time, and co-ordinate the administrative processes associated with open publishing in a way that eases the burden for academic staff but encourages them to publish openly? There is no easy answer to this conundrum but reflecting on what the Library can bring to open publishing is an important exercise. Our own experience emphasizes that we have skills in searching, selecting and curating resources. There is a depth of knowledge in creative commons licensing and copyright, and established processes in permission seeking if required. To move to a sustainable model, the Library needs to consider an author do-it-yourself (DIY) approach. This approach allows the library to support each creation through a project management structure with clear workflows, guidance and financial support, and the author is tasked with the responsibility for creation and delivery of the final product. Other issues emerge from this model such as the support for copy-editing, proofreading and peer review, and to this end the Library needs to consider financial incentives for educators so that they can buy in the expertise required.

Publishing workflow and authoring platform.

We developed a file structure to manage the toolkit creation in Microsoft Teams. Colleagues worked in pairs on chapters and reported back to the larger group on their progress. As relative newcomers to OER creation, we eagerly dove in and

dealt with issues as they arose. In retrospect, there needed to be a clearer understanding of the fundamental principles of an OER workflow and the processes that underpinned it before we embarked on our project. For example, when our project was initiated, it would have been appropriate to develop a workplace compact. This action would have set parameters, ensured compliance via an agreed workflow and cleared misunderstandings before they arose. It was fortuitous that Frank was a member of the CAUL Enabling a Modern Curriculum OER Collective that was examining an OER publishing workflow. Through several meetings and discussions this group created a workflow that described the seven stages of textbook creation: initiate, plan, draft, design, review, publish and evaluate. The Open Publishing Workflow has been developed into this online guide.

In addition to the OER workflow, we also required an authoring platform. At the time of creating the toolkit, the availability of such a platform did not exist, however, towards the end of 2021 the RMIT University Library secured access to Pressbooks, further supporting the sustainability of an open publishing program at RMIT University Library. The platform has been badged as RMIT Open Press and will be used to support and guide open authorship moving forward. Pressbooks is a book production software built on WordPress which meets the needs of open authoring and has features such as LMS integration, institutional branding and training.

Access to such a platform will streamline the publishing workflow and level of support provided by the Library.

Creative commons licensing and remixing

The Toolkit content was built using material that was badged with Creative Commons licences, and customized to our region. The content sourced was either badged under a Creative Commons-Attribution (CC-BY) licence or in the public domain, as these are the most open licenses having the least restrictions on use. However, this exercise unearthed a myriad of misunderstandings associated with remixing which needed clarification as we progressed through the development phase.

Some of the problems we encountered included:

- The realisation that there were only four CC licenses that could be combined with the license type of our adapted work, which was Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial. (CC-BY-NC). The four compatible CC licenses were:
    - Public Domain (PD)
    - Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY)
    - Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial (CC-BY-NC)
    - Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike (CC-BY-SA)
- A non-derivative license could not be used in any adaptation.

- Maintaining a log of resources and keeping track of what was used assisted in creating the reference list and acknowledging the original resource.
- Linking out to more restricted content by providing a link in the adaptation rather than embedding it was deemed acceptable.

When creating an original work (not a remix) and planning to apply a creative commons license, consideration of the following factors is important:

- New works created within the context of your workplace may be subject to intellectual property policies and require permission to be made openly available. Check with your institution's copyright officer to ascertain these parameters.
- All creative commons licenses are not revocable. You are free to stop offering material under a creative commons license at any time, but this will not affect the rights associated with any copies of your work already in circulation.
- You need to assess your level of comfort associated with what creative commons licensing allows. That is, are you happy for your newly created work to be adapted, remixed, or monetized. Carefully consider the license options available.

Formative assessment – H5P activities

Formative assessment in the toolkit was considered a critical element. The ability to create quizzes, multiple choice questions, and fill in the blank tasks, was an efficient and inexpensive way to test knowledge and engage the learner. Stiwinter (2013) argues that interactivity assists learners to stay focused and engaged with the content.

The H5P plugin is an addition to the Pressbooks environment that allows the author to create formative assessment content easily and quickly, further enhancing the open book creation process. H5P was a new tool for library staff. A forty-five minute session was all that was required for staff to engage with the software and begin thinking of ways to enhance their chapters with interactive elements.

H5P activities are shareable resources that can easily be adapted and used in your own open work. You can locate many examples from the Pressbooks Directory and repurpose and reuse them in your own open work. See the example from the following open textbook: An interactive Introduction to Organismal and Molecular Biology.

It is also important for the author to consider adding a learning designer as a collaborative partner. Learning designers work closely with academic staff to conceptulise, design, produce and deliver online courses across a range of disciplinary and educational contexts and the creation of online textbooks has similar challenges. The added advantage of a learning designer as a member of team would ensure the

work being built is aligned to course learning outcomes, assessment tasks and teaching activities. This is a very important point particularly if the textbook is to be ultimately used within their teaching practice and subsumed as part of course delivery.

Copyright – "all rights reserved"

The use of copyright materials in an open textbook was discouraged due to several factors:

- Permission seeking created time delays for the Library copyright staff.
- Lengthy time delays awaiting responses from the copyright holder. Most responses received from authors would be a request for clarification, or no permission granted, holding up the development process.
- It was sometimes difficult to track down original authors due to career changes or other personal factors.
- Copyright works require references to be clearly labelled in an open publication with a notation in the preface that the publication contains "all rights reserved" materials.

Referencing

A distinction between attribution and citation was not clear from the outset. While we had consensus by the team to reference materials using APA 7th edition, we did not clearly distinguish the difference between attribution and citation

statements and when they should be used. Even though they share characteristics, citations and attributions play different roles and appear in different places. A citation allows authors to provide the source of any quotations, ideas, and information that they include in their own work based on the copyrighted works of other authors. It is used in works for which broad permissions have not been granted.

Attribution on the other hand is used when a resource or text is released with an open licence. This legal requirement states that users must attribute — give credit — to the creator of the work and encompass these critical elements at a minimum:

- Title of the work
- Author (creator) of the work
- Source (link) or where the work can be found
- License of the work

The decision in the end was to create a reference list that encompassed both attribution statements and academic citations at the end of each chapter. Additionally, attribution statements would appear under each image, table or video throughout the chapter and be repeated in the list at the end of the chapter.

Peer review, front and back matter

Towards the conclusion of the project, Frank tasked the project group to peer review each other's chapters. This

exercise provided a good opportunity to finesse language, grammar, and comprehension so that the work maintained a level of quality, readability and standardisation. Peer review is especially significant when creating open works as the quality, comprehensiveness, clarity, and currency of OER is often challenged. Peer review can encourage wider adoption and dispel the myths of low quality. The Toolkit has also undergone an external peer review. A useful tool to activate in the peer review process is Hypothesis. Hypothesis is a plug-in available via Pressbooks and primarily used to openly annotate content. It is generally used to engage students with social annotation. Students can reply and share annotations, they can also collaborate privately in groups. It is also a useful tool to apply when conducting a peer review process. All commentary is contextualized within the chapters and responses are received by email and easily edited.

It was also important to include front and back matter as part of the adaptation process. Including front and back matter provided completeness to the work and served to provide the reader with context. The front matter introduced the new work and helped the reader understand the evolution of its creation. Included are attribution statements, contributors' names, and a preface. Back matter includes a glossary and appendix.

The changing role of librarians

Technology and new platforms have streamlined the process of open publishing. In turn, Librarians have led the way by

creating awareness of OER, advocating, curating, increasing OER adoption, advising on copyright and creative commons and driving discoverability. As these aspects become more mainstream, Librarians at RMIT University are transitioning to become facilitators of open publishing projects. Encouraging academic staff to create and adapt open resources and supporting the publishing process through open workflows. They are building skills technical expertise of authoring platforms like Pressbooks, but also publishing skills like copy editing, proofreading, and peer review. They are gaining critical knowledge that underpins the motivations of open education adoption, that is, how a social justice viewpoint can benefit students by building author awareness of diversity and inclusion. They understand what it means to be learner driven, allowing students to forge their own learning pathways using open educational practices, and, using connected learning techniques, by adopting collaborative pedagogical practices to empower learners. They are also considering the development of local grant programs to incentivise open publishing for educators, gathering a deeper understanding of learning analytics, sharing impact stories of open works and ensuring that published resources are archived and preserved.

The future of open book publishing at RMIT university

The future of open publishing at RMIT University is a dynamic and evolving space. In 2022, the Library has lead

the development of an open scholarship policy. This policy will encompass the fundamental activity associated with open research and open education. Open research aims to incorporate aspects of open journal publishing, the deposit of research papers in the institutional repository and greater exposure of RMIT research data. Open education embraces co-creation of learning experiences with students through open educational practices, the development of online peer communities and the creation, and sharing, of open educational resources.

The Teaching and Research team within the Library which is comprised of a newly created Open Publishing team will drive the bulk of this activity. The Open Publishing team has been tasked with guiding the development and delivery of open textbooks by academic staff. The team will establish workflows, support structures, training, and the management of open textbook projects using the Pressbooks authoring platform which will underpin these outcomes.

It is also important to note that the Library is encouraging open textbook development that aligns with accessibility, social equity, justice and inclusion. We urge academic staff to consider issues associated with access such as making resources widely accessible allowing all learners equitable learning experiences; diversity and inclusion; including marginalized voices through images, case studies, and videos; co-creation; allowing marginalized voices to speak for themselves. These are important factors that will create relevant, engaging resources,

and align with university enabling plans that reflect the university's vision and strategy.

RMIT Library is an advocate for sharing and reusing information. The open access philosophy clearly interconnects with RMIT Library's ethos of sharing knowledge and supporting learning. RMIT Library is well positioned to work with academic staff to create, produce, and disseminate open works via open platforms for maximum impact, and the Library as publisher, can lead and shape the transformation of curriculum pedagogy where every learner is supported and valued.

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CHAPTER 7: BUILDING A HIGHER DEGREE BY RESEARCH COMMUNITY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: MOVING AWAY FROM THE 'ONE MAN BAND' EXPERIENCE

Chapter 7

Building a Higher Degree by Research Community During COVID-19 Pandemic: Moving away from the 'one man band' Experience

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Abstract

One of the most frequent grievances by candidates pursuing

higher degrees by research is the inability to engage in meaningful relationships with peers and colleagues. This chapter utilizes autoethnography as an approach to consider Gabriella and Samantha's experience of facilitating engagement and connectivity among higher degree by research (HDR) candidates at RMIT University. In their capacities as PhD candidate representatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, they contributed to establishing an HDR online platform that contributed to easing heightened isolation among HDR candidates in RMIT University's College of Design and Social Context (DSC). This chapter explores their experiences using a framework for reflection known as the 'What? So What? Now What?' framework, unpacking and discussing excerpts of self-reflection by the authors in the context of pertinent literature and relevant sources. In the context of this edited volume, this chapter focuses on the learning environment of HDR candidates, and indicates that HDR candidates themselves can play an important role in creating much needed elements of the HDR experience.

Keywords:

Higher Degree by Research, COVID-19, Meaningful Relationships, Collaboration, Learning Environments

Introduction

"I feel I'm a one-[wo]man band doing this PhD – but it's not making very good music". Gabriella recalls and reflects on one of the first conversations she had with a fellow PhD candidate. It had been some months after she commenced her study, but

she was yet to venture into the study space shared by doctoral candidates in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University. When she finally went there, she sat next to a peer at a comparable stage of her research project, who made the above remark. Gabriella found this statement interesting because it spoke to how she herself was feeling. Between spurts of productivity, Gabriella faced periods of what she thought of as 'PhD drought' and a barren computer screen. Although she was sitting in a shared PhD space, each person there worked on their own unrelated projects. This meant that collaboration was all but impossible, and communication often limited to general discussions rather than constructive feedback or meaningful peer assistance. The PhD was undeniably a lonely experience, but the further into the candidature Gabriella progressed, the more evident the link between loneliness and lack of productivity seemed.

One of the most frequent grievances of candidates pursuing higher degrees by research is the lack of meaningful relationships with peers and colleagues (Cantor, 2020). A study of loneliness among doctoral students concluded that "both domestic and international [PhD] students from a range of disciplines experience social isolation, suffer a lack of emotional support and may struggle to engage in meaningful relationships with their peers" (Janta, Lugosi & Brown, 2014, p. 565). Complaints of loneliness and isolation among PhD students were exacerbated by the onset of the pandemic; work

from home measures removed any previous face-to-face interactions, and further dislocated peers from one another.

Surveys conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic reported that over half (54%) of respondents felt lonelier since the start of the pandemic (Lim et al., 2020). Completing a PhD often felt like working in a silo, with productivity eroded by the additional work needed to self-motivate in the 'one-man band' that is the PhD research project. There is limited research on the link between loneliness and PhD productivity, although anecdotal evidence in PhD labs is abundant. A study conducted by Akcit and Barutcu (2017) considered the relationship between loneliness and productivity among academics. It found that there was a significant relationship between lowered productivity and loneliness, highlighting the significant human desire to establish relationships with people around them. A similar study conducted among university students in the UK found that 56% reported that loneliness impacted their level of productivity, either sometimes or often (Doot & Gupta, 2020).

In 2019, Gabriella and Samantha became Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidate co-representative for just over 700 HDRs within the DSC college. Any plans towards reducing candidates' isolation (and hopefully increase thesis wordcounts) were thrown into turmoil with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Melbourne spent a total of 262 days in lockdown, earning the title of the 'most locked-down city in the world'. Gabriella and Samantha found themselves and

peers no longer interacting in the ways they had, such as meeting in seminars, having incidental chats in the corridors, or engaging in day-to-day routines that they found supportive of their PhD research and writing up. A study conducted at RMIT shows that many other HDR candidates were grappling with the challenges of working from home, and contemplating uncertain futures (Gomes et al., 2021). Considering these new compounding challenges, Gabriella and Samantha found themselves wanting to create opportunities for peer connection during these strange times, but unsure how to do this in the context of such a diverse cohort.

This chapter reflects on Gabriella and Samantha's experience of facilitating connection as candidate representatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how they believe the online platform they contributed to enhanced productivity and a sense of community. What also emerges through their reflections is that the learning experience and learning environment of HDR candidates is one where candidates themselves can play a vital role in developing and creating, thus decentering assumptions about the centrality of academics and staff in establishing learning environments and experiences.

Gabriella and Samantha use an autoethnographic approach and a minimalistic framework for reflection known as the 'What? So What? Now What?' framework (Driscoll, 2000; Pretorius & Ford, 2017; Rolfe, Freshwater & Jasper, 2001). In

brief, the 'What' dimension of the framework allowed them to recall and outline their experiences, the factual account of what happened and the particular situation. Secondly, the 'So What?' dimension allowed for the deeper exploration of thoughts and feelings during this experience. Lastly, the 'Now What' prompt builds on insights gained in order to plan for the future. Excerpts of personal reflections by both Gabriella and Samantha will be unpacked and discussed in context of pertinent literature and other relevant sources.

What?

Gabriella and Samantha reflected on their experiences during early stages of the pandemic. Their reflections highlight the emotionally charged response to the drastic shift and ensuing changes to their lives. Gabriella, as a counsellor, likened her initial feelings of the pandemic to the stages of grief:

> I could liken my feelings at the beginning of COVID-19 to the seven stages of grief – shock and denial, pain and guilt, anger and bargaining, depression, the upward turn, reconstruction and working through, and finally acceptance and hope. It's interesting to consider the first lockdown of many in Melbourne, and how different my response was to it. The initial feeling was denial. Even though global signs pointed to the first lockdown being a long and extended period away from the office, I remember only taking my laptop away from the shared PhD lab, thinking that it would be silly to

> take the rest of my materials home with me (as 'surely I'd be back next week'). The succession of grief stages came after, from pain and guilt ('I'm so unproductive at home, I can't believe I'm not pushing myself to do more'), anger ('how much longer is this going to be! I can only walk this block so many times!'), and bargaining ('I promise I'll finish it twice as fast if things go back to how they were!'), depression ('I'm no good at this anyway… what's the point?'), the upward turn ('it's not changing soon so I should change my mindset or see how I can make this work'), reconstruction and working through ('I know many people are going through this too, we should come together and see how we can help one another), and acceptance and hope (at least I'm safe and well, and hopefully we'll be back again soon').

Because of physical distancing demands, there was grief over the demise of conventional routines in academia which supported productivity, such as brainstorming in labs, professional development seminars, and convening with colleagues and peers (Wallace et al., 2020). Samantha reflected on the impact of the pandemic on her PhD productivity and personal life:

> The world seemed as if it was moving on swiftly, yet I felt as if I was caught unprepared, not knowing where to go next. Plans for my research were upended by COVID-19 restrictions and I was unable to do my

> fieldwork as planned. It was difficult to feel motivated at that time, and isolation compounded the feelings of grief for the research plans that had to be abandoned.

Although inertia felt like second nature after months at home, Gabriella and Samantha could see there was a need to cultivate an academic environment in their new context. Restrictive policies during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted mental health, possibly due to what counsellors would call impaired mood homeostasis (i.e. failure to positively regulate mood via mood-modifying activities; Haucke, Liu & Heinzel, 2021). Later, Gabriella reflected on her experience:

> I realised quickly I was not alone in my feelings – my PhD peers becoming increasingly vocal about writer's block, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and the impact of being separated from peers and familiar spaces on the quality of their writing, thinking and reasoning.

As student representatives, Gabriella and Samantha felt a duty to advocate for HDR students who were also commenting on similar experiences of inertia and lowered productivity, particularly those who had previously made a habit of working from campus. However, merely attempting to transpose old ways of engaging with peers to an online format felt like an unrealistic aim. Gabriella and Samantha began to speculate on the possibilities that were viable in digital forums yet could actually have measurable outcomes. Gabriella recalls:

> Chatting with Samantha, it was evident that we really

> couldn't know how far our reach was as candidate representatives, and if we were truly making a difference. We knew what the feedback was – that people were delaying milestones and not getting much work done – but really, what could we do to remedy it? It was time to get creative.

Many had previously asserted they wanted a platform to (re)connect with peers, however, everyone seemed to now be struggling with the initial stages of 'grief'. Complacency and helplessness had set in and contact between peers was increasingly irregular. It became apparent that any decision regarding peer-engagement would require 'buy in' by those who we hoped would participate in it. Therefore, including PhD candidates in design was paramount. Samantha commented:

> Yes – creating new platforms for engagement seemed like a great idea. But as we know, ideas can seem great in abstract, but it's about execution and buy-in from others. Many of our peers lamented that there was never really a strong PhD community to begin with, so what could we do to facilitate one in such precarious times? Really anything we were to create needed to have a clear goal. It was about reminding everyone of the importance of their research project, and hopefully, getting others excited about it when connecting to peers.

After much discussion, and after collaboration with key

academic stakeholders across levels in the College, Gabriella and Samantha began to conceptualise how a new collaborative and productive PhD space could look in the virtual context. They first made a call to HDR students via email and College newsletters, inviting candidates to reach out to them with ideas and requests on how to improve their learning experience. Much to their surprise, this was met with enthusiasm from peers and academic staff alike. A common theme throughout correspondence was that a blend of academic and social spaces should be facilitated. PhD candidates wanted to be able to meet (virtually) with each other and discuss their research, but also share ways they were maintaining their wellbeing during arguably one of the most challenging global periods in recent memory. After a process of collating the inputs, the Design and Social Context HDR Canvas page (an online learning management software platform) was born. This interactive portal, much like what was long employed across traditional coursework units, was the first of its kind specifically created for PhD candidates, by PhD candidates. It provided an accessible platform for informal peer chats via forum discussion posts, a calendar of weekly events that all could join (such as virtual 'Shut up and Write' Pomodoro writing sessions, where one could write in the company of others, and career information events), links to wellbeing resources and weekly interactive group yoga sessions, and contact details for all relevant staff and personal in one location. Gabriella reflected on the first week of the portal launch:

> After initial teething issues (as is always the case with the launch of anything new), the portal gained traction, fast. HDRs across disciplines were emailing us asking how they could get involved with facilitating extra social sessions or providing general feedback on how great it was to have the convenience of one digital space to locate contact details for academic staff. Although the space was originally designed in response to COVID-19, it really did prove itself as a fantastic aid for HDRs, meeting many of their informational, social, and educational needs.

The platform was a remarkable success, reaching and connecting over 700 HDR students at RMIT. Many students who were previously inactive in HDR community spaces were now highly engaged in virtual events and forums. It appeared that the space was not a substitution for face-to-face interactions (not that it sought out to be), but a way to bridge gaps between students who were geographically dispersed or found it difficult to access campus for a multitude of reasons. Many commented that they felt reinvigorated to continue with their research project, and more productive after connecting in the online spaces. In the following section Gabriella and Samantha analyse their thoughts around facilitating this virtual collaborative space, and comment on potential areas of improvement.

So what?

In addition to the HDR Canvas platform being well used,

the demographic had also notably shifted to include more than those previously well engaged in face-to-face events and interactions. Prior to COVID-19, metropolitan residents attending the university seemed to be those most immersed in campus life. An online format lent itself to being more geographically inclusive, with people from interstate and rural locations able to participate in virtual meetings. Similar findings were reported by Niner and Wassermann (2020), who noted that moving online substantially increased the accessibility for those who would be unable to attend an in-person event for financial or personal reasons. Their study, which investigated virtual conferences, indicated that the online experience was able to replicate some of the benefits of in-person events, with many participants interested in attending online or virtual events in the future (Niner & Wassermann, 2020). Gabriella considered some of the benefits of online interactive forums in academic contexts:

> *The HDR Canvas shell was more inclusive than face-to-face spaces in many ways. I began to notice faces I had never previously seen on campus, and after discussion, realised how much we had in common (in terms of research interest and beyond!). We also started to discuss the impact of regular online meet ups facilitated by the platform on productivity. Having 'accountability buddies' and having to discuss my writing progress with others in set time frames meant I had no choice but to get on with it. I wondered if this had created opportunities for*

> *more people to engage than those who felt confident in a normal face-to face setting. I also wondered about modes of communication. For many, meeting in the comfort of their own home meant they were able to engage with peers in ways (and times) that previously would have been unachievable.*

Indeed, there were many opportunities facilitated by the online platform. There was a radical departure from the status quo of only being 'student life active' if you frequented campus. By way of accessibility, the online format lent itself well to welcoming participation Australia wide, with the usual travel costs now void. Niner and Wassermann (2020) reported that one of the most positively acknowledged elements of online spaces is the ability for participants to access recorded materials and being able to engage with content at their own pace, in their own time zone, which was also a well-acknowledged positive feature of the Canvas shell (Edelheim et al., 2018; Gross and Fleming, 2011). Samantha shared her observations regarding new opportunities presented with the changed format:

> Sometimes people would reach out to us after a careers session that was held via Zoom that they had seen advertised on the Canvas shell. Previously, when all seminars were held face-to-face, it meant many who had children, worked, had restricted mobility, or otherwise, missed out. Now it was as simple as directing them to

the recording, which they could view at their own leisure.

As well as the evident benefits of the online format, shortfalls of the platform became apparent. It seemed that some PhD candidates succumbed to 'Zoom fatigue' – tiredness, worry or burnout associated with the overuse of virtual platforms of communication, particularly videotelephony (Jiang, 2020). Although many showed initial enthusiasm to partake in online events and meetings, some would drop out, particularly during long sessions. Furthermore, a balance of academic and social dimensions was hard to strike. Also commonly cited was the inability of candidates to 'protect' their time from work or personal commitments (particularly as the closure of schools brought on increased home-schooling pressures for parents); face-to-face formats allow better physical and mental distancing from usual commitments. It was also stated that the lack of opportunity for informal interactions, or 'water cooler' chats was missing from the Canvas platform, particularly as these could be a precursor for meaningful connection and networking (Edelheim et al., 2018; Gross and Fleming, 2011). Gabriella and Samantha found one of the challenges of shifting networking events online was the inability to recreate similar informal and non-verbal communication cues that are essential for relationship building (Oester et al., 2017). This informal communication comes from physical proximity, where body language can be a signal to invite verbal

engagement (Fish et al., 1993). This proximity is challenged by remote participation where many of these cues remain invisible or less easily detected (Erickson et al., 2011; Fish et al., 1993). Samantha reflected:

> [...] there was still a gap where social interactions and exchanges had once lived in the campus lab rooms. I felt we weren't quite able to meet that need in our format, and this was reflected in comments and conversations from our peers a few months into having the platform. I felt people were keen for spaces to informally chat about things, because mainly in the hosted meet ups and even social events, there was a pre-determined 'theme' for conversation. But this also forced me to question whether there were spaces and settings for this kind of informal engagement when we were face to face. Whilst this was part of the problematic nature of online engagement, I felt like this ran deeper than the limitations of technology. These issues were there for me before we had to do it all online. Maybe the online nature just made it more visible or gave us the opportunity to reflect on something we were seeing in a different light?

From an organizational perspective, Gabriella and Samantha were surprised by the outreach of peers and academics alike, many offering to assist in various capacities in organising social events, seminars, online writing boot camps, and beyond. Grimalda et al. (2021) suggest that situations of

existential threat, such as COVID-19, enhances prosociality in general, particularly toward others perceived as belonging to the same group (parochial altruism). This is directly in line with Gabriella and Samantha's experience. It was a recurring comment that the platform created a new academic for academic engagement that was missing from the PhD experience which is well-known for being a solitary endeavor (Cantor, 2020). Gabriella noted the following:

> Upon reflection about organising various events via the platform, I can attribute the enthusiasm of PhD candidates and academic staff. Although the act of volunteering is in itself altruistic, many contributors claimed that they felt reinvigorated through their organizational efforts, and more connected to their peers than ever. The previous feelings of guilt of perhaps not taking full advantage of the PhD experience meaning they were more committed to meaningfully engage with their peers and the research field.

Reflecting about the platform helped Gabriella and Samantha recognise benefits, whilst also acknowledging significant room to learn and grow. This led them to consider the implications of the Canvas shell and think about how this might impact future HDR learning experiences.

Now what?

The experience of developing and running the HDR Canvas platform during the pandemic was, for Gabriella and Samantha, an opportunity to reflect on HDR community

building. There are few firm conclusions, and many questions emerged (and avenues for further research have opened up). However, the experience of pivoting face-to-face interactions to an online platform for engaging with HDR peers allowed them to reflect on what they could take into the future, and the possibilities of modifying methods of collaborating, contributing, and connecting with such communities. They became keenly aware of the importance of learning from their experiences, particularly as COVID-19 changed the face of academia and interaction at large. This again challenged the myth of 'snapping back' to previous ways of approaching learning and research in any post-COVID-19 era that emerge. Gabriella remarked:

> We're at a time where I feel there is no going back to 'normal'. While this new way of doing things has been challenging and uncomfortable, it's also shed light on assumptions we've made and things we've taken for granted.

The pandemic paved the way for reimagining the HDR experience. Significant budgetary constraints in higher education institutions, and the reality that many international students are still unable to study in Australia meant that the candidate experience will continue to shift and evolve. Samantha reflected on the future of HDR learning in an unknowable future:

> We can't even conceive of the future of the HDR experience. As my experience as an HDR student draws

> to a close, I hope that our learnings during this time can inform those who embark research degrees in future and help facilitate more connectivity between candidates. From my experience, productivity in this space seems to be at its most optimal when we are connected.

Looking towards the future of the HDR experience, Gabriella and Samantha have wondered about the possibilities of using 'hybrid' or a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous models of peer interaction going forward. Gabriella acknowledges that *"it is hard to omit the reality that many people are wired towards face-to-face engagement"*. Following this, Samantha commented on alternatives to hosting either face-to-face or online events:

> While the 'hybrid' model seems to offer the best of both worlds, it is also probably the most complex, having to engage on screen and in person at the same time while switching between the two. Is a compromise achievable?

A study conducted by Tisdell and Loch (2017) investigated the challenges of integrating in-person and online formats, and the risk of inadvertently segregating the online and in-person communities from one another. The authors raise their concerns that inadequate integration in hybrid models has the potential to widen existing systemic inequalities, particularly if in-person activities are prioritised (Tisdell & Loch, 2017). It is crucial that we continue to question and challenge new ways

of working and reflect on the barriers that any new formats may introduce. Although it can be inferred that connectivity among PhD candidates can support their productivity, some HDR candidates are not as able to connect with others due to factors outside their control. Modified practices in the future should reflect the diversity of the HDR cohort, and in doing so, be regularly reassessed for their effectiveness and adapted as needed.

Conclusion

Through their reflection of reimagining student engagement in the COVID-19 era, Samantha and Gabriella considered the link between connectivity and productivity. Prior to COVID-19, HDR students lamented the isolation that is often considered 'part and parcel' of the PhD experience – the pandemic further compounding dislocation from space and peers. From their experience in developing an online mode of engagement during this time, Gabriella and Samantha found there were many benefits – such as creating further opportunities for a more diverse cohort of students to attend, increased accountability in completing writing and research tasks, and reported lowered feeling of isolation. However, we also noted the distinct lack of informal social opportunities which play an important role in students' feelings of connection and belonging. Although the circumstances of the pandemic meant that an online platform for HDR community building was the only option, Gabriella and Samantha are cautious in embracing the online or hybrid

student platforms as a one-size-fits-all solution to these issues into the future, believing that inequalities in the HDR experience will persist in these new formats without a commitment to actively addressing them (see also Niner et al., 2020, p. 254). Their experience, however, points out the fact that HDR candidates, alongside more senior university staff, can play a vital role in this community building, and may in some ways be best placed to lead a shift in the HDR candidate's experience from being a 'one man band' to working 'in concert' with peers.

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CHAPTER 8: LEARNING IN PLACE: STUDY TOURS AND THE CULTIVATION OF GROUNDED INSIGHT

Chapter 8

Learning in Place: Study Tours and the Cultivation of Grounded Insight

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Abstract

This chapter considers the potential impacts of study tours as deeply immersive and potentially profound learning and teaching experience. This co-authored chapter describes how study tours can challenge not only students' certainties and unstated assumptions about the world, but can also transform the teachers that lead study tours. Drawing on study tour experiences from East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Pacific, and on

Country in Australia, the authors distil from their experiences of study tours they participated in, an insight that, together, enables this chapter to shed light on the educational and transformative potential of these intensive and multi-sensorial learning experiences.

Keywords: study tours, on Country, inter-cultural student interaction, embodied insights

Introduction

Learning and teaching can occur in many settings, of which classrooms are only one. Classrooms have an important place in creating regular and routinised spaces where some level of predictability of expectations can aid in the learning and reception of new ideas and conversations. However, learning is a multi-sensory experience, and there are few experiences that are as sensorily all-encompassing as study tours. Study tours place students in new environments and cultural contexts, often with an all-new set of smells, textures, climates, cadences of speech, and palates of taste. The immediacy and presence of these new sensations and different forms of interaction form a Gestalt and steep learning experience which often challenge taken-for-granted understandings of the world (Roffee & Burns 2020, pp. 9-14; Bretag & van der Veen 2017), but which are often deeply memorable experiences, where profound connections are made between the student and the society being visited, as well as the forging of bonds and greater

mutual understanding with fellow students and the staff who accompany them (Cooper 2009; Gomez-Lanier 2017).

At RMIT, study tours have long been a staple and regular learning opportunity presented to our students (Nadarajah et al. 2022; Ohashi 2020; Kingston 2018; Cooper 2009; Cerotti et al. 2006; Sinatra and Murphy 1999; Ryan et al. 2015; Mclaughlin et al. 2020). In this chapter, we will present insights from leaders of study tours to different parts of the world. Through each colleague's reflection, a different insight is unearthed with respect to study tours. As will be seen, Kerry Mullan's study tours to New Caledonia often complicate some of the certainties held by students; Hiroko Ohashi describes how students on a study tour to Japan come to new understandings of themselves via the Japanese language; new understandings of self in relation to place occur for Peter Phipps' students during 'on country' study tours in Victoria, Australia; Robbie Guevara describes the impacts of students' observations and questions on him as a study tour guide; and Damian Grenfell, reflecting on a study tour to Timor-Leste, explores the longer-term impacts of 'being in place' on student learning.

All these insights emphasise and reflect on one of the possible benefits of a well-conducted study tour, which is to challenge the mindset of at least some, if not most, students as to their relative position with respect to the other societies, and to their 'natural' role in 'fixing the problems' of (often distant) others. Clare Talwalker (2016) discusses this insightfully

(though not in relation to study tours) in a chapter titled 'Fixing Poverty', where she analyses her experience teaching a course on poverty in the US. Noting that many students arrive at university caring greatly about one or another cause, such as child labour and unfair trade practices, Talwalker writes:

> What can it mean for a student to care about poverty as a general and global problem and seek ways to redress it? Care of this kind – the kind that comes from the embrace of universal problems and generalizable moral positions – is itself a sort of power and privilege, and it tends to lead people to solutions – utilitarian solutions – that are not attentive to the things that are distinctive about a place and a people (Talwalker 2016, p. 123).

Talwalker's (2016) identification of the desire of students to want to 'fix poverty' and develop 'solutions' is apposite (see also Nadarajah et al. 2022, pp. 94-95). This tendency to perceive 'a problem' naturally leads to a desire to apply a solution to it, and the continued existence of the problem is implicitly because the solution has not been applied by someone adequately, and the well-intended person is willing to do this *for* those who require it. Courtney E. Martin (2016) has made similar observations. She notes that whereas a twenty-two-year-old American would understand that gun control in the US is a deeply rooted complex problem, 'if you ask that same 22-year-old American about some of the most pressing problems in a place like Uganda—rural hunger or girls' secondary education or homophobia—-she might see

them as solvable. Maybe even easily solvable.' Martin goes on to write that 'There is a whole industry set up to nurture these desires and delusions' and that the hubris it creates 'is encouraged through job and internship opportunities, conferences galore, and cultural propaganda—encompassed so fully in the patronising, dangerously simple phrase "save the world."'

It is crucial to note that neither Talwalker nor Martin are against engaging with societies and cultures other than one's own. While Martin writes in favour of resisting 'the reductive seduction of other people's problems and, instead, fall[ing] in love with the longer-term prospect of staying home and facing systemic complexity', she also adds that people can go overseas if ' [they]must, but stay long enough, listen hard enough so that "other people" become real people. But, be warned, they may not seem so easy to "save"' (Martin 2016). In a similar vein, Talwaker describes her approach to teaching her students as being...

> ...much more about motivating college students to learn about the history of a place and to develop an anthropological appreciation of an issue in that place, as this takes them from their embrace of a particular cause (e.g. human trafficking) to a longer and deeper engagement with a particular part of the world and a particular group of people (Talwalker, 2016, p. 124).

Although study tours are often relatively short in duration, as we will see, they can enable students to develop initial

insights into the reality, complexity and the utter situatedness of the people they visit and engage with. A sensitively and thoughtfully planned and guided study tour can enable students to glimpse complexity and to appreciate the fact that there is a historical and cultural totality which they will be far from mastering. However, the fact of the insight itself can hopefully be a catalyst for deeper longer-term transformations, and an awareness that distant people and problems have own historical situatedness and complexity.

New Caledonia in the twenty-first century

"New Caledonia in the 21st Century" is a study tour organised by RMIT University in partnership with the University of Melbourne, which has been running biennially since 2015. Kerry Mullan has been involved in the design and realisation of this interdisciplinary study tour from the outset. though I wish to acknowledge that these study tours would not have been possible without support from The University of Melbourne, my colleague Diane de St. Léger, and more recently funding from the New Colombo Plan. The aim of this interdisciplinary study tour is to offer students of (intermediate to advanced)[1] French the opportunity to explore the political and sociocultural aspects of this little-known neighbouring French territory in the Pacific, to better understand its many historical and contemporary parallels with Australia, and to reflect on post-colonialism more broadly as New Caledonia transitions towards new models of government and possible independence from France.[2] The

study tour is best described as an enquiry-based field trip where learners are encouraged to explore and question the various tensions and contradictions that they encounter, and to consider New Caledonia their intercultural classroom. Students come from a range of disciplines such as political science, history, geology, linguistics, media and communication, business, international studies etc., and are encouraged in various ways (including assessment design) to experience the program in a way that is relevant to their own field of study. The program includes no formal French language classes; rather, it is conducted entirely in French and learners are provided with multiple opportunities for interaction in the host communities through group and independently organised activities.[3] The three-week program includes stays in four very distinct locations (university campus in Noumea, a Northern Province Kanak community, the tourist area of Noumea, one of the Loyalty Islands) to expose the students to a range of local communities and contexts.

The in-country part of the program is greatly enhanced by twelve hours of pre-departure seminars and workshops. While the complexities of New Caledonia remain somewhat abstract for students during these seminars, the material covered falls into place during our stay. Cultural moments such as 'la coutume', a solemn and political occasion where gifts and speeches are exchanged as a mark of respect for the Kanak community one is visiting have a strong impact on students.

Standing at the tomb of Jean-Marie Tjibaou (revered pro-independence politician assassinated in 1989) and being welcomed into his community by one of his sons are extremely powerful and moving experiences for the students, moments where the abstract suddenly becomes real, and deep transformative learning takes place. Students regularly undergo profound 'aha' moments (Ritz 2011) where they make links between conceptual knowledge and their experiences on the ground. Institutional visits to the Australian Consulate, the New Caledonian Congress, the government headquarters of the Northern Province, the Pacific Community headquarters and the Urban Planning department of the Noumea Town Hall are all central to the students' learning. It goes without saying that the ability to speak French is critical to the students' understanding and appreciation of the people they meet, places they visit and their learning in general.

The importance of Australia as New Caledonia's "older brother" in the Pacific with responsibility towards all Pacific nations is repeated often by the various individuals and institutional representatives we meet during the trip. This message seems to greatly impact the students, many of whom describe the program as life-changing, both in terms of their future studies and/or career, and in terms of their confidence and identity. Some students report changing their subject choices to include more Pacific-, economic- and environmental-related courses, as well as Australian Foreign

Policy. Others have made conscious career decisions to include the Pacific region (e.g., joining the Army Reserves and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), or to undertake postgraduate study focusing on urban sustainable development and climate change. Others see clearly how the skills they developed on the tour (intercultural communication and linguistic skills, open mindedness and cultural awareness) are relevant in their chosen careers. Several students claim that the tour increased their confidence to travel in the Pacific region and to travel in foreign countries in general (as also reported in Lewis and Niesenbaum 2005). Other students were deeply affected by their interactions with the local indigenous Kanak and migrant (Arabic-speaking) communities which mirrored their own backgrounds and gave them the confidence to more fully own their identity. Experiences and reflections such as these are invaluable for developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship.

The designers of the study tour place emphasis on personal learning and reflection in the program, with daily debriefing sessions for students to share their observations and seek clarification where required. Students regularly write their reflective diaries together, checking and consolidating their understanding of their experiences. The program includes tasks designed specifically to develop students' critical awareness of their environment and direct their attention towards important aspects of their surroundings to deepen their understanding of the territory (cf. De St. Léger & Mullan

2020). This leads to extremely valuable and rewarding discussions where learning evolves for teachers and students alike. One concrete example of this is that following the pre-departure seminars, students generally arrive in New Caledonia with a (somewhat simplistic) pro-independence stance. This tends to change after spending a few days in Noumea, where the complexity of the terrain and the current economic and cultural connections with France become evident. Following the stay in a Kanak community where the students have several discussions with the locals, many develop a better understanding of the centrality of the issue of independence for Kanak communities. However, on leaving, most students declare that they are more unsure of how they feel about the impact of colonialism on indigenous communities, both in New Caledonia and in Australia, than before they arrived. On hearing such revelations, as teachers we consider our objectives to have been successfully met.

Study tour to Japan and a 'journey to self'

Second language acquisition, which is often referred to as 'L2', can provide learners with not only language knowledge and skills, but facilitates opportunities for meeting and getting to know 'new people' through the crossing of cultural and linguistic boundaries, spending time in a foreign environment, and being part of a new community. Such opportunities change their epistemic states (Kramsch & Zhang 2018), from a not-knowing to a knowing state, and afford them the inspiration to imagine and understand cultural others not only

from their own perspective, but from the perspective of those others. Thus, study tours can be catalysts for promoting and expanding students' imagining of the world and their relations with others.

In contrast to the previous section where the language was a vehicle but not the focus, this section discusses the educational significance of a language-orientated study tour based on a research project undertaken by Hiroko Ohashi with participants of a study tour organized between the Muroran Institute of Technology (MuroranIT) and RMIT University. These two institutions have been conducting two-way short-term language study tours annually, based on an academic exchange agreement signed between the two universities in 1994.

The research discussed here is based on my research into L2 learners' perceptions of their Japanese learning experiences. Of the 31 former learners of Japanese from four Victorian universities, four RMIT students who participated in the study tour all described it as a significant event in their overall Japanese learning experience. The data from this research are drawn from their written accounts of their Japanese language learning experience, and follow-up interviews. Insights from the accounts and interviews provided by the RMIT students are discussed here (anonymously, pseudonyms are used) to demonstrate the potential that study tours have to enable deeper and more profound engagement with the language being learned and the culture(s) associated with that language.

Of the six students from RMIT, four named 'study tour' as a key event within their whole Japanese language experience. The following, Nem's comment, is an example:

> I signed up for the study tour to Japan. This was my first trip to Japan and an unforgettable one. ...This was a great learning experience as well as seeing firsthand some of the concepts I had only read about.

Kate's experience, written in Japanese, the language she was studying, (translated by Ohashi)suggests how a language study tour provides opportunities to interact with cultural others in the 'third place' (Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1997; Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco, 1999; Liddicoat et al., 2003), which is essentially a symbolic 'meeting place' where second language learners explore the unique space of "interculturality" as they transcend cultural boundaries (Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco, 1999, p.13) as well as linguistic barriers. Moreover, it gave Kate a chance to reflect on her experiences of encountering otherness during a homestay component of the study tour:

> Communication was difficult during the homestay. My Japanese is not good. And my homestay family's English is not good either. I did not want to speak. I wanted to hide in my room. But I decided to try my best and did it, and eventually my family started to converse with me in my Japanese. I also chose my words according to their English. We met in the middle.

Along with Kate and Nem, Tran had never been to Japan

before the study tour, but she was profoundly impacted in a different way. Tran migrated from Singapore to Australia in 2006 at the age of 25 and became interested in Japanese fashion and food. She decided to learn Japanese to challenge herself. Despite her "intrinsic" (her description) motivation, she explains that her "life was changed" after RMIT's Hokkaido study tour in 2012, where she came to embrace the culture of the hosting community, including her host family. She states in her written account: "I learned about the nuances, values and hospitality (*omotenashi*)[4] reflected in the Japanese culture. I was deeply moved. It resonated with my emotional self". She never expected that attending the study tour would affect her "like this". In the follow-up interview, Tran provided some background to her written account:

> I was facing problems at work and I think it just showed me that a lot of the problem rested with me...that I wasn't expressing my needs ... I always felt like there was something there that makes me want to run away. [In the study tour environment] I felt maybe I could ... express myself more...Because for the first time in my life I was in a community where I actually felt safe. ...Um, even though with English and Mandarin I am fluent in ...I don't think I've felt that I belong to a community where I felt safe. But for some reason when I was in Japan ... I felt maybe I could ... express myself more. I just felt this is something I can do. I, I think

> this is like a turning point in my life. I realised... I can connect with people ... in the community.

Tran's sense of community and security gave her the legitimacy to express herself even in a foreign language, subsequently changing the way she saw herself and how she related to communities. She states that the study tour allowed her to "experience kindness and generosity in humanity, and for the first time in [her] life, [she] experienced the joy of being involved in a community".

When my research participants referred to people in their accounts, they typically were either the Japanese teacher or person who inspired them to first learn Japanese; the Japanese who provided them with learning opportunities; and the Japanese whose interactions with them changed their worldview. All these categories of people contribute to motivating L2 learners to learn a second language, according to Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005). However, the Japanese communities that Tran mentions provide much more than motivation to learn a second language. They are deeply involved in their personal growth as individuals and their empowerment as learners.

The three British L2 French learners who provided autobiographical accounts in Coffey's (2010) study consider their experiences in France as "a phase of key moments (turning points) of personal development" (p.129). Coffey (2010) refers to Bakhtin's (1986) account of *Bildungsroman*[5], a narrative of transforming into a better

person. Kramsch et al. (2007) argue this concept is currently overlooked in tertiary L2 language education. Trans's L2 learner autobiographical account suggests that L2 learning is a lot more than simply increasing knowledge and communication skills of a language. It was a life-changing experience for her, from her 'not-knowing self' to 'knowing self' in terms of the importance of human relations and being involved in a community.

In L2 learning, each language has a different impact on the individual, and each individual is affected differently by a language. There is also a possibility that the learners fall into reductive dichotomous cultural comparisons. However, transformative and life-changing experiences are some of the common themes of L2 learner autobiographical research, and well-designed study tours clearly have the ability to facilitate such experiences. It is, therefore, necessary to design study tour programs through which critical thinking and reflexivity can flourish.

Start Where You Are: Study Tours On Country

Like the other educators contributing to this chapter, Peter Phipps is deeply committed to the pedagogy of experience. Training in Anthropology and Social Theory, combined with extensive backpacker travel and Buddhist studies through South Asia and elsewhere, prepared me, in an ad hoc way, for a range of immersive cross-cultural research and learning experiences.

In this learning journey I am deeply indebted to many great

and generous Indigenous Australian teachers and Elders (Huggins, Nakata, Yunupingu, Marika, Ganambar, Marawili, Edwards, Birch, Hayes, Harrison, Thomas, Alberts, Clarke, Coe) who, despite my many re-colonising failings, patiently schooled me into a more sympathetic understanding of Indigenous peoples' lives, philosophies and life-worlds. In the process of teaching, leading and correcting my work, these Elders have irrevocably transformed my self-understanding, experiences of being and place, and my worldview, to the point where I now understand Country (Indigenous ancestral domains imbued with agency) itself as a teacher (Bawaka Country et al., 2016).

As an educator, I became very interested in the opportunity to offer these kinds of transformative experiences to undergraduate students in a supported, structured and reflexive way through university field studies. At the heart of this process is learning from Indigenous elders and educators, learning through Indigenous pedagogy on Country, with my role as a non-Indigenous facilitator and guide.

My first epiphany that these life experiences formed a practical basis for working across cultures occurred in a remote Yolngu (Indigenous Australian) community in Arnhem Land in 2002. I was flown to a funeral ceremony underway on Elcho Island, to be vetted by the senior Yolngu leaders who were my prospective employers for a consultancy at the Yothu Yindi Foundation. Having been long-schooled in the Himalayas in the basic dispositions of how to sit comfortably on the ground,

show bodily respect to teachers, sit silently observant and wait to be directed, as well as a basic understanding of the colonising processes in northern Australia, I passed my job screening.

The following year the Yothu Yindi Foundation enabled me to bring a group of RMIT student volunteers to support the Garma Forum of Indigenous Knowledge, a centrepiece of the annual Garma Indigenous Festival (Phipps, 2011). This was a great opportunity for students to experience an otherwise expensive and inaccessible undertaking. On an escarpment overlooking the Arafura Sea, the culturally significant festival site at Gulkula is a great distance and an expensive trip from Melbourne. Arnhem Land is also a vast Aboriginal Reserve, and entry normally requires permits granted by the Northern Land Council for specific purposes. Students worked in various support roles at the Forum and Festival, learning from Indigenous and other speakers in the forum and having interactions with a wide variety of participants throughout the day: Yolngu hosts, visiting Aboriginal elders and leaders, politicians and government administrators. Students would come together with all other participants each evening for the sunset *bunngul* (clan-based ritual dance and song) which is the pedagogical core of the festival. While visually and musically powerful, Bunngul is not an entertainment event, it is a ceremonial manifestation of ancestral power, knowledge, Yolngu law, philosophy and spiritual connection to country. As with Yolngu visual art, the selective revelation of the

bunngul's 'shining' aesthetics (Morphy, 1989) is a manifestation of that spiritual ancestral domain based in an entirely different understanding of time, space and embodiment from the dominant Western modes of settler-colonialism. Understood this way, the experience of a counter-ontology is profound and can be confronting.

At the end of each day, after bunngul and sharing a meal, I would gather the students around a fire to both check-in with their wellbeing, and to have them share something they had learned that day. These were incredibly potent pedagogical moments, giving students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, monitor their emotional and physical wellbeing, and to share and learn from those reflections with one another. These sharing circles also created great opportunities for me to provide context, explanation, support and to extend student enquiry into what they were experiencing. This particularly involved supporting students with the dawning recognition that they were on Aboriginal land, in a cultural context where they didn't know the law, the language or how to behave. In short, students were having a profound experience of decolonial anxiety (Hage, 1998; Henty, 2019) with one student expressing tearfully, "Before I came here I thought we were in Australia, now I don't know what that is or where I am."

I encouraged students to share and reflect on these emotional experiences in their field journals, and to understand emotion as both a key part (data) of any

intercultural learning experience, but also a critically important part of Indigenous pedagogies (deep listening, connecting to country). It is a delicate balance to guide students through noting and paying attention to these emotional experiences without a collapse into a self-centred or overwhelming experience. While not the same as Indigenous pedagogies, trusting this emotional and bodily feedback has a place in the tradition of phenomenology (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Abram,1996) and the radical pedagogy of feminist and decolonial thinkers (bell hooks, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2015)

Over several years, a fairly consistent pattern of student experience became evident. The first day was wide-eyed amazement at the new context and adapting to the new environment. The second day involved a 'honeymoon' sense of wonder and delight to be in the presence of deep cultural richness being shared so openly, and an infatuated experience of the Yolngu world. Usually by the end of the third day, students would share complex expressions of grief through tears and words. This grieving was firstly a sense of shock at their own cultural ignorance in an Indigenous-led context. As they had the opportunity to go deeper into these experiences, some students articulated a sense of betrayal by a colonial education system that systematically misled them about Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and kept them ignorant of their own implication in the settler-colonial project (Hage, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Wolfe, 2006).

Many students came away from Garma with an experiential sense of what had been destroyed by the Australian settler-colonial project throughout the continent, particularly in their homes in the heavily and violently colonised urban parts of southern Australia. This could lead them to the conventional (genocidal) conclusion that Aboriginal peoples and cultures are no longer present there; they couldn't be more wrong. So for the last decade I have used a similar approach bringing students to Indigenous communities much closer to home. The cultural differences are more subtle given the continuing state-sponsored colonising project of destroying Aboriginal peoples, languages, and spiritual connection to country. We start on the RMIT city campus at a recently erected memorial to the Tasmanian Aboriginal resistance fighters who were executed by hanging on that site, and from there explore the Indigenous history of the campus and open a decolonial critique of state institutions including the prison, school and university. Students then learn directly from Indigenous elders about their lived experiences of genocidal colonial violence, forced institutionalisation, and efforts to continue culture despite extreme oppression. These lessons are often delivered with subtle cues, with the deep content expressed as an aside or a gesture for those ready to hear it.

On a recent urban fieldwork trip with deeply experienced educator Uncle Mik Edwards guiding students on the modern Indigenous history of the inner Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy (a mere kilometre from the university), two Aboriginal

community members passing in the street stopped to greet Uncle Mik, declare their kinship relationship with him, and tell the students to, 'Listen to this man!' and the other, 'You are lucky to be learning from him, he's the real deal.' These spontaneous manifestations of Indigenous life and law in the urban heart of the city are another powerful reorientation for student's understanding of where they live. As Uncle Mik instructs them, 'Be aware where you put your feet on this country; my history lives wherever you put a foot down.'

We also leave the city for Indigenous community visits, including the cultural landscape at Lake Condah in western Victoria. This is a significant cultural site where RMIT staff (past and current) have strong, long-standing relationships (including Bruce Partland, Mik Edwards and others training the Budj Bim Rangers; Jim Sinatra, Yaso Nadaradjah, Barry Judd, Al Fricker, Libby Porter and others taking students and staff there over two decades). This aquaculture system for farming eels and other fish was recently World Heritage listed for both its living cultural and natural significance, after a twenty- year process driven by the Gunditjmara people. Guided by the Budj Bim Rangers students learn how to walk respectfully on country, and following the instructions in the core course text, *Nyernila (VACL 2014)*, some start to listen more deeply to Indigenous people and places. They learn directly about the agency and organisations, driven and controlled by Aboriginal people, that are reclaiming and transforming land and culture and lives in this part of

Australia. The Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation and its offshoots is now the largest employer in the regional town of Heywood, with interests in cultural heritage protection, health, welfare, land management, cattle farming and of course, cultural tourism and education. Students are again confronted by preconceived ideas of Aboriginal people and communities as victims in need of assistance, the fantasy of white benevolence, to directly witnessing these people rebuilding their own lives and communities in defiance of the colonial experience. One study tour included a night spent camping in solidarity with Indigenous activists at the Djab Warrung Heritage Protection Embassy, a struggle against the destruction of 800-year-old culturally significant trees by the State for road widening, with follow-up student actions back in the city for an arrested Indigenous activist. The complexity of a 'progressive' State Government seeking treaty with Aboriginal people on the one hand, while continuing cultural destruction and mass Indigenous incarceration on the other, was a powerful learning experience for these students.

Of course, these processes are complex, and Indigenous communities across Australia suffer the traumatic effects of ongoing colonisation (from hyper-incarceration to health issues), but these fieldwork experiences offer students the possibility to understand these complexities more deeply, and what lies beyond the colonial characterisations of Aboriginal peoples as either 'deep wisdom elders' or downtrodden victims. Further, and equally as importantly, it gives students

the opportunity to critically and reflexively reorient themselves in the settler-colonial experience. They are encouraged to critically reflect on their received histories and culture, and in the process also open themselves to Indigenous life worlds. One fieldwork course, or even a whole university degree cannot decolonise any of us, but it can create the possibilities to set us on a life-long learning journey.

Becoming Active Global Citizens

When I started conducting study tours in the late 1990s, most of the objectives of study tours were about achieving cross-cultural competencies. It is more recently that a more holistic approach, active global citizenship, has become more widely recognised (see Brookings, 2017). It is a result of my experiences as a study tour leader that I feel I have grown as an active global citizen and observed how study tours foster active global citizenship. These experiences come from having conducted three international community development study tours to the Philippines (where I was born and raised), two to Vietnam and one to Myanmar. It is from these study tours that I have gained lasting insights, two of which I will share here to help illustrate how study tour leaders and students alike can grow as active global citizens. The first of these insights began with a question which in turn helped me to strengthen my capacity to facilitate the development of one of the characteristics of global citizenship, the ability to identify the contemporary impacts of global and historical processes (Brookings, 2017, p. 4).

"Robbie, why isn't anyone talking about the elephant in the room?" It was after the first week of my third study tour to the Philippines that was designed to coincide with a global conference on migration that one of the students asked this question. This happened after a visit to a local women's NGO that worked with Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), particularly women. The discussions explored a range of initiatives addressing the challenges of returning OFWs including investing savings, reproductive health, family separation, etc. I was puzzled by the question so I asked the student to clarify. He replied, "You know, why isn't anyone talking about the Catholic Church and the role it plays in society?"

I quickly realised that, indeed, the conference was hosted by a Catholic women's university, we would see countless churches along the routes of our travels in the city, prayers would open each day of the global conference together with the national anthem, and crucifixes could be found in the shared dormitory rooms where the students were staying. But while there was a discussion of Spanish colonial history and an introduction to Catholicism in the Philippines during our pre-departure briefing, the ongoing role of the Catholic Church in the daily lives of Filipinos still needed to be more explicitly identified and discussed, drawing on students' personal experiences during the study tour.

I had to reflect on this 'silence'. I realised then that as someone who had been brought up Catholic and had gone

to a Catholic school, the church and its teachings were like the air I breathe. I realised that as a Filipino leading a study tour in the Philippines, I needed to be more self-aware about this unintended 'silence' if I was to effectively facilitate the understanding of the impacts of global and historical processes on Filipino life. By making these 'silences' more explicit to the students, they would be able to fully appreciate the complex interconnections that helped to account for the realities not just of women migrant workers, but of all the people they were meeting in the Philippines.

The second insight relates to the feature of global citizenship that the Brookings Institute describes as "a willingness to act to advance a common good" (Brookings Institute, 2017, p. 4). At my final study tour, I told the students, "This is going to be my last study tour." I recall having shared this with the students who gathered for drinks. Anyone who has led a study tour will know that it is unlike any normal credit-bearing class. There is so much curriculum development and logistical preparation required even before you select the students; while you are in-country you are on-call twenty-four hours; and at the conclusion, you still have marking to complete. But that all tends to fade into the background as the non-academic outcomes, like student-initiated actions and on-going professional connections, take shape and bear fruit.

However, as I later reflected on my remark to the students, I wondered whether it might have been more appropriate to

ask, "When will this study tour end?" While a study tour does officially end, achieving the stated objectives of community development is a process that I would describe as 'awareness to action', lasting well beyond the final assignment submission date.

My first study tour to the Philippines, focused on community development and the environment, resulted in students publishing their reflections in a local North Melbourne newspaper. The students also organised a local indigenous Filipino elder and an NGO worker to Melbourne to speak at a shareholder's meeting of an Australian mining company that was negatively impacting on the elder's community, which we had visited during the study tour. This visit to Melbourne contributed to some banks withholding loans which delayed the expansion of mining operations in the Philippines. The second study tour was focused on community development and indigenous communities, which involved a week-long immersion in a remote indigenous community. After the study tour, the students decided to organize a photo exhibition and sale, to raise funds for a scholarship to try to ensure that the community had a primary school teacher who lived locally. This was to address the problem shared by the community leaders that the current teacher was only able to conduct classes three days a week, as she must travel on Monday and return home on Fridays because she does not live locally. A few years later, I received a message to say that the funds raised had contributed to one

of the locals graduating with a teaching degree and that person had become the primary school teacher, so the children could have classes five days a week.

A few years after one of the study tours to the Philippines, I met a study tour student, who had since graduated. She said to me: "Robbie, I apologise that I have not been able to travel back to contribute to addressing the problems of the communities we visited in the Philippines." I replied by asking her what she was doing. She said she was working with communities in Myanmar. I told her that the aim of the study tour was not to encourage students to work in the Philippines, but to cultivate an understanding of the complexities of working in community development, to develop cross-cultural competencies to meaningfully engage with people from different backgrounds, and to act on the challenges one sees, wherever they are. Back then, I did not have the phrase expressing what we were seeking to foster not only in students but in ourselves as study tour leaders: 'active global citizenship'.

The Political Context of Student Learning and Engagement

The Timor-Leste Research Program (known in Tetun as 'Pezkiza Timor-Leste') is a teaching and research program established by Damian Grenfell in 2003 at RMIT University (timor-research.org). While the program is focused intellectually on questions of nation-formation in Timor-Leste, one of its longer-term objectives has been to facilitate

connections between people within Timor-Leste and beyond (particularly Australia given RMIT's location). This objective has been driven by the fact that while the repressiveness of the Indonesian occupation (1975 to 1999) had resulted in few foreigners having sustained first-hand knowledge of life in Timor-Leste, following independence the territory was comparably saturated by foreign workers undertaking a wide variety of humanitarian, security, development and peacebuilding initiatives. While the latter was at once much needed the international presence could nevertheless at times be characterised as unreflexive, instrumentalising and limited in terms of building longer-term forms of solidarity. Extending on themes explored earlier in this chapter (see for instance Mullan), the focus in this case study is on how a study tour to Timor-Leste facilitated new sets of long-term engagement by students that have endured more than a decade on.

Since its formation, the Timor-Leste Research Program (TLR) has taken a multi-dimensional approach to engagement while seeking to be cognisant of the impact of working in both a post-colonial and post-conflict context. It is never possible, as an academic, to work freely of the power dynamics that sustain acute imbalances between a Global North and Global South for the very fact that academia has itself been so bound up perpetuating power inequities. That said, via the TLR there has long been the attempt to encourage a form of engagement that is framed by some form of mutuality and solidarity rather

than a one-sided instrumentalism that mimics other forms of foreign extraction. Both teaching and research endeavours have sought to de-emphasize the 'individual narrative' and rather try to see each act as endeavours of exchange and the forming of social ties, reciprocity and solidarity. This has meant for instance holding conferences both in Melbourne and Dili where East Timorese organizing and representation was central, East Timorese attending courses at RMIT University (see below), of translating and distributing research within Timor-Leste, facilitating publishing opportunities and co-presenting research with fellow East Timorese researchers, and so forth. A study tour—which by its nature draws together students who are often inexperienced working and studying in particular sites—risks accentuating power imbalances if students gain far more benefit from the experience than a local community. Given this, much thought was put into whether a study to Timor-Leste was even legitimate (did Timor need another plane load of students?) and in turn was there any hope in being able to organise one that might allow great learning and in turn for new sets of longer-term connections across societies?

Following eight years of work in Timor-Leste, a study tour was initiated in 2011 that drew both undergraduate and postgraduate students together to investigate the consequences of Western-led humanitarian interventions. Subtitled 'Contextualising the Development-Peace-Security Nexus' the tour sought to engage with critical sympathy the attempt to

address the consequences of mass societal violence by an international community. For a study tour it was comparatively small—twelve students, one RMIT staff member and a number of East Timorese working to support in country activities—and comprised both significant pre-departure sessions along with debriefs with students on their return. On the study tour itself areas of focus centred on the kinds of generic intervention templates that had been deemed certain to create peace (as in the 'liberal peace') and what this approach had meant for East Timorese in the pursuit of a recovery of the devastation of the Indonesian occupation. Given that over 2006 to 2008 Timor-Leste experienced what is generically referred to as 'the crisis'—where an initial split in the military led to violence between state actors, communal conflict and large-scale displacement—there was ample terrain by which to explore the consequences of the international intervention and its emphasis on state-building.

While longer-term engagement has been a broader aim of the TLR there was little sense at the time of how successful an aspect this would be with regards to the study tour. As with the Philippine study tour discussed above, there was perhaps at best a hope that such an exercise in learning may have assisted students in their pathway to being 'global citizens' and certainly nothing obviously stated in terms of ongoing expectations beyond the tour itself. Nevertheless, more than a decade on, some half of those students who originally participated remain somehow involved, as members of a group

of RMIT students, alumni and staff who volunteer as part of an English training program housed at RMIT, as publishing academically, by completing further study (three are currently completing their PhDs), and by working in Timor-Leste for extended periods of time. While the reasons for this engagement are various and clearly relate to the students themselves and the opportunities provided to them since by East Timorese, there are three reasons that are worth identifying here in terms of how a study tour can inform such ongoing connection.

In the first instance, to answer the intellectual questions framing the study tour necessitated an engagement with a variety of different actors and travel to different districts, centres and villages. As such all kinds of organisations were visited ranging from the Australian Defence Force with their lunch flown in via TOLL, the United Nations in its Dili compound, international and local NGOs, and local government offices. Importantly, students also sat in the homes of East Timorese families, discussed development with village level cooperatives, engaged with locals in markets and over meals, went to Sunday mass, and stood in the fields where agricultural initiatives sought to counter the constant experience of hunger. In other words, while confronting and fatiguing, the students got a firsthand insight into the development-peace-security nexus from all angles, saw the differentiated resources drawn up by actors and the very different sets of approaches utilised. Framing the study tour

with an intellectual question meant that each of these learning moments could be threaded together so at once to demonstrate how fraught interventions can be while not arguing against them *per se.* What was not realised at the time though was that this approach was enabling an intellectual pathway that allowed students to dissent from 'international norms' without disabling the possibility for finding their own pathway forward. In other words, the students could still imagine a future for themselves in Timor-Leste even while navigating a significant critique of the international efforts in front of them.

Secondly, and resonating with the discussion of study tours above (see Phipps' contribution for instance), the learning that occurs 'in place' can have a profound impact on students. For example, students relayed how reading the same article in place (i.e. in Dili) had a profoundly different effect than reading the same article previously in Melbourne. Students were able to take the words about a place and mix them with the grit and texture where the sensory dimensions of being there meant a grounding of the otherwise abstract ideas of academic inquiry. Such ideas then become mixed and tested as part of the student's own personal interpretations and experiences while adding a form of first-hand legitimation to the critiques of humanitarian intervention. This combination of learning can have a politicising impact as a need for action is identified, as can the emotions that are conjured through such learning experiences also motivate students to want to act. Fury,

sadness, grief and guilt were common refrains as students visited massacre sites, saw the impact of development failure, experienced acute poverty (many for the first time) and also responded to the impacts of the failures of successive Australian Governments to support East Timorese in their pursuit of independence. Together then, being 'in place' led to a change in learning opportunities that meant a more likely interest in Timor-Leste beyond the study tour itself.

A third dimension that has been reflected on in terms of ongoing student engagement with Timor-Leste has been the institutional dimensions afforded by the Timor-Leste Research program at RMIT University. The study tour did not occur in isolation of a university program of engagement, which meant that there was a kind of intellectual and institutional infrastructure that provided follow up opportunities for students to participate in events, to work, undertake further study and to publish their own ideas. In particular, this group of students have been instrumental in the ongoing sustainability of the Matadalan ba Malu program (the non-literal translation meaning 'shared mutual care and guidance') which has provided annual English language training for East Timorese women at RMIT in Melbourne. While some students from the study tour did not go on to engage in Timor-Leste in an ongoing way (with our hope that they are the global citizens wherever they may be), a significant portion have built and maintained a durable and longer term professional and personal interest within their social networks.

This has been one of the most fulfilling, even if not necessarily anticipated, outcomes of the study tour.

By Way of Conclusion

Although study tours are challenging to conduct and require an immense amount of logistical and administrative work at all stages – including after their conclusion – and although the number of students on a study tour is often relatively small, as compared to regular classes on campus, what comes through in the above contributions is the profound value and impact that study tours can have on those who participate in them. They are, therefore, an important element of the curriculum. As noted in the above contributions, students gain better insight into a particular place and the people who live and have lived there but also, study tours can precipitate transformational changes to the worldviews and the inner sense of self, not only in students, but also the staff involved as study tour leaders.

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Notes

[1] B1-C1 on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

[2] The third and final referendum result from December 2021 has not been recognised by the indigenous Kanak community. A transition period is in place until 30 June 2023, during which time it is thought that another referendum could take place.

[3] Group cohesion is vital for providing the support and confidence which allow individuals to challenge themselves linguistically and to go beyond their comfort zone, where maximum learning takes place (cf. De St. Léger & Mullan 2018).

[4] *Omotenashi* is considered as Japanese hospitality culture, means warmly treating and entertaining visitors.

[5] *Bildungsroman* is in fact a historical typology of the novel in European tradition (Frow et al. 2020) which follows a storyline of protagonists who go through the journey and grow.

CHAPTER 9: CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES IN WRITTEN ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK IN A UNIVERSITY-LEVEL SPANISH PROGRAM

Chapter 9

Contextual Variables in Written Assessment Feedback in a University-level Spanish Program[1]

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Abstract

The 'situated' nature of assessment may help to explain why feedback interventions are successful in one setting but not in another. This study reanalyses data from an earlier study (Ducasse & Hill, 2019) using a coherent theory of context, Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (1979), to investigate contextual influences on teacher feedback practices and learner responses respectively. Participants comprised 15 beginner,

intermediate and advanced level students in an Australian university Spanish language program. Data comprised summative feedback on writing tasks and audio-recordings and transcripts of teacher and student think-aloud protocols, and discussions. Data were analysed in relation to the five systems of Bronfenbrenner's framework (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem). The study found teacher practices appeared to be influenced by perceptions of the learners in addition to task and performance characteristics (microsystem), by institutional policies and practices (exosystem) and by external professional accreditation standards (macrosystem). Contextual factors found to influence learner responses included perceptions of the teacher, the timing and valence of feedback (microsystem), course level and maturity as a learner (chronosystem) as well as by other subjects the learners were enrolled in (mesosystem). The study demonstrates the utility of Bronfenbrenner's framework for systematic reflection on contextual influences in language assessment research.

Key words: feedback, context, Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, feedback literacy, language assessment literacy

Introduction

The evidence for 'the power of feedback' for promoting learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) has made an understanding of the role of feedback in assessment, a core component of teacher assessment literacy. However, too often teachers find the effort put into providing

detailed constructive feedback seems to produce little or no effect. Feedback is often understood as a one-way process by both teachers and learners alike (Urquhart et al, 2014). More recently, however, there has been a shift from the traditional view of feedback as 'information transmission' to focus on a more active role for the learner as elicitor as well as user of feedback (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). The centrality of the learner is emphasized in Dawson, et al.'s (2018) definition of feedback, namely, 'a *process* in which *learners* make sense of information about their performance and *use* it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies.' (p.2) [emphasis added]. Hence, rather than a one-off, one-way (teacher to learner) episode, feedback is characterised as an ongoing iterative process, or dialogue, between learners and their teachers (Leung, 2020; Nicol, 2010). Moreover, feedback is only considered effective, or 'productive', to the extent that it is actually engaged with by the learner and used to effect a change in understanding or behaviour (Boud & Molloy, 2013a; Carless et al., 2011; Price et al., 2011). Hence, understanding why learners fail to engage with feedback, has become an important focus for research (Pitt & Norton, 2017).

Influences on learner responses to feedback

A range of individual learner attributes impacting their responsiveness to feedback have been identified in the literature. These include emotional responses (Dippenaar, 2018; Forsyth & Johnson, 2017), learner 'mindset' (i.e., perceptions of whether ability is fixed or malleable) (Dweck,

2002), defence style (response to perceived threats to self-concept) (Forsyth & Johnson, 2017), and goal-orientation (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010).

In addition to learner attributes, there has been an increasing recognition of the 'situated' nature of learning (Brookhart et al., 2006) as well as of assessment and feedback (Larenas & Brunfaut, 2018; Scarino, 2013; Xu & Brown, 2016). For example, Ajjawi et al. (2017) suggest that contextual differences may explain why feedback interventions which have been successful in one setting may not necessarily succeed in others. Hence, they argue that an understanding of the limitations and affordances for effective feedback within the broader system is critical to improving feedback literacy – teachers' ability to provide effective feedback and students' ability to "make sense of [feedback] information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies" (Carless & Boud, 2018).

Theory of context

The context for teaching and learning has been characterized in various ways, e.g., as macro-and micro-levels (Turner & Purpura, 2015), macro-sociocultural and micro-institutional levels (Larenas & Brunfaut, 2018), external and local levels (Ivinson & Murphy, 2007) or textual, interpersonal, instructional and sociocultural levels (Chong, 2020). However, Van Lier (2005) argues that researchers need to employ an overarching theory of context to enable a 'consistent and systematic view of context and a clear connection between person and context' (p. 205). Ajjawi et

al. (2017) investigated the utility of one such theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework of human development (1979), for exploring the relationship between context and feedback interactions and outcomes in health professions education. Bronfenbrenner's framework allows consideration of the impact of contextual factors on a "focal individual" (e.g., a teacher or student). The original framework comprises five nested systems, each seen as influencing an individual's development: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. More recently, in line with more contemporary, socio-constructivist, views of learning, Neal and Neal (2013) reconceptualised the framework as a set of networked and overlapping (rather than discrete nested) systems to include a focus on social interactions within and between systems. The revised framework comprises:

- the microsystem comprises the interactions between participants and materials (e.g., curriculum, equipment) in a setting that includes the focal individual (i.e., the language classroom)
- the mesosystem comprises interactions between the various microsystems which include the focal individual
- the exosystem comprises interactions external to, yet impacting on, the focal individual
- the macrosystem comprises socially or culturally

determined patterns of interaction, and

- the chronosystem comprises changes in patterns of interaction over time induced by changes in the environment and/or within the focal individual (e.g., maturation).

Using Bronfenbrenner's five systems as the organizing principle, the section below on context and feedback will review the evidence on potential contextual influences on teacher practices and learner responses to feedback in the language classroom.

Microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the microsystem as a 'pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the [focal individual] in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics' (p. 22). For our purposes the 'focal individual' is the teacher or learner within a classroom setting

According to Brookhart et al. (2006) the classroom context (termed the 'classroom assessment environment') comprises:

- the teacher's assessment purposes, methods (and underlying rationale)
- the characteristics of the assessment tasks
- the characteristics of feedback
- the characteristics of the teacher as assessor (e.g., background, training, and experience)

- the teacher's perceptions of the students, and
- the broader assessment policy environment (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992).

Brookhart, et al.'s (2006) study found that the influence of teacher characteristics and assessment practices on achievement eclipsed all other aspects of the classroom context, including learners' prior achievement. However, the evidence suggests that learners' responses are influenced both by the objective feedback the teacher provides and how they in fact perceive it (Ajjawi & Boud 2017). For example, whether the feedback reflects the learner's own beliefs about their ability or the amount of effort they invested ('face validity') can affect their perceptions of its value (Boudrias et al., 2014). Another factor is whether learners perceive the feedback to be positive or negative ('valence'). For example, learners often try to avoid failure or negative evaluation and are less likely to accept feedback which produces a negative emotional response (Elliot & Covington, 2001). Finally, feedback which challenges, or destabilises, the learner's pre-existing understandings or experience, has also been shown to cause a defensive response (Rogers, 2012).

Learner perceptions of the person providing the feedback have also been shown to be important. In particular, perceptions of the credibility (or professional competence), and personal characteristics (such as perceived authenticity) of the teacher have both been found to influence the value

learners attribute to feedback (Boudrias et al. 2014; Eva et al. 2012). Telio et al. (2015) argue that these credibility judgements are influenced by learners' perceptions of the quality of the learning relationship, or 'educational alliance'. This alliance, they argue, stems from the learner's perception of a shared understanding of goals and how these can be achieved; credibility judgements; and a relationship of mutual liking, trust, and value (Telio et al., 2015). The authors conclude that developing strong 'educational alliances' between teachers and learners is critical to improving learners' responsiveness to feedback. Together these findings serve to underscore the importance of the social and relational aspects of context which motivated Neal & Neal's (2017) reformulation of Bronfenbrenner's original framework (Ajjawi & Boud 2017; Esterhazy, 2018). Research also suggests that uptake of feedback is more likely where there is a relationship of trust (Carless, 2009), and where learners experience some level of control over the process (Dann, 2019), particularly in the case of low-performing students (Carless, 2009).

Mesosystem

The mesosystem comprises the different microsystems in which the focal teacher or learner participates. A university student, for example, is typically enrolled in subjects from different disciplines in addition to their language studies. Ajjawi et al. (2017) hypothesize that a lack of continuity between expectations and feedback practices across different

microsystems may mean a learner who regularly seeks and engages with feedback in one class may feel less motivated to do so in another. Similarly, a teacher who teaches across multiple classes may find feedback strategies which actively engage learners in one class are less effective in another.

Exosystem

The exosystem comprises the systems and personnel within the institutional setting which interact with the settings containing the focal individual. According to Leung (2020), the 'infrastructure of any teaching programme is a complex web of cultural, intellectual, financial, organizational, policy, physical … and social affordances and constraints' (p. 99). Examples include:

- the institution's assessment policies, procedures, and culture (i.e., the social and pedagogical values, beliefs, and practices specific to that institution)
- features of the learning infrastructure such class size, teaching environment (e.g., lecture theatre, lab, online), and timetabling (Andon et al., 2017; Inbar-Lourie & Levi, 2015; Inbar-Lourie, 2008), and
- aspects of curriculum design such as the timing of assessment and feedback (Ajjawi et al., 2017).

Macrosystem

At the level of the macrosystem, teacher feedback practices

and learner expectations can be seen as framed by socio-political factors such as the government education and assessment policies and sociocultural norms (e.g., societal expectations and beliefs about teaching, learning and assessment) which distinguish one educational jurisdiction from another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ivinson & Murphy, 2007; Neal & Neal 2013; Turner & Purpura, 2015). For example, Winstone & Boud (2019) found the Australian university students in their study were more responsive to feedback than their UK counterparts. In addition, teachers are often called on to reconcile their assessment and feedback practices with contemporary views of best practice in language learning and assessment (Larenas & Brunfaut, 2018; Scarino, 2013). Finally, the literature suggests discontinuity between discipline-specific feedback conventions also has the potential to influence how learners experience feedback (Anderson, 2013; Clarke & Gipps, 2000; Esterhazy, 2018; Xu & Brown, 2016).

Chronosystem

Finally, the chronosystem allows us to consider how a teacher's practices or learner's responses to feedback may change over time, e.g., in response to changes in the learning environment. Ajjawi et al. (2017) for example, reflected on how feedback interactions and outcomes might change for a notional learner as they progress through the campus-based and clinical stages of their studies in the health sciences. Similarly, in his study Leung (2020) suggests the disposition

of an international student towards feedback may have been influenced by her experiences with feedback in her country of origin. Practices or responses may also change as a result of changes within the teacher or learner themselves over time. For example, the teacher may have gained more experience and the student may have matured as a language learner.

A summary of the potential contextual influences on teacher feedback practices and learner responses to feedback discussed in the literature reviewed in this section is presented in Table 1 under the relevant column or centred when applying to both Learner Responses and Teacher Practices.

Table 1. Summary of contextual factors

System	Learner responses	Teacher practices
Micro	Assessment purposes & methods Characteristics of the assessment task (Perceived) characteristics of the feedback Perceptions of teacher Peers Curriculum	Perception of learners Perceived relationship with learners Curriculum
Meso	Experiences in other course levels/disciplines	Other classes/course levels taught
Exo	Institutional policies, procedures & assessment culture Learning infrastructure (e.g., class sizes, teaching environments, timetabling)	
Macro	Socio-political factors & sociocultural norms Disciplinary conventions Dominant learning theories	
Chrono	Year level Maturation Previous experiences with feedback	Training Experience

Rationale

Leung (2020) has identified a need for research into learner responses to feedback which is situated in specific curricular contexts (p.105). Others have called for empirical studies on the influence of contextual factors on teacher assessment (and feedback) practices (Xu & Brown, 2016). Ajjawi et al.'s (2017) paper appears to be one of the few to use a coherent theoretical framework to consider potential contextual influences on both feedback practices and learner responses. However, while Ajjawi et al. (2017) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework to reflect on the experience of a *hypothetical* learner at different stages of a health professions education course, this study will use the framework to consider how contextual factors appear to influence *actual* teacher feedback practices and learner responses across different levels of a university-level language program.

Research questions

This paper investigates the influence of context on feedback using data from a previous study of summative feedback in a Spanish language program at an Australian university (Ducasse & Hill, 2019). Specifically, this previous study investigated how the teacher's feedback practices might inform revisions to a teacher assessment literacy research tool and vice versa (praxis). In this study we revisited the data using the five systems of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework of human development (1979) to investigate two main research questions:

1. How do contextual factors influence a teacher's written feedback practices, and
2. How do contextual factors influence learner responses to written feedback?

For RQ1 the focal individual is the language teacher and for RQ2 the focal individual is the student.

Details of original study

This section summarises the methods used in the original study (Ducasse & Hill, 2019).

The study was carried out in collaboration by a university Spanish teacher (herein referred to as T) and an external language assessment researcher (herein referred to as R). Participants comprised 15 student volunteers from beginner (CEFR A1), intermediate (CEFR B1), and advanced (CEFR C) levels of a university Spanish program (i.e., five from each level). Data collection progressed in four distinct stages and focussed on feedback on the final assessment task for each of the three course levels (Table 2).

Firstly, T produced think aloud protocols (Ericsson & Simon, 1993) as she provided written feedback on each student. Secondly, R met with each student (herein referred to as S) and asked them to think aloud as they read their feedback and then discuss their responses. Thirdly, R asked T to think aloud as she read her original feedback and again as she read a transcript of the respective student's response to their feedback. Both then discussed her reactions. Finally, the T and

R met to discuss themes emerging from data from each of the three levels in turn.

Transcriptions of audio-recordings of these sessions provided the data used in the current study.

Table 2. Assessment tasks for each level

Level	Task	Details	Length	Marking/ Criteria	Comments
Beg.	Exam	Use picture prompts to describe daily routine in 3rd person	10 sentences	Accuracy: 1 point per sentence minus ¼ point per error	Coordinator specified marking scheme
Int.	Essay	Describe life & times of chosen artist	400 words	Structure, cohesion, ease for reader content, vocab & grammar	Criteria made available to Ss in advance
Adv.	Reflective journal	Weekly reflections on learning	3000 words	Relevance, depth, clarity, honestycreativity, critical thinking, etc.	Criteria discussed, clarified and practiced in class.

Analysis

Data were analysed in NVIVO (Version 11) by both T and R. Each independently assigned provisional codes for each transcription before comparing coding, revising, re-organising,

or merging existing codes and creating new coding categories as the analysis progressed.

In the first instance, coding was organised under the headings of macro, institutional and classroom contexts. However, this representation of context did not allow us to account for potentially important individual teacher or student variables, which have traditionally been viewed as distinct from the classroom context (Brookhart et. al. 2006; Norris, 2014). By taking the perspective of the focal individual, Bronfenbrenner's framework allows teachers and learners and the relations between them to be viewed as integral to their respective contexts. That is, when the learner is the focal individual, the teacher can be treated as a component of the learner's classroom context and vice versa.

Results and discussion

This section will discuss the results for each of the two research questions respectively.

RQ 1. ***How do contextual factors influence the teacher's written feedback practices?***

The nature of the assessment task (microsystem) appeared to have a significant influence on the type of feedback provided to students. Feedback for the Beginner-level task, a grammar-focussed written exam, largely comprised a summative tick for each correct sentence, whereas feedback for the Advanced-level (Reflection) task, took a variety of formative forms from 'smiley faces' to explanatory comments.

There was also evidence that T instinctively adjusted the

terminology used in her feedback according to her beliefs about what students "should know" (microsystem), based on her knowledge of the students' first language, previous experience in learning Spanish and/or other languages, what they had previously been taught (by herself or others) and previous interactions in class:

> T: From the questions the students ask in class I get a feel for the kind of comments I can put on their work. If they ask in grammatical terms, then I can write that on their paper. But if they ask like "what's the difference between a direct object and indirect object?" and the rest of the class is going aargh [I know that most students already understand this]

Regarding the focus of feedback, several Advanced-level students questioned the emphasis on grammatical accuracy in their feedback when it was not one of the published criteria for the Reflection task (Table 2).

> T: Ok. I have to look a bit closely at this because I must be missing them. There can't be no errors. [...] there we go, I found one. He incorrectly formed a noun. He needs to put capital letters for 'United States' [S 8_Pe].

Here T appeared to have been influenced by some unstated disciplinary conventions (macrosystem). That is, while initially justifying this discrepancy to R by insisting students at [advanced] level should demonstrate a high level of accuracy as a matter of principle, T later reflected that she had probably

been influenced by her training as an assessor of the official test for accreditation of Spanish teachers in Spain (the DELE), which demands a high level of accuracy.

The focus on accuracy at the expense of other features of the writing was also partly an artefact of the way T had set up the marking sheet for the Reflection task (microsystem). That is, she realised that she had marked the 'official' criteria on the marking sheet while feedback on the paper itself (i.e., the feedback students would see) related to additional, 'unpublished', criteria including accuracy: 'T: I've really mucked up… When I tick on the column [in the marking grid] I'm not really ticking on the page, so they can't see, I'm not marking on the page what's good actually.' This omission was also possibly influenced by the fact that, while students regularly received feedback during semester, they would not normally receive written feedback on their end of semester assessments (exosystem: a discussion follows). When reflecting on the feedback she provided for students' earlier draft versions of the Advanced-level (Reflection) task (which were not graded), T remarked:

> T: I think it is interesting what is marked as feedback to the student when I am not thinking remotely about the mark or providing a grade. The feedback is not from a 'this is all wrong' perspective rather than the idea that a 'you might like to know this'. 'You can take it up '.

This more formative orientation on earlier drafts of their work was corroborated by students: *It was not all correcting*

structure… cf Sometimes it was like "I really like this phrase". [S8_E]

The number of errors in a piece of work (microsystem) appeared to have influenced the extent to which T was able to focus on other features of the writing.

> T: I'm able to comment a lot more on her reflection because by the time I get to this I'm spending less time on corrections. It shows I don't only focus on mistakes when they're not there distracting me. I can actually comment on what's going on in the rest of the work.

In addition, there is evidence that T unconsciously tailored her feedback to reflect the learners' perceived orientation to the task (microsystem). For example, when asked if there were any differences in her feedback patterns across students, T noticed that for two of the Advanced-level students she had focused on accuracy at the expense of other features of the work:

> T: Looking across the five Level-8 pieces three are showered with content ticks and two have none. I find this very unnatural for me not to have ticked for ideas. It is almost as if I was busy looking at expression without even noticing the content!

Further discussion revealed that this focus reflected the students' known preference for detailed grammatical feedback:

> T: So it's interesting and knowing that he wants the correction, also the little microscopic things, and then I get distracted and forget the reflections and like, the singular and plural, so it's been corrected.

In contrast, the following comment reflects T's knowledge about this student's more literary orientation:

> T: I'm going to give her a bit of stylistics here because she would probably like that. [S8_E]

During discussions, T commented that she knew far less about Beginner-level students due to their limited ability to communicate in the exclusively Spanish-medium classes. (microsystem), as well as to the larger class size (microsystem) (n=28). As a result, feedback to them was less likely to be tailored to reflect personal preferences.

Finally, a range of institutional (exosystem) factors were found to influence the teacher's written feedback practices (RQ1) specifically, the primary audience for feedback as well as the level of detail provided. The first was an institutional documentation policy stipulating that formal assessment tasks must be retained for the records. This meant that students needed to request a formal appointment with T if they wanted to see the feedback on their end of semester assessments and this rarely happened in practice. The second was a re-marking policy where students could apply to have their work re-marked (i.e., by another assessor) on request. As a result, T commented that she tends to mark final assessments with the second marker, rather than the student, in mind:

> T: That's very perceptive of [the student] to say she didn't really understand the marking but she never expected to get it back anyway and to be fair none of the markings that were on those texts that were corrected

> were ever meant to be seen by students. They weren't going to see them, ever. so … in a way she wasn't the audience. Well, she is the audience if she made an appointment to see her marks but so few people do it that's why I said she wasn't the audience. It's just a reminder for me to calculate the marks.

In other words, the primary audience for the feedback was herself (for the purpose of calculating marks) and a potential second marker, rather than the student. This meant that she needed to provide sufficient detail for a second marker to see the basis for the mark awarded. This also reflects a commonly reported practice of using feedback to justify the grades awarded, rather than to support the learners to improve (Boud & Molloy, 2013b).

In summary, the findings suggest that T's feedback was influenced by a range of micro-, exo- and macrosystem factors. These findings are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Contextual influences on Teacher feedback practices

Contextual variables	System	Influence
Audience for feedback	Exosystem	Institutional factors
Level of detail	Exosystem	Documentation policy Re-marking policy
Type of feedback	Microsystem	Task type
Terminology	Microsystem	Perception of what students know
Focus of feedback	Microsystem	Task factors (marking grid)
	Exosystem	Performance (number of errors) Perceived student preferences Re-marking policy
	Macrosystem	DELE accreditation
Tailoring of feedback	Microsystem	Class size Level (proficiency) Perceptions of Ss

RQ2 ***How do contextual factors influence student responses to feedback?***

Contextual influences on students' responses to feedback (RQ2) will be considered in terms of their 'dispositions', or attitudes, towards the feedback and of their intention to act on the feedback respectively.

Disposition

In a study of postgraduate level TESOL students, Andon et. al (2017) distinguished four distinct dispositions towards

feedback ranging from outright rejection to uncritical acceptance. However, while some types of feedback may have been preferred over others, none of the participants questioned the essential value of the feedback they received.

At the microsystem level the high degree of acceptance was attributed to T's undisputed authority (or credibility) in this context:

> T knows Spanish; I'm not going to argue [Intermediate_Ci]

Interestingly, this is contrasted with the perceived authority of feedback providers in other disciplines:

> In my other subjects I can usually justify why I've done something. And [in Spanish] if I'm not right I'm definitely wrong… [and the] authority she has as the most accomplished Spanish person … just makes it very easy to receive that feedback [Intermediate_He]

This aligns with research showing that learner responses to feedback are influenced by their perception of the professional competence of the teacher (Boudrias, et al. 2014; Eva, et al. 2012).

There also appeared to be an interpersonal aspect to responses with some students perceiving feedback as an indication of T's investment in them as individuals as well as in her subject:

> *I think it was more a curiosity [about what the feedback said] because I always want to do well in Spanish because it's the subject that I care about the most I*

> *think maybe because it makes me [feel] most cared about. [Advanced_E]*
>
> *R: You don't feel overwhelmed by the amount of feedback?*
>
> *No, it's definitely an indication that the teacher cares and I really respond to it when you can tell the teachers [care] [Advanced_M]*

This again highlights the relational nature of feedback (Esterhazy, 2018), with learners responding more positively within a relationship of trust (Carless, 2009).

Students' relative maturity as second language learners (chronosystem), also appeared to make them more receptive to what might otherwise be perceived as negative feedback.

> I like [feedback] but I also detest it. I've got a lot better at getting feedback. I've got a lot better at being wrong. I definitely used to, but I've got a lot better at not taking it personally. I think learning a language throughout school probably made it easier for me. So really not having total command of something but just trying to work [at] it … No one likes to get not great marks but in a language that's where I kind of expect it a little bit more. [Intermediate_He]
>
> I got so used to just getting everything wrong… I'm just completely used to [the fact that] my grasp of the language is extremely poor and that's fine coz if I'm just being defenseful [sic] I won't get better at it. [Intermediate_Ci]

This maturity also appeared to lead to an increase in feedback-seeking behaviour for this student:

> I've got a lot better at giving things in to get marked, just homework or something, just getting [feedback] so that I can make it better … I knew that I had to do a little bit more to up my level a little bit. I think it's also to do with the fact that I know how far you have to go to be fluent in a language, how much effort you have to put in [Intermediate_He]

Another aspect of the chronosystem, course (or proficiency) level, appears to have had an influence of the type of feedback students found most valuable, with respondents from Beginner according greater value to feedback on accuracy than students in levels 4 and 8:

> I'm only in Spanish 1 so it's more difficult for me to recognize when I've made a mistake because I don't have as much knowledge about it. [Beginner_R]

> I think now that we're starting to write longer pieces of writing maybe just a comment about the piece as a whole would be useful as well and the quality of writing not just the actual grammatical and spelling mistakes, would definitely be useful [Intermediate_Cl]

> The feedback's pretty good in the sense that she's corrected my grammar, but I feel like sometimes maybe I phrase things a bit clumsily so maybe if she could give a bit more, I might phrase them in a way that an English person might phrase them but not so much the Spanish

> was, like it might be grammatically correct but might not sound quite right… most of the students in Spanish 8 sort of have their head around the grammatical rules [Advanced_Pa]

Uptake

Despite acknowledging the value of feedback, students varied in the extent to which they tended to act on it:

> If I noticed that there was a repeating pattern like I was making a grammar mistake wrong [sic] a lot, I usually would go and do a few of these exercises [Beginner_R]
>
> I normally read over it and take some of the major bits that like if there's a rule that I'm consistently getting wrong I'll try to remember that next time I'm writing but I wouldn't normally do much more than that [Intermediate_Ci]
>
> If I'm really honest it's not that I don't pay any attention to feedback … but I'm not someone who is really pedantic about it and sits there and goes, "oh, I need to fix this" [Advanced_M]

At the level of microsystem, certain characteristics of feedback appeared to influence uptake. The first of these was the timing of feedback. That is, "[f]eedback comments need to be provided at a time that learners are best able to use them." (Henderson et al., 2019).

> The teacher provided feedback] right up until the

> final date for submission so I definitely proofed it all and definitely missed some things [Advanced_E]

Secondly, the valence (positive or negative tone) of the feedback (microsystem) also appeared to have an influence on uptake. However, contrary to Elliot and Covington's (2001) findings, this student reported that he was more likely to act on feedback he perceived to be highly critical.

> R: So, at some level you're taking [the feedback] on board, but not in a conscious way?
>
> S: Unless it's really negative, and this is me being really honest, if it's really
>
> negative and I get affected by it you know? [Advanced_M]

There also appeared to be a relational aspect to uptake (microsystem) with some students recognising that feedback entails a form of mutual obligation:

> T is very passionate about what she does, and she really takes on board with students who ask for more how to get better, how to become a more proficient speaker, so I think [that T thinks], "the people who come to me I'll help and help and help. If they don't come to class, there's not much I could do". The thing is, you didn't respect her; you didn't come to class so how can you expect to pass? [Beginner_S]

Finally, students are typically juggling demands from the various microsystems they are involved in (the mesosystem).

Hence a student may fail to act on feedback the context of too many competing demands:

> Admittedly a lot of this semester I've either looked at it and been like "ok, I need to fix that" or I've been like "Ah, I've got too many other things to do, I'm not going to worry about it too much". But after this one I had a look through quite extensively, as [I did] in the quiz [Advanced_Pe]

In summary, contextual influences on learner responses to feedback (RQ2) appeared to be influenced by a range of micro-, meso- and chronosystem factors (Table 4).

Table 4. Contextual influences on Learner responses to feedback

Response	System	Influence
Disposition	Microsystem	Credibility
		Perceived relationship with T
	Chronosystem	Maturity as language learners
		Course (proficiency) level
Uptake	Microsystem	Timing of feedback
		Valence of feedback Perceived relationship with T
	Mesosystem	Demands from other microsystems

Conclusion

This study used the 1979 Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (Neal & Neal, 2013), to investigate contextual influences on teacher feedback practices and learner responses at three levels of a university-level Spanish language program.

The study identified a broad range of contextual factors which appeared to influence the type, focus and amount of feedback provided by the teacher as well as learners' disposition towards, and intentions to act on, the feedback they received. Specifically, teacher practices appeared to be influenced by perceptions of the learners as well as task and performance characteristics (microsystem), by institutional policies and practices (exosystem) and by external professional accreditation standards (macrosystem). Contextual factors found to influence learner responses included perceptions of the teacher, the timing and valence of feedback (microsystem), course level and maturity as a learner (chronosystem) and other subjects they were enrolled in (mesosystem).

However, it is important to acknowledge a number of limitations of the study. Firstly, it is based on a small sample of students, from a single language program, taught by a single teacher at a tertiary institution in Australia. Moreover, the small number of participants and voluntary nature of their participation means that responses were not necessarily representative of the student cohort as a whole and that potentially important factors may not have been captured by the data. The use of think aloud protocols and self-reports, e.g., rather than observational data, means the data are

inherently subjective. Furthermore, as they are based on re-analysis of the data, the findings may be biased by the original interpretations and others may have interpreted the data differently.

Nonetheless, the findings point to a number of areas for further investigation. From the learner perspective, what is the basis for the perceived relationship (or educational alliance) with the teacher as well as for judgements of teacher credibility (Telio et al., 2015)? How do students respond to differences in feedback practices across different teachers (mesosystem), discipline areas (mesosystem), and course levels (chronosystem) (Ajjawi et al., 2017)? With regards to teachers, to what extent do differences in feedback practices reflect discipline-specific feedback conventions (Winstone et al., 2020) or indeed, differences in the nature of the target languages themselves (e.g., between script and character-based languages) (macrosystem)?

In summary, this study demonstrates the utility of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework Neal & Neal, 2013), for investigating contextual influences in classroom-based assessment. Most importantly, in our view, the framework allows the teacher and learners to be viewed as part of their respective contexts, which means that factors previously seen as distinct from that classroom context, such as learner perceptions of the teacher's 'credibility' or teacher perceptions of student preferences, can now be accounted for.

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Notes

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CHAPTER 10: INSTAGRAM AS TRANSCULTURE: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' MULTILINGUAL AND TRANSCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE CO-CONSTRUCTION

Chapter 10

Instagram as *Transculture*: International Students' Multilingual and Transcultural Knowledge Co-construction

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Abstract

International students develop and benefit from knowledge, understanding and skills across multiple languages, cultures and societies. However, their multilingual and intercultural capabilities are often undervalued in Western-Anglophone universities where academic English is the default medium of instruction. Recent literature has emphasised how international students engage in multilingual and translanguaging practices on social media and during self-directed and group study. Building on this literature, this study further explores how course designs in Western-Anglophone universities may explicitly combine international students' multilingual and intercultural competencies and their social media literacy to enrich their learning. Situated in a humanities subject for higher education coursework students, this study uses the theoretical approach of multilingual and transcultural knowledge co-construction to involve international students in conceptualising and co-producing Instagram projects on social topics of intercultural significance. Our analyses of student artefacts and follow-up interviews show that international students demonstrate a) increased self-awareness of their multilingual and intercultural capabilities; b) improved intercultural perspectives within and

across nations; c) emerging disposition towards transcultural innovation across time and space; and d) shifted perceptions of the role of social media in intercultural communication. These findings validate the relevance of international students' multilingual and intercultural capabilities for course design in Western-Anglophone universities.

Keywords: multilingual, transcultural, social media, project-based learning, international students, Chinese

Introduction: Multilingual and intercultural learners

International students develop and benefit from knowledge, understanding and skills across multiple languages, cultures, and societies. However, their multilingual and intercultural capabilities are barely deemed relevant to coursework design in Western-Anglophone universities, where learning programs and courses pivot around international students' academic English proficiency, especially in humanities and social sciences. Recent literature has emphasised how international students engage in multilingual and translanguaging practices on social media (Li et. al. 2020; Yin, Chik and Falloon 2021) and during self-directed or group study (Shi 2021; Brewer 2021). This study draws on previous research literature to further explore how course designs in Western-Anglophone universities may explicitly combine international students' multilingual and intercultural competencies and their social media literacy to enrich their learning.

Recent studies on doctoral education have sought to

theorise a transcultural space where multilingual and intercultural capabilities of international research students become legitimate drivers of knowledge creation. These theories view international research students' capacity for knowledge production through the diverse epistemological perspectives they are capable to bring forth using multiple linguistic and cultural resources (Manathunga 2014; Singh et al. 2016; Qi et al., 2022). Building along this theoretical orientation, this study explores how coursework design in Western-Anglophone universities could recognise, utilise and enhance international students' multilingual and intercultural capabilities to contribute to diverse cultural and social practices. Situated in a humanities subject for higher education coursework students, this study uses the theoretical approach of multilingual and transcultural knowledge co-construction (Qi, 2015) to involve international students in conceptualising and co-producing Instagram projects on social topics of intercultural significance.

International students and multilingual social media

Social media is a core component of international students' intercultural experience. As active participants in social media sites, international students' social and communicative needs have increased their competence in functioning within media platforms in different languages, a phenomenon that Gomes (2018) has termed as 'polylingual media'. International students often undertake a 'digital journey' when studying abroad and they often adopt new 'digital bundles', including

new social media applications ('apps'), to access information and connect with local communities (Chang et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2021). Similarly, a study about international graduate students in southwestern United States found that international students apply their "multilingual and multimodal repertoires" to engage social media audiences, and "build identification performances signalling local and global affiliations" (Solmaz, 2018, p. 1662). In China, social media are key tools for international students in universities to become familiar with local cultural practices (Zaw, 2018). International students in China engage in characteristic digital border-crossing with layered intercultural and multilingual patterns (Qi, Shen and Dai, 2022). Pang and Wang's (2020) systematic literature review verified the essential role of social media in the acculturation and mental wellbeing of international students.

Increasingly, social media has been employed as a pedagogical tool to develop international students' intercultural competence (Sawyer & Chen, 2012; McPhail Fisher, 2015). For example, Gibson and others (2015) designed a course to use blogs, Twitter and Facebook to facilitate students' intercultural learning and self-reflection. Instagram has been used in a range of higher education disciplines (e.g. Yudhiantara & Nuryantini, 2018; Shafer et al., 2018). Handayani (2015) reports that the multiple features of Instagram can be utilised creatively for different activities in English language teaching and learning. Hurley (2019), in her

research on social media influencers, argues that Instagram's 'triadic affordances' at material, conceptual and imaginary levels have provided social media influencers and their followers with strategies for "navigating conflicting modes of representation and self-presentation within local and globalized economies" (p. 1). This study selects Instagram as the social media platform for students to structure and share their multilingual and multimedia projects.

Multilingual and transcultural knowledge co-construction

Central to the conceptualisation of this study is the theoretical approach of multilingual and transcultural knowledge co-construction (Qi 2015). This approach encourages international students to employ their multilingual intellectual capacity to enrich critical debates around cultural differences, flows and convergences. It is expected that international students' multilingual and intercultural capabilities may facilitate social diversity and inclusion and stimulate transcultural knowledge creation (Qi 2015; Qi et al., 2021). The approach of multilingual and transcultural knowledge co-construction builds upon Singh and Shrestha's (2008) notion of international students as 'double knowers'. The approach is underpinned by recent education theories that call for democratising Western research using non-Western theories (Singh & Han, 2017; Singh & Meng 2013; Meng, 2016), which argue for a place in the Western tradition for the offerings of the knowledge of First Nations, as well

as international, migrant and refugee research students (Manathunga et al. 2021, Engels-Schwarzpaul 2015), and which provide substantiated examples of multilingual conceptualisation of social, cultural and educational phenomena (Qi, 2015; Liu 2016; Shen, 2017).

The approach of multilingual and transcultural knowledge co-construction further theorises international students' intellectual work in relation to the space of *transculture*. The notion of *transculture* was developed by the Russian culturologist Mikhail Epstein (2009), drawing on the work of Ortiz (1940) and Welsch (1999). Epstein's (2009) concept of the *transculture* entails the breaking down of cultural envelopment for openness, mixing and mutual involvement. Epstein states that culture is an 'organic unity' capable of transcending its own boundaries (p. 23). A transcultural dimension exists within every culture and, over time, brings about meaningful changes in each culture. The transculture, therefore, is "a model of cultural development that differs from both levelling globalism and isolating pluralism" (ibid. p. 327). The sphere of transculture overcomes the isolation of culture's symbolic systems and value determinations, and also nurtures the ground for "supra-cultural" creativity (p. 330). In this sense, transcultural practice alters the mode of cultural diversity, from co-existence of discrete cultures to co-producing, co-enriching and co-transforming of cultures in relations of interdependence. Dagnino (2012) suggests that,

inter alia, transculturalism should be "deployed as a concept for creative culture-making" (pp. 12-13).

This study uses the theoretical approach of multilingual and transcultural knowledge co-construction to increase international students' preparedness to transcend a default or privileged model of knowledge consumption and creation (Qi, 2015). This approach nurtures the aptitude of international students to use their multilingual intellectual resources to identify and negotiate multiple perspectives arising from contextual particularities for the construction of multilingual and intercultural knowledge networks. For international students, building such knowledge networks is often a journey of epistemological border-crossing, where they develop a tolerance of ambivalence, and a 'mestiza consciousness' of transcultural knowledge creation (Qi et al., 2021). At the same time, they may also develop a critical awareness of the complex, active, and sometimes unequal links between cultural hybridity and politico-economic power (Kraidy, 1992). In this study, we use the approach of multilingual and transcultural knowledge co-construction to encourage international students to analyse their selected issue in a transculture penetrated by political, economic and social relationships. In particular, international students were encouraged to reflect critically on how transcultural processes of alteration and innovation may be productive or destructive, for example risking cultural assimilation (Brooks, 2012).

Developing Instagram projects

This study explores how coursework design in Western-Anglophone universities could mobilise international students' multilingual and intercultural capabilities to contribute to cultural and linguistic diversity on social media. The theoretical framing of multilingual and transcultural knowledge production is substantiated through the task of project conceptualisation by all student participants, which energises their project development, and their reflections through interviews. During the initial stage, staff members focused on introducing and discussing theories and practices of multilingualism, transculturalism, and social media production. Case studies on multilingual media content in mainstream media and on previous student projects were used to exemplify how students could use intercultural and multilingual elements creatively to conceptualise and present their project.

Student artefacts in the form of team projects are the first source of data. The pedagogy of project-based learning was used to scaffold student learning over a few weeks. The cohort consists of undergraduate and postgraduate by coursework students, who come from a range of disciplinary backgrounds including for example, international studies, business studies, accounting and logistics. They were required to work in teams of three to conceptualise, develop and present a multilingual, intercultural and multimedia project on the social media platform of Instagram. Each team selected a real-life social or cultural issue which had piqued their interest or concerned

them. Each team researched the issue in focus using their multilingual and intercultural skills, for the development of salient themes to represent how their selected issue had been interpreted, debated and/or reconciled across different cultures. They were then asked to develop multilingual and multimedia content to weave these key themes into a coherent and sophisticated storyline and write and refine bilingual scripts for their posts and videos. Meanwhile, during classes video and audio production techniques were introduced through examples. Students were asked to use the three main features of Instagram, namely Story, Post and IGTV, to create content in different visual forms for their project. Each project was required to present a holistic view using self-developed video (and/or podcasts) and illustrated posts. All the projects included for analysis in this chapter were generated by students in 2019 and 2020. We conducted interviews with five international students who completed this course. Interview questions focused on their language and culture background, their general study abroad experience, the rationale for their selection of the intercultural issues for their projects, what they have learnt from doing the project and how the project has influenced their intercultural understanding and multilingual practices. The section below provides thematic analysis of student artefacts (their Instagram projects) and follow-up interviews about their learning experience.

International students' learning experience

This study integrates international students' social media

literacy with their multilingual and intercultural capabilities for the purpose of designing a higher education course in a Western-Anglophone university. This section analyses four key themes that characterise international students' learning experience and outcomes.

Intercultural capabilities and competitiveness

This study purposefully and explicitly positioned international students as multilingual and intercultural knowers and social actors. Mini-lectures and discussions were designed to foreground international students' experience and potential to facilitate transnational flows of ideas, contribute to intercultural understanding and participate in creative transcultural practices. Accordingly, a key theme across international students' interviews speaks to their improved self-awareness of such capabilities. One student stated: "It was a great self-realization. I hadn't studied concepts related to multiculturalism, and because of the course I found that I had been quietly learning across cultures. Before it never felt like an ability, or my competitiveness" (Shi, female). Likewise, another student noted that "doing this project gave me a new understanding of my overseas study and life experience in the United States, Australia and China, which improved my confidence in living abroad" (Fan, Female). A third student commented that she realised how she could "use multiple ways of thinking to look at various problems in life" (Lee, female). For these students, participation in our study has expanded their perceptions about their personal competitiveness and

confidence by revealing the value of their multilingual and intercultural skills.

Intercultural perspectives within and across nations

Another theme concerns international students' enhanced awareness of intercultural values and practices between countries and within national borders. Students commented on their incremental changes via the process-oriented learning, first through designing and developing an explicitly multilingual and intercultural project, and then by sharing and discussing their projects with the entire class. One student recalled that "when working with the team members every week, we discussed examples of the cultural and habitual differences in various regions of China, and then referred to these differences in several places in our project" (Bai, male). As another student summarised,

the course has made my values more multicultural. I recognize in specific examples of ours and other students' projects how people from different cultures have different ideas, behaviors, and deal with specific problems from their points of view. This process also changed some of my preconceived notions. It is important to respect everyone and not to judge others." (Shi, female).

In the same vein, Fan commented that she learnt the importance to "jump out of your comfort zone, communicate, and be willing to accept differences, and learn more about cultures" (Fan, female). Lee said: "We used Instagram and our bilingual and intercultural skills in this course to examine

cultural customs, and to consider intercultural differences in thinking styles. We adjust and constantly interact within the team, and work towards a balance of cross-cultural content. I have never had such experience before" (Lee, female).

Transcultural innovation across time and space

International students also reflected on how cultures transform across time and space, and the importance of studying and reflecting on how cultures mix, develop and innovate historically and transnationally. One student observed that the course content had changed how she now thinks of cultures and intercultural spaces:

I have found that intercultural exchange is a space of many positive aspects, including to achieve innovation. Also, I had always thought that historical and cultural traditions were cultures, but I learned that the scope of culture is so large and the culture today we use need to be studied. Like many things, the innovation of popular culture involves collision and integration of different cultures (Gao, female).

Another student hoped that through cross-cultural exchanges, Chinese culture can communicate with different cultures for more understanding, and "preferably to develop and innovate transcultural achievements with contemporary consciousness" (Lee, female).

Some students' projects sought out innovative transcultural examples in Melbourne. One project focused on the traditional Chinese sport of *Cheling*, also known as *Diabolo*. The project reviewed the historical origin and contemporary

development of the sport across three locations: "It originated in ancient Beijing, and became popular in Taiwan. Surprisingly I also saw performance of Cheling in Melbourne Chinatown, including by some youth foreigners [non-Chinese]. We discovered that this traditional sport has been combined with contemporary electronic music and performed on stage. The integration is so good" (Shi, female). Another team's project featured dumplings. They chose one popular restaurant in Melbourne that innovated with their dumplings using western ingredients and seasoning to attract both Chinese and international diners. When asked about their reason for choosing this topic, one student responded: "In Chinese restaurants in Western countries, I have had a different Chinese food experience. I saw how Chinese immigrants work hard to adapt and improve their dishes to survive and to integrate into the local culture" (Bai, male). The team on the Cheling project learned how the transcultural evolution of this sport has been affected by global flows of people and culture. The team working on the dumplings project accentuated how transcultural innovations can be driven by immigrants' survival strategies.

Social media for intercultural communication

This study has encouraged international students to employ their agency across multilingual and intercultural contexts through exploiting the technological architecture of Instagram. Instagram has been carefully selected for its structural features that became a pedagogical and

communicative tool in our study. For example, one student team devised their multimedia project to convey key messages around social and cultural perceptions of people with depression and advocated for a culturally sensitive approach to online communication. Participants remarked on the role of social media for intercultural communication. As one student said: "I suddenly felt that my communication through the Internet with a global perspective was a highly valuable activity" (Lee, female). Similarly, another student observed: "I have gained a new understanding of social media. Before, I thought of social media as where people from different countries easily conflict. Now, I feel deeply that social media could be conducive to enhancing the understanding between different cultures. It could play an active role in transnational and intercultural exchanges" (Gao, female).

Fan revealed that through doing the project in this course, she gained insights into how to use intercultural understanding and communication skills in movie production to integrate in Australia's multicultural environment. As the projects gravitated towards video production, each team worked together to identify a topic, conduct research, determine key messages, write the script, plan, shoot and edit their video. For Fan, "the production process [of this project] allowed me to shoot, direct and edit a film in its entirety for the first time, and it was the starting point for me to continue to study film" (Fan, female). Fan went on to study another degree in professional movie production in Melbourne.

Discussion and conclusion

This study examined the relevance of international students' multilingual and intercultural capabilities for coursework design in a Western-Anglophone university. It contested the notion that studying in Western-Anglophone countries is a unilateral process of knowledge absorption facilitated through English as the medium of instruction. This study showed how a multilingual and transcultural knowledge-construction approach could enhance international students' learning experience. Using this approach, international students have gained increased self-awareness of their multilingual and intercultural capabilities, improved intercultural perspectives within and across nations as well as disposition towards transcultural innovation across time and space, and shifted perceptions of the role of social media for intercultural communication. These findings validated the relevance of international students' multilingual and intercultural capabilities for course design in Western-Anglophone universities.

International students' analysis and reflections through their social media projects in this study echoed the principles of transculturalism (Epstein, 2009). From a transcultural view, no culture nor language is complete or self-sufficient, therefore all cultures and languages can, and have benefitted from mutual constitutive processes involving cultural and linguistic mixes and permeations. Comparatively, multiculturalism, which emphasises the self-sufficiency and value equality

among cultures, tends to reinforce cultural borders. Transculturalism, through cultural hybridisation, dismantles the outdated notion that culture is a separate, complete and autonomous entity. Cultures today, being inherently differentiated in vertical (e.g. social class) and horizontal (e.g. religious, ethnic, gender) terms, are each other's "inner-content or satellites" and are therefore "transculturally determined" (p. 5). To extend this metaphor, international students' multilingual and intercultural capabilities functioned as the antennas and transponders of different cultures' satellites to enable transnational exchange of ideas and transcultural knowledge co-construction.

Moreover, in using social media to connect and interact with private and public audiences across the globe, international students could contribute to normalising linguistic and cultural diversity on the Internet. The presence of multiple languages in social media is more visible than in traditional media. Chen (2012) argues that social media do not only serve as platforms of intercultural interaction, but also as a space where existing communication norms are challenged and transformed. Purposeful promotion of multilingualism in alternative media has been increasingly noticeable (Kelly-Holmes and Milani 2013). Nevertheless, Kelly-Holmes and Milani (2013) also questioned, through their meta-linguistic analysis of online multilingual discourses, whether simply offering Internet users a "smorgasbord" of languages options contributes proactively to normalising multilingualism (p. 13).

This study encouraged international students to become active and critical knowledge consumers and creators by engaging in meaningful multilingual and intercultural practices on social media. Using project-based learning to encourage a participatory and collaborative learning culture, this study legitimized students' hybrid and multilingual digital practices to accelerate the circulation of intercultural discourses online.

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CHAPTER 11: REFLECTING ON ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND FEEDBACK: REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE OF A LANGUAGE AND CULTURE EDUCATOR

Chapter 11

Reflecting on Assessment Design and Feedback: Reflections on the Research and Practice of a Language and Culture Educator

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Abstract

As a Language and Culture Educator (LCE) with over twenty-five years' experience in research and practice in that

field, the author considers the focus on reflective practice in designing assessment and feedback in her teaching and research. In doing this, the author considers both the context of her teaching practice and the history of her research agenda and publications in the field of student assessment and feedback in order to draw in evidence-based practice of feedback practices alongside her own reflections on her experiences in the classroom. This chapter's narrative is founded on both elements of the biography of the author as well as an array of vignettes that illustrate aspects of the feedback and learning and teaching practice of one LCE at RMIT University.

Keywords: language pedagogy, assessment design, feedback processes, reflective practice, language and culture education

Introduction

In this chapter I reflect on twenty-five years of experience as a Language and Culture Educator (LCE) in higher education. I consider myself a facilitator, an educator, with insights into pedagogy, the practice of which is an integral part of my role. This chapter shares my reflections and exercises in critical awareness to present my views as an LCE. Although I spent many hours reflecting, planning, and developing my teaching practice, the thoughts shared here have heretofore not been explicated and shared. The foil for the reflection on my practice in this chapter is my current teaching context. At RMIT over the years, undergraduate and postgraduate

students have studied in Spanish language and culture classes across eight levels, from introductory to advanced. Students in these classes are from across the university, but a large proportion is from the Bachelor of International Studies. In addition, I teach sociolinguistics and supervise Higher Degree Research in areas of language and applied linguistics. My reflections here endeavour to acknowledge the link between practitioner reflection and student learning. They evidence, I hope, the notion that "reflection itself becomes not a means to an end or something to perform, but rather a way of being in the world" (Hebert, 2015, p. 369).

As an educator, I hope to be a role model for how language learning can be part of a person's life-long learning. Experience as a language teacher *and* student has shaped my practice. Because I have witnessed differences in learning contexts as a result of teaching locally and internationally at different levels of education, I have some grounded empathy with local and international students transitioning from traditional to 'new' or unexpected styles of learning as occurs within language classrooms. In those classrooms, I aim to provide a range of practitioner's disciplinary and pedagogical insights used to enhance learning, teaching, assessment and feedback that supports course participants' development and engagement.

In learning a language, you look at what you know and what you are learning, and as you see yourself in a mirror; you are reaching out to the other side, another version of yourself in another language and culture. That space between *where you*

have come from and *where the speakers of a language are located* has been called the Third Place. It has since been adapted to many areas and the concept has been renamed across disciplines. It was first coined by Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet (1999) for intercultural language teaching. It was defined as 'a space of negotiation between two or more cultures – as the ultimate goal to strive for within what came to be known in Australia as intercultural language teaching" (Crozet, 2015, p. 137). Within it, you are making for yourself a new expanding place where you are no longer mono- or bi-lingual; you have an additional language that transforms your ability to communicate across cultures. Intercultural language teaching invites critical reflection by learners on connections between language and culture, while inviting them to respond about how they feel and think when faced with cultural differences (Crozet, 2015, p. 144). As a multilingual speaker and teacher of four languages, I position myself in the continuum of that third space. My work as an educator spans four languages and has focused on facilitating learners in that space between their language/s and the 'different' one being enjoyed and embraced. My reflection on practice as an LCE emerges from the perspective of a a bilingual/bicultural English/Spanish family background and as a speaker of four languages: namely my two 'home languages' and French and Italian which I have studied formally after secondary studies.

The students I have been teaching are learning additional languages while also engaging with diverse disciplines. The

intersection of language instruction with disciplines also occurs at a collegial level, due to the types of research undertaken by my colleagues in the discipline area of Global and Language Studies. The range of research foci of my colleagues exemplifies the diversity of perspectives to which our students are exposed in language classrooms. In terms of the areas explored in our PhD theses, on gender and identity, there is Glenda Mejia's thesis on the 'Representation of Women in Revolutionary Cuban Cinema' and Maki Yoshida's 'Negotiation of gendered language and social identities by students of Japanese as an additional language in Australian universities'. In the intercultural space, we find Jindan Ni's 'Discovery and Influence across Boundaries: A Comparative Approach to The Tale of Genji' and Jing Qi's 'Language teachers & the teaching of culture: Insights into the interface between theoretical discourses, context and practice based on an Australian case study', and 'Intercultural doctoral education'. In the French/Australian intercultural space, we have 'National history and migrant history after the transnational turn: the French in Australia and the articulation of Frenchness' by Alexis Bergantz and 'Expressing opinions in French and Australian English discourse' by Kerry Mullan. This array of research projects amongst RMIT's LCEs indicates that a significant level of disciplinary expertise is overlaid onto the practice of teaching language, which is much more than dis-embedded vocabulary and grammar rules. The disciplinary intersection with language teaching (and

learning for students) is one of the things that can bring engaging with a new language to life.

Reflecting on a research agenda on assessment design and practice

Given the context of the array of research backgrounds of the LCEs at RMIT that inform our teaching practice, I will here consider some of the history of my own research agenda, which focuses on assessment and feedback. My earliest research in applied linguistics was on language teaching at the tertiary level. I considered the appropriate quantity of grammar to teach in a language curriculum, and when this grammar instruction should occur (Ducasse, 2002). Swiftly, however, my focus turned to assessment and reflection, which has carried through to my current research (e.g. Ducasse, 2022, expanded on below). For example, I explored working with older learners in higher education; I was keen for them to set their own goals and show me their progress as a way for them to make explicit for themselves why they were studying advanced Spanish (Ducasse, 2004). I asked students to set personal learning goals and then reflect and assess themselves against these in a reflective self-assessment task which counted towards their final marks.

My next research inquiries involved assessing orals in tertiary level Spanish language and culture learners at the beginner level. I found that if I paired the students with a task to complete, I could listen to them and mark without involving myself in the test talk and thus allow them more airtime to

display their language proficiency. At the time, 'interaction' was not a developed criterion for assessing orals, so I focused on diverse aspects of paired assessment. I explored the impact of asking students to watch videos of their performance and their perceived performance while talking in pairs for an assessment (Ducasse, 2007). When asked, the candidates discussed elements of turn-taking and listening, which I saw as evidence of their awareness of managing an assessed conversation.

I turned next to the teacher assessors, wondering what they observed while students conversed in pairs for their Spanish oral assessment. I found that these teachers regularly noticed non-verbal skills (Ducasse, 2013), students' listening skills, and how they managed turn-taking (Ducasse & Brown, 2009). The teachers workshopped their observations and developed a decision tree rubric for marking paired interaction (Ducasse, 2009; 2010), which at the time was radical. Later, I was fortunately granted study leave in 2011 and invited to participate in the professional development of SaberPro, which was a compulsory generic skill Colombian post-secondary graduate written assessment. That year, I worked with the assessors in the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (ICFES), who marked writing tasks written by Colombian Spanish speakers in their language. There were ninety assessors, and we worked on what they focused on first when they marked writing. First came the content, then the text organisation (i.e., cohesion and

coherence) and finally language expression (Ducasse, 2011). After applying the decision tree methodology again, this time for assessing writing (see also Upshur & Turner, 1995), the assessors used the decision trees to rate the SaberPro written task during moderation training (Ducasse & Hill, 2015) for the next national exam, and they felt empowered to have contributed to the questions involved in developing rating scales decision trees (Ducasse, 2019).

On my return to Australia in 2012, generic skills (also called graduate attributes) such as critical thinking in higher education were being discussed and with a greater focus placed on oral assessment in all study areas. Where teaching speaking in the language classroom was a given, the expansion of communication skills through different faculties across disciplines offered an opening for colleagues at La Trobe and I to explore oral presentation assessments in higher education. We examined the requirements of the oral presentation tasks by observing groups of international students preparing for and presenting oral presentations at the university. We compared the oral skills required for academic oral presentations and those assessed in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) used for university entrance by international students. We concluded that from what we had observed, the cut off scores for speaking on the IELTS were too low so students were not able to speak well enough to participate in classes when they started (Ducasse & Brown, 2011). A study of the curriculum documents also uncovered

that though students were expected to take speaking assessments they were not being adequately prepared for this (Ducasse, 2014). We later undertook a study of oral presentations across disciplines (Business, Biology and Health Sciences) and focused on another high stakes speaking test, the 'TOEL iBT™ '. It is an online test where candidates record responses to computer-generated speech. We compared whether students' speaking in oral presentations matched the demands of the TOEFL iBT™ speaking through a discourse analysis of transcriptions (from the TOEFL iBT™ and the presentations (Brown & Ducasse, 2019.) We asked the raters to discuss how they marked after watching video performances of presentations (Ducasse & Brown, 2020).

Disciplinary research in assessment and pedagogical practice in Spanish provided an opening for co-teaching a translation subject which evolved into research with the coordinator. This research considered overlaps between classroom-based assessment research and Spanish studies pedagogy. Language students in a third/fourth-year translation course for language majors were the foil to enhance learning amongst colleagues. The coordinator studied Italian and became a literary translator lecturing on theory and practice in English. A native French speaker specialist in contemporary French literature, and I, a Spanish/English Bilingual and applied linguist, were tutors. We sourced the weekly class texts for tasks on various translation skills that matched the lecture topic to tutor groups of students in our language. When I was a student, translations

were frequent assessment tasks. However, I had never used translation tasks in my teaching practice because translation is a specialist skill, which is no longer developed and assessed in second language classes.

Matching text difficulty in weekly skill areas across languages and developing tasks was a struggle for us and pushed us to rethink what was being assessed. The three of us were fluent in Spanish and English and sharing French and Italian fluency with each tutor enabled me to compare tasks across languages. It offered a learning opportunity to highlight different perspectives on assessment because we came from three research disciplines and languages. I observed that the application of second language assessment theory in the tutors' practice sharply contrasts with the practice of their literature and translation colleagues. To learn more, I offered to lead an assessment project on conveying implicit cultural knowledge across languages through translation. I pondered how an elusive concept such as 'culture' could be straitjacketed into a translation task and marking rubric.

Working together was a way to clarify the forms of thinking, writing, and assessing in our disciplines. I learned how translation was taught and assessed, and interrogating the process helped develop competence by reflecting on assessment and refining rubrics with the framework developed by Hill (2017, p. 4), which sets out a series of questions for teachers to consider when setting classroom based assessment: "1. What do teachers do? 2. What do teachers look for? 3.

What theories and standards do they use?; 4. What are learners' understandings of and orientations to
assessment? and 5. How does the context for teaching shape assessment
practices?

We presented at the Language and Culture Network of Australian Universities, and our paper was well received and accepted for publication (Ducasse & Maher, 2020). This collaboration exemplifies teacher/researcher praxis (Poehner & Inbar-Louie, 2020; Ducasse & Hill, 2020), where our relationship progressed from collaborating colleagues to teacher-researchers. We learned from each other and changed our practice by becoming more flexible on what counted as marking criteria in assessment tasks for the translation of culture in language translations. Through teaching together, designing assessed tasks in English and their corresponding translation rubrics in the three languages the course was taught (i.e., Italian, Spanish French), we made explicit and measurable in the rubrics the construct that was being measured and assessed. After learning about different constructs assessed in translations the coordinator embraced 'defining the construct' as she explained skills to assess and what to look for in the source text to challenge students in assessment tasks.

Reflecting on classroom practice of feedback

Once you start language learning, it can be a lifelong endeavour, so as a facilitator, I try to help students find *their* best way of learning a language. This is half of the challenge

and knowing that students have different motivations and that they learn in different ways and thus I use many feedback methods to enable students to know how they are going and what to work on to improve. As a teacher, you are like a sounding board where students try language out on you to see if they are making sense. I am there so students can learn to 'perform' by writing or speaking proficiently in a new language. Garcia (2001, p. 232) notes that teaching "is perceived as assisted performance"; this resonates with a concern for student learning, and I agree with Ellis (1989; 2008) that students can be encouraged to discover and make explicit how they best learn to enable practitioners to support and encourage learning.

The challenges of promoting learning can be supported by an "instructional conversation" (Goldenberg, 1993; Perez & Vazquez, 1996; Stipek, 2002) by extending the roles of teacher and student that allow for dual-directional feedback to foster improvement via critical reflection for both parties. I respond to students 'trying out their Spanish' in ways that facilitate student efforts to share ideas and, in this way, contribute to classroom communication. As Scribner (1999) points out, "teachers who apply the concept of instructional conversations embrace the philosophy that talking and thinking go together and assume that the student may have something to say beyond what the student's teacher or peer is thinking or already knows" (p. 202). Its function in class

drives interesting, engaging, and relevant conversations among students, encouraging high participation.

The notion that "learning is performance achieved through assistance" (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) closely aligns with my language teaching beliefs. Students are assisted in accomplishing tasks and learning that might be unachievable alone. It is done through a socially constructed learning context based on Vygotsky's well-known sociocultural learning theory (1980). Rather than conceptualising students as being passive recipients of grammar and vocabulary Vygotsky's work has an application for transcending such a grammar focused instruction by using innovation in teaching, assessment, and feedback to talk about culture, building knowledge and reflecting together on how student learning fits with their world. A student-centred reflective classroom meets the challenges of learning content while improving language at their Zone of Proximal Development (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

When teaching and coordinating an advanced Spanish Language and Society course, as I have regularly done, the principal objective is to transition from learning language as an 'object of learning' to studying content through authentic spoken and written texts. Through an innovative, collaborative, and reflective teaching approach, student presenters lead the weekly workshop by providing an overview of the content in ways that the students devised so that they could work to their own strengths (Tomlinson, 2015). The

central written assessment, which were weekly reflections written in Spanish, aimed to explore their learning and what the content and language learning experience meant in the context of their bachelor's degree, whatever it might be, and their life experience. This partnership with students extended to the co-created development of the criteria for correcting their reflection task (Hill and Ducasse, 2022). We – the students and I, as their teacher – devised marking criteria for the journal writing collaboratively by using student samples of work (with permission) and my first draft of marking criteria. Firstly, the students tried marking their own first draft (not graded), and in class through their questions and suggestions about what might count for a grade, the criteria were further expanded, then were accepted by myself and the class as the 'new' adopted criteria to be implemented for grading the remainder of the reflection tasks.

In relation to providing feedback on students' foreign language speaking practice, it is worth reflecting on Edmondson's point that, "We seek to teach people how to talk when they are not being taught" (1985, p. 162). It captures that 'talk' is the outward expression of thinking processes honed via learning, regardless of language or level. Two examples are presented from my advanced and beginners' Spanish classes.

When teachers meet student expectations on the feedback in response to assessment tasks, they can work together towards their goals, even beyond curricular goals. Assessed oral

reflection tasks were incorporated in my Level 5 Spanish class during online delivery undertaken during the lockdowns in Melbourne during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (Ducasse, 2022a) at a time when language assessments previously delivered face to face and on paper were adapted for online delivery (Ducasse, 2022b). Listening to the oral reflections in Spanish facilitated an acknowledgement of the importance of student emotions connected to language learning and feedback. Hence, with an emphasis on emotions, it was possible to provide a modest but important level of support to students with immediacy while learning a language in an online learning classroom context.

It is worth acknowledging that feedback is not only something that teachers give to students. It is elicited formally from students in the context of twice-a-semester staff-student focus groups. Student representatives on the staff student consultative committee (SSCC) from each language are trained and receive a certificate for providing direct feedback and identifying areas for development for Spanish or other language classes. In this forum, students provide candid feedback on their experience of their classes. Among the questions regularly asked is: "Why don't teachers correct every mistake when I speak?" In responding to this, there needs to be an acknowledgement that learner characteristics affect learning, so it is crucial to design instruction around that evidence in order to make learning and feedback meaningful (Kember, 1991; Kember et al., 1999). Correcting every mistake

in formative or summative language production, whether written or spoken, is an issue when it disrupts communication for speaking and confuses what is essential to correct at a particular level in writing.

In responding to students' perception of practice (i.e., requests for the teacher to correct everything learners said so they could achieve fluency), I made changes to create a safe way for all students to prepare for fluency in speaking assessments. They performed timed practice with their peers. The fluency 'rehearsal' task comprises students speaking and recording fifteen seconds on their mobile phones in Spanish and then increasing the length in fifteen-second increments over the semester. They continued until they could speak about themselves while recording video and sound for five minutes into their phone camera in front of two peers. The peers could then immediately provide feedback to each other, using the rubric and which provided them with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the final oral presentation task requirements through the process of appraising their own recorded speech and that of their peers during the 'rehearsal task'.

In the lead-up to the paired speaking test, students self-select into groups of four class members. They practice speaking tasks with each other and provide each other with feedback. On the test day, the group is split into two pairs randomly, who speak together. The practice means they are learning while preparing for a test. The random split means they are

comfortable with the partner but cannot memorise a script ahead of the test task since they are presented with the exact speaking topics ten minutes before they start a ten-minute dialogue/discussion task recorded in Microsoft Teams. Students receive a copy of the recording with their partners. While students speak, I take notes and mark them individually. I upload feedback comments and the rubric in the learning management system. Also, I send a comment on the learning platform that shows how to correct pronunciation errors that lead to misunderstanding.

Among my current feedback practices is enabling students to understand that the way feedback is delivered and framed is developed in view of evidence. To do this, for example, I have sent announcements recognising that "you might be wondering about doing an oral in pairs", or on giving peers feedback on presentations, "well, research tells us..." In doing this, I endeavour to engage students to reflect on emerging research in language learning and feedback practices, and the ideas that were sourced from journal articles, conferences I attended, webinars, and discussions with academic colleagues with language teaching experience.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that students often have difficulties in their language-learning journey. They struggle with achieving fluency and learn a lot about cultures different from theirs. A possible solution is to offer peer role models who can allay fears about not becoming sufficiently fluent. Spanish-speaking students studying in English can also share

experiences and provide feedback by speaking with students and engaging on topics relevant to the Spanish course to reduce beginners' fears of 'not achieving'. These native Spanish speakers might encourage students to follow the path of many others before them, such as by going on exchange, or undertaking an internship or an intensive course in a Spanish speaking country. I have invited PhD students from Spanish speaking countries to Spanish 4 to discuss how they felt about learning English before coming to RMIT. Then they speak in Spanish about their research topic relevant to class content, for example, the impact of woodburning heaters on health in disadvantaged areas in Chile. Similarly, a Colombian student completing a Spanish Art PhD was invited to lead Spanish 4 around the National Gallery of Victoria Spanish art collection for a similar exchange about study in Australia, with the added Spanish input for the art tour. I have organised these talks in the hope that these native Spanish-speakers might encourage students to advance their language learning still further.

Conclusion

Before I embarked on a path to engage regularly in explicit critical reflection, I had less awareness of theoretical frameworks that underpin teaching. I had given precedence to practical implications of decisions taken for the classroom experience. However, through participation in relation to feedback and assessment, I gained insight into how students perceive and use feedback as part of a chain of learning experiences. Exploring how to make a fair marking grid, then

seeking to apply it justly, and then observing students react to and interpret the feedback provided, formed a cycle of feedback (see Figure 1) that, it is hoped, improves the teaching and feedback practices in my courses.

Figure 1. The feedback chain reaction (Ducasse & Hill, 2019)

In this cycle and my teaching, teacher and student collaboration in learning has been deliberately made more explicit to the students via the cycle of reflection and learning. By working together, the practitioner provides a learning context, and, in their way, students show me that they are learning so it can be reported on and assessed. There is an intent to approach teaching with transparency and the expectation that learning is co-constructed.

Key points learned from this multi-pronged reflection on my teaching and learning is that it has, I think, generalisability to pedagogy in other disciplines. I have sought to contribute to the scholarship of learning and teaching in relation to

assessment moderation in conjunction with staff from the Social Work discipline area. Internationally I was invited to an Erasmus teaching exchange at UPF Barcelona to present my RMIT feedback research. Since 2021, I have been working with them on research into in the assessment of plurilingual discursive competence and feedback literacy.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I have sought to explain my ethos as a language and culture educator at RMIT University via insights drawn from my disciplinary overlap of applied linguistics and language pedagogy. With insights from applied linguistics and language pedagogy combined with critical reflections informed by the scholarship of learning and teaching, this chapter demonstrated proactive ways to support the engaged, global and transformative educational experience of our students including, but by no means limited to, those specialising in language studies. This chapter also calls for the opening and widening of an ongoing agenda that continuously explores and makes explicit the Language and Culture Educators' orientation towards effective pedagogy in an ever-evolving higher education context. In turn, it seeks to contribute to "the collective understanding of effective teaching" (Devlin & Samarawicrema, 2010, p. 122).

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CHAPTER 12 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, TEACHER IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A DUOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Chapter 12

The COVID-19 Pandemic, Teacher Identity and Language Education: A Duoethnographic Approach

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Abstract

In this paper, two language teachers—Maki and Jindan, teaching Japanese and Chinese respectively, will reflect on their teaching experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic through duoethnography. Duoethnography is an emerging research methodology for two or more researchers to share their

personal history and experiences through dialogues to explore the multiple perspectives of understanding the world.

The abrupt transition to online teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 required the authors to swiftly adapt to digital learning and the new pedagogical environment. However, being swamped with unprecedented tasks, we hardly had an opportunity to stop and ponder on the changes occurring around and about us in the tertiary language education context. This study aims at reflecting upon our experiences as language teachers during the pandemic and providing insights into how our identities are complicatedly intertwined with the past, present and future of our private and professional spaces. We invite our readers to enter our conversation and explore the meaning of language education in the time of uncertainty and conflict.

Keywords: Duoethonography, Language Education, Identity, Pedagogy, Digital Learning

Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit Wuhan, a city in central China, and spread across mainland China, vital personal protective equipment such as surgical masks and protective suits were in short supply. During this challenging time, many countries generously donated the necessary protective materials to China, and Japan was among them. A heart-warming couplet was subscribed on some of the donated goods from Japan, "山川異域，風月同天 (Chinese: shan

chuan yi yu, *feng yue tong tian*; Japanese: sansen iki o koto ni sure domo, *fūgetsu ten wo onaji usu*)," which means "though we may live in different lands, we share the wind and the moon under the same sky." The couplet is an excerpt from a poem written by the Japanese Prince Nagaya (684–729) about 1300 years ago. Prince Nagaya sent the poem to the noted Chinese monk Jianzhen (Ganjin in Japanese), inviting Jianzhen to come to Japan and propagate Buddhism. The couplet caused a great sensation in news and social media in China and Japan (Hirai, 2020), reminding people of the importance of humanity in a time of crisis and the deep cultural bond between China and Japan.

This episode intersects with the life and professional experiences of this chapter's two authors: Maki and Jindan, teaching Japanese and Chinese respectively at RMIT University's Australian campus. The pandemic that started in 2020 brought unprecedented changes and challenges around us, resulting in a financial crisis that saw large-scale restructuring and redundancies to the Australian tertiary education sector. Language courses in some universities were closed without the prospect of re-opening.[1] The abrupt transition from face-to-face to online teaching necessitated our swiftly adapting to the new pedagogical environment. Besides that, the frustration against the pandemic, along with rising political tension between Australia and China, led to growing hostility toward Chinese communities (The ASIAN AUSTRALIAN ALLIANCE, 2021), to which Jindan and

many of Maki and Jindan's students belong. All these drastic changes have drawn us to ponder on our teaching practice and our identities as language teachers. We ask: What is the meaning of language education and what can we, as academics and language teachers, contribute to broader society in one of the most challenging times that contemporary societies have faced? The opening story symbolizes what we aspire to achieve and what we believe could be nurtured through language education: shared humanity and empathy toward the "other."

In Australia (and arguably in other English-speaking countries), the status of language education as a tertiary-level subject has faced scrutiny, often from within tertiary institutions. In the midst of the financial crisis and massive redundancies at universities, in June 2020, the Australian Government announced the "Job-ready Graduates Package" in which languages were also included as part of the skillset that would be of benefit to Australian students' employability. This package aims to equip students with necessary qualifications for their future jobs, bridging students, industry, and the wider society (The Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). As academics teaching language, we welcome the government's emphasis and promotion of language education. However, the "job-ready package" could underscore the preconception that language education is purely skill-based, divorced from "content," and does not dovetail with the mission of producing and disseminating knowledge in the universities. Consequently, language

programs would be confronted with an existential crisis because their scholarly and educational contributions to academia and society are underrated.

In this chapter, we invite our readers to the collaborative dialogues through which we reflected upon our experiences of language education and negotiated our identities; wherein the past, present, and future of our private and professional spaces complicatedly intertwined. The dialogues reassured us that language education, especially in this era of uncertainty and conflict, not only provides opportunities and platforms for students to learn an additional language, but also cultivates and enhances their ability to empathize with people from diverse backgrounds. This capability contributes to dispelling the unhelpful antagonistic narratives built upon growing nationalism and racism that have often been reinforced by media (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 31–35). It also nurtures students' sense of global citizenship that embraces "political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global" (UNESCO 2015, p. 14). The sense of global citizenship is a vitally necessary disposition that enables everyone to negotiate their identities and navigate through complex globalized contexts.

Methodology

Right in the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the authors thought it would be important for them to record the unprecedented changes occurring around and about them

in the tertiary language education context to "make sense of (their) experiences" (Ashlee & Quaye, 2020, p. 6). After teaching two academic semesters that year, we decided to reflect on our experiences through collaborative dialogues with each other, in order to explore how the pandemic affected our teaching practice and teacher identity, applying duoethnography – a method that has attracted growing attention in the field of identity and educational research. The duoethnographic approach requires two or more people of difference (e.g., academics with different cultural and disciplinary background) to be engaged in collaborative dialogues about their life histories "to provide multiple understandings of the world" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 9). Duoethnographers use "themselves to assist themselves and others" and undertake the mutual and reciprocal journey "to better understand oneself and the world in which one lives" (Ibid., p. 13) through dialogic storytelling. In line with other advocates of the approach (e.g., Ashlee & Quaye, 2020; Laurence & Nagashima, 2020), we considered this methodology a powerful tool for personal transformation and teacher development. As our teaching philosophy and practice always evolve with the changing socio-political environment and our personal experiences, the continual openness of duoethnography allows us to constantly explore new directions, approaches and possibilities in the language classrooms. In addition, one of the key tenets of duoethnography, which has been identified as an approach to

advance social justice (Sawyer & Norris, 2013), resonated with the overarching theme of the study (exploring our teaching experience and teacher identity during the pandemic). Through the pandemic, already-prevalent social injustice further deteriorated both at local and global scales, fragmenting our communities and countries. What the authors experienced and witnessed during the pandemic inevitably concerns unequal power relationships and social injustice. Although fully aware that duoethnography on its own cannot fix social injustices, we believe that duoethnographic investigations can contribute to advancing social justice by revealing and challenging dominant discourses and practices in order to "remove personal, institutional, national, and transnational structures that impoverish, disenfranchise, enslave, disempower, and humiliate people" (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 6). Through duoethnography, through dialogues, we provide our readers with "polyvocal" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 13) texts in which readers can "witness stories and meanings" (Ibid., p. 15) and then construct their own perspectives.

The data of the current study come from five one-on-one online meetings (60–120 mins each, 420 minutes in total) that the authors conducted from December 2020 to February 2021. Before each session, we prepared several topics that we thought were relevant to the overarching theme of the study, i.e., our teaching experience and teacher identity during the pandemic. After each session, we kept and shared an online

journal to reflect our discussions during each meeting, which provided the basis for the topics of the following session (cf. Laurence & Nagashima, 2020). All meetings were video recorded, and the audio data were transcribed by the Microsoft speech-to-text service. The transcriptions were then reconstructed to clarify information and increase reader accessibility in recognition of the active role readers play in duoethnography as they "enter (our) conversation" and engage in meaning making while "recalling and reconceptualizing their own stories" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 10). The following sub-sections explore the three key themes: our life trajectories in the past, present and future. These themes emerged from our dialogues and reflective journals about our journey of reconceptualizing our identities and their connection to the world in which we live.

Dialogues

Life Experience at a Younger Age and Our Current Academic Positions

In the first duoethnographic session, the authors talked about their personal life experiences that led them to their current academic positions. We joined RMIT University at around the same time as early career researchers and shared the same office for several months. During those months, we had conversations about ourselves and our interest in the other's home country (i.e., China and Japan). Still, the dialogues in this session provided new perspectives on ourselves and on each other and, most importantly, manifest how interacting

with different languages and cultures at our young age has cultivated our interest in foreign countries and has affected our life trajectories. By returning to our past, we aim to achieve a better understanding of ourselves and the world we live in.

> M (Maki): You said there were many people working overseas in your hometown. So, when you were a kid, was it something special to work overseas?
>
> J (Jindan): Actually, when I was a kid, I dreamt of studying overseas and experiencing different cultures.
>
> M: Why is that?
>
> J: Foreign lands are attractive to me. I read many English novels when I was a teenager, and I was attracted to the places described in those novels, such as the vast grassland and the howling wind that often appear in the British novels. Stories from other countries lured me into dreaming about traveling abroad. I think it's the power of literature. It makes people want to leave their own land and adventure into the unknown.
>
> M: Yeah, and you said when you were a kid, you also watched Japanese anime on TV. Was it broadcast in Chinese?
>
> J: Yeah, it's dubbed in Chinese. I remember that every afternoon after school, I would rush home and watched Sailor Moon.

As the excerpt shows, Jindan's childhood environment and interaction with foreign literature and popular culture

developed her interest in other countries and cultures. She then started learning Japanese at a university in China, and "fell in love with" Japanese language and culture which led her to pursue a master's degree in Japanese literature. During her master's study, she was able to study in Japan as an exchange student for six months, where she built invaluable connections with Japanese academics. She went on to pursue her PhD in Japanese literature in Australia. After the first duoethnographic session, she wrote in her journal:

> J: Reflecting upon my journey of learning English and Japanese, I realized how much my current life and job were shaped by my previous interest in reading books and watching animation. I am eager to explore more about how our life events and experiences make us who we are, as well as how those experiences affect our way of teaching and our understanding of language education (or education in general).

Maki also shared her life trajectories in the first session.

> J: Maki, may I ask what brought you to Australia?
>
> M: When I was young, my parents sometimes took me overseas, and I really liked it, including my trips to Australia and China. I was always curious about life overseas, like you. I was working in Japan after I graduated from university, but I had always wanted to go overseas someday. One day, one of my friends introduced me to a Japanese teaching position in

> primary and secondary schools in Australia. I applied for it and got the job. That's why I came to Australia.

Like Jindan, Maki developed her interest in other cultures through her childhood experiences. After the first duoethnographic session, she wrote in her journal:

> The session was quite interesting. Although Jindan and I shared an office for about six months and chatted a lot casually, I got to know her more after the first session. I was able to talk to her very comfortably. The relationship between Japan and other Asian countries, especially China and Japan, has been something I have cared about since I was a teenager, and has affected my career choice as well as my teacher identity. If Jindan does not mind, I would like to discuss this in the next session.

After hearing Jindan's strong connection with Japan in the first session, Maki decided to talk more about her past, focusing on her connection with Asian countries in the second session as below.

> M: When I was a child, I often heard people saying that some Asian countries are "近くて遠い国" (chikakute tōi kuni) for Japan, which means they are geographically close but far away in spirit. Because of the Asia-Pacific War in the first half of the twentieth century and unfinished postwar reconciliation, some ill will and enmity remained among Japan and its neighbors. And, many Japanese people seemed obsessed

> with Western countries, distancing themselves from the Asian world. I didn't like this idea. I was interested in Asian countries, and when I was in high school, I joined an exchange program and stayed in Thailand for a month. I studied Chinese at university for one year and wrote my thesis on a topic related to the Sino–Japanese relationship. After I graduated, I wanted to do something that could connect Japan with Asian countries, so I decided to work for a company with employees from Asian countries. My job was to teach Japanese to them. So, teaching Japanese wasn't my first option; it was a coincidence. I wanted to do something for people from Asian countries, and teaching Japanese was just a tool to achieve that. I worked for the Japanese company for about five years, and then came to Australia and did my master's degree and PhD, and I'm still teaching Japanese now. Yeah, so after I came to Australia, I think I deviated from my original purpose, that I wanted to do something to improve the relationship between Japan and Asian countries. My focus has shifted toward teaching Japanese.

Maki has been teaching Japanese in Australia since 2009. Over time, this has become her primary professional identity. However, through the dialogues with Jindan, she found out that teaching Japanese was originally merely a "tool" to achieve her aspiration of building an amicable relationship between Japan and other Asian countries.

Through the collaborative dialogues, both authors recalled their childhood and teenage memories, realizing how much their past experience had paved the way for their current academic positions. During our dialogues, we mentioned the Asia-Pacific War and its consequences for the Sino–Japanese relationship; these are sensitive topics that we had previously subconsciously avoided to maintain an amicable professional relationship. However, the dialogues of our personal experience in this study revealed that both of us developed an interest in each other's country from a young age. In addition to our positioning each other's status as "one of equals" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 21), this discovery helped us to construct a safe space to talk about our life history despite the often inimical Sino–Japanese relationship, enabling us to recapture what has been the core in our career trajectory. These dialogues, at the intersection of our professional and private spaces, strengthened our shared understanding of the importance of multicultural and multilingual education (formal or informal) and opened up a doorway into meaningful dialogues for the subsequent key theme of the study: the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic affected our teacher identity and teaching practice.

The Pandemic, Teacher Identity and Language Education

Maki: Reconceptualization of her Connection with Asian Countries

Since starting to teach Japanese at Australian universities,

Maki has taught many Chinese-speaking students, who make up one of the biggest enrolment demographics for Japanese programs in many Australian universities[2], and has developed a real appreciation for those students' enthusiasm for learning Japanese. However, despite having taught numerous Chinese-speaking students, Maki had not considered it as an opportunity to revive her previous aspiration of improving Sino–Japanese relations through teaching Japanese in Australia, as her career focus shifted onto teaching the language. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt transition from face-to-face to online teaching completely changed her perspective of teaching Japanese to those students.

> M: Last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic started, many international students in the Japanese program, mainly Chinese students, struggled because some of them were overseas. And that's when I realized the connection between myself and China again. Before the pandemic, I knew some international students' struggles in learning in Australian universities. They moved to a new environment, they had to become familiar with new Australian practices, and some of them were not fully proficient in English. But last year, because of the pandemic, their struggles became more salient, and I asked myself, what I can do to help them? I think the pandemic really changed the way I want to

teach and my identity as a teacher and a researcher as well.

Regarding her concern about Chinese international students, Maki shared her and her colleagues' experiences of some students not engaging in activities in online introductory Japanese courses.

M: While some students may have pretended to attend classes by joining the online sessions but were occupied with something else, some had internet connection problems and could not respond to teachers and peers. Apart from these issues, it seemed that some students didn't respond to us because of their unfamiliarity with the teaching style or anxiety in [the] online teaching space. Students from Asian cultures may not be familiar with openly speaking up or doing pair or group activities, and I think if they are not familiar with those kinds of teaching styles and activities, adapting to them online is much harder. So, maybe that's why some international students didn't engage with classroom activities much.

J: Yeah, especially if they were in their first year. It's different from China, the teaching style, and the group discussions in class.

M: Yeah, and they're learning Japanese via English, which is not their first language. So maybe that also made them more nervous. Their non-engagement may be because of their limited English ability or

unfamiliarity with the teaching style, or something else. But there may be teachers who judge those students' non-engagement negatively. I think we need to think about how they felt about the online learning environment in Australian universities and what made them hesitant to engage with the class activities or classmates.

J: Yeah, and there might be some cultural factors that prevent Chinese students from speaking up in class. It might seem daunting to them to articulate their opinions in the classroom.

M: Yeah, exactly. In terms of how I think about my students, I was aware that many Chinese international students were in a disadvantageous situation during the pandemic. Despite the situation, some of them still chose to study Japanese. I was grateful for that and thought I should do something about the situation through teaching and research. Having said that, I'm fully aware that this year's [2021] learning experience was also challenging for local students. So, I think I need to attend to local students' voices as well.

In accordance with Maki's reflection, some studies have explored (Chinese) international students' different learning styles from Western ones and challenged the imposition of the monolithic, monolingual Western perspective of "capable" students in the Australian tertiary context (Lu & Singh, 2017; Sit, 2013). This issue concerning diverse learning styles

intersects with the way those students' linguistic capabilities are perceived and evaluated—formally or informally—in classrooms. In the field of applied linguistics, "translanguaging," have been widely recognized and explored, being contextualized in "the complex linguistic realities of the 21st century" (Wei, 2019, p. 9). It refers to using "one's linguistic repertoire, without regard for socially and politically defined language labels or boundaries" (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 297). While translanguaging may represent the complex linguistic realities of this era, the multicultural and multilingual speakers' creative and fluid linguistic practices that blur language labels or boundaries can be challenged and marginalized in (language) classrooms due to the prevalent discourses and practices that worship "a pure form of a language" (Wei, 2019, p. 14). If classrooms disregard and marginalize culturally and linguistically diverse students' different learning styles and fluid linguistic practices, those students will not be able to embrace their existing capabilities, linguistic repertoire, and hybrid identities. Although this issue existed before the pandemic, it is conceivable that the abrupt and chaotic changes the pandemic brought to their (university) life aggravated their struggle in adapting to a new learning environment.

The collaborative dialogues with Jindan enabled Maki to reflect on and reconceptualize her teaching experience during the pandemic, raising her awareness of the issue that international students may have been confronted with more

difficulties in the online teaching and learning space during the pandemic. Consequently, she decided to examine students' voices regarding their experience with Jindan and Jing—another colleague in the Chinese program—to explore a better online learning experience for students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The duoethnography thus served as a locomotive for her to act on possible educational inequalities that may have been exacerbated by the pandemic, transforming her research and educational aspirations.

Jindan: Complex Feelings as a Chinese-born Australian Citizen

The previous section illuminated the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic affected Maki's identity and professional practices as a teacher and a researcher. The pandemic affected Jindan, a Chinese-born Australian citizen, in a completely different manner because "the global attitude toward China and Chinese has dropped into a historical lower point," as she explained. The Australian government's call for the origins of the pandemic to be investigated on an international stage fractured the bilateral relationship between Australia and China (Packham, 2020). While looking into the origins of the pandemic is needed, the issue had been intensely politicized and led to hostility toward China and Chinese people. Along with the pandemic, a suite of political issues concerning China and Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Uyghurs sparked worldwide outrage and dominated the media coverage

in Australia (Sun, 2021). The dialogue below illuminates Jindan's complex feelings about the image of China and Chinese people that were constructed in the Australian media.

> J: TV and other media platforms tend to strengthen the image of a country through constant emphasis on certain aspects of that country. TV can easily be propaganda. Media show some impactful images to people, and they can really changes people's thoughts about certain nations and their cultures. The images are also posted on Facebook, Instagram, changing and transforming our perceptions towards a country.
>
> M: Yeah, it's really true. And as you mentioned, I think that tendency has intensified because of SNS [Social Networking Service].
>
> J: It's also about "eyeball-catching." What wording is chosen to report the news? Which image is chosen for broadcast? It's all, as you said, political. I think the word "China" should denote more than just the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] and more than what we see in the media.

Although Jindan has lived in Australia for ten years and has become an Australian citizen, she values her Chinese cultural identity. As with many migrants in Australia, she constantly negotiates her hybrid identities concerning her "original homeland" (China) and "adopted homeland" (Australia) (Leong, 2000, p. 60), as well as her sense of belonging to a broader global community. When the pandemic started, some

Chinese international students were randomly abused by strangers simply because they were positioned as "Chinese" (Tao 2021). Many of Jindan's Chinese friends experienced racist verbal abuse during the pandemic. Although such incidents were not limited to Australia (Addo 2020), the above collaborative dialogues illuminate Jindan's complex feelings towards the ideological and monolithic image of China and Chinese people in the media, which contributed to escalating physical and verbal attacks on Chinese in Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

While revealing her complex feelings, Jindan commented on Maki's concern for Chinese international students as below:

> J: I think, because of the pandemic, more people criticise and attack China and the Chinese, but you go into the opposite direction. That is really wonderful.
>
> M: I think my connection with you and [colleague] Jing, as well as my college study of China and Chinese language helped a lot because I know you guys. That affected my relationship with Chinese people. And I think that relates to what language teaching can develop, the local level connections.
>
> J: Exactly.

While Maki is determined to address educational inequalities through research, the experience during the pandemic made Jindan rethink her teaching practice in order to encourage students to engage in critical thinking and question the "bipolarity" of cultures, nations or ideologies.

M: These days, media constructs particular ideological images of certain countries. Because of that, I think it's important to build real, local relationships through language education. Because if you know real people, you won't be affected by that kind of rhetoric and imagery too much. So, I think we can achieve real strong local relationships through education.

J: Yeah, absolutely. When I talked about cultural behavior or something like that in my class, I did my best to explain that "Chinese culture" is really diverse, and Chinese people too. We have different beliefs. So, we can't judge people from just like one sentence or one image on TV or Facebook. I really hope that our tertiary education can do more on that. And I really hope that Australia can become a place where the younger generation will not be judged by their ethnic background.

M: Yeah, and like we said before, that's where education can help us, so that people won't judge others based on their specific social category only.

For Jindan, teaching Chinese language and culture is far more than teaching grammar and syntax, or listing the Chinese festivals. It is, of course, important for language teachers to introduce the unique cultural and societal aspects of the country where the target language is used. However, as Garrett-Rucks (2013) reminds us, language instructors are prone to "objectify the target culture and present members of

the target culture as monolithic entities with marked cultural difference" (p. 862). Language teachers should avoid reinforcing or essentializing the images of some countries because, as Bennet argues, people from the same culture tend to "take for granted some basic shared assumptions" about the nature of their cultural background (Bennet, 1998, p. 2). In other words, while teaching language and culture to language learners, it is vital for us to bring the specific historical context into consideration so that instead of a fixed image or meaning, we provide our students with the transformation of representations and meanings. Through this practice, we may be able to help students to establish an understanding of the multiplicity and fluidity of a country and its language, culture, and people.

Besides teaching Chinese to Chinese language learners, Jindan also teaches Chinese history and literature to Chinese international students. She shared her current teaching practices and aspirations in regards to this course.

> J: The younger generation doesn't know much about China's past. They don't even know much about the Cultural Revolution, and I think that's dangerous. If it is forgotten, we might fall into that situation again. So, in my class, I teach a lot about the Cultural Revolution. This course is not only about helping students strengthen their ability of articulating in their native language; it is also about history. I think it's important for the Chinese students to know more about China

from a different perspective. This is an opportunity for them to see China "from outside."

M: Do they comment on the content in the class?

J: Yeah, I encourage students to discuss. Not everyone, but many of them are quite comfortable with sharing their views. I encourage them to disagree with me, but if they just say "I disagree," that's not enough. They need to provide evidence of why they disagree.

M: So your purpose is to provide multiple views and let students choose their own voice.

Again, Jindan's teaching practice is deeply related to her background as an immigrant from China, the way she was educated there, and her academic pursuit of literary studies. She further revealed how this background intersects with her teaching philosophies.

J: After I came to Australia, after I started my PhD candidature here, I began to see China and Chinese literature in a very different way. I'm interested in bringing those different perspectives, different understandings of China to my Chinese international students. I hope they can learn something that was not encouraged in their classes back in China. I want the students to formulate their own thoughts about certain issues. I think nowadays, when news and information seem easy to obtain online, people can know what's happening in the world as long as they have internet access. But at the same time, it seems that some people

> don't know that well, and it's very dangerous if people follow media opinions. I want my students to build up the capability to think about issues and problems independently.

As a literary scholar, Jindan is acutely aware of the impact of media narratives and how media can be used for propaganda. While the above excerpt concerns Chinese media, she observed a similar mechanism in Australian media as well, as previously discussed. Consequently, she is determined to teach her students that "the truth can't be easily obtained, and we are always on a journey to seek the truth." Jindan's determination is deeply rooted in her life trajectory and her academic pursuit, which has been reaffirmed during the pandemic and reconceptualized through the dialogues.

Our Teaching Experiences During the Pandemic and Future Aspirations

The transition from face-to-face to online teaching was one of the most significant changes to teaching practices during the pandemic. Most classes at RMIT University officially transitioned to online in week four of Semester 1, 2020. In the fourth session of our duoethnographic dialogues, we reflected on our teaching experiences during the pandemic, focusing on the virtual teaching mode.

> J: Overall, are you happy with last year's teaching experience? Do you feel it was very hard, very frustrating, or do you think it's acceptable, normal, not different from face-to-face teaching?

M: It definitely changed my teaching practices as well as my identity as a teacher, and how I think about my students. We were forced to change our teaching practices at such short notice, and it was of course challenging. But at the same time, teaching online was, in a sense, exciting. I wish it hadn't happened this way, but I was always interested in online teaching. The way the change happened was not ideal, but I learned from it and gained confidence in teaching online courses. As we've been offering face-to-face classes, of course, we are familiar and comfortable with that mode. I know face-to-face delivery has its advantages, but online teaching and learning can offer what face-to-face classes can't as well. Yeah, so both modes have pros and cons.

J: Yeah, it's worth exploring online teaching in depth. I agree with you. I am actually a very "against-technology" kind of person. Very old-fashioned. I would say face-to-face would be easier for me, but I don't think face-to-face is the only way to teach language. Online is also workable, feasible. So, I agree with you, because last year I survived, as a person who doesn't know technologies very well.

M: How about your reflection on your teaching last year?

J: Yeah, as I said, I'm not 'techy' at all. I was really reluctant to teach online and to do assessments online, but after doing it for a year, I think it worked out pretty

well. Not as daunting as I thought before, and I think online teaching also gives students more flexibility. That's very important because students are also very busy, occupied with their own life-centered subjects. Yeah, it's flexible, and it also fostered more trust. I think teaching online requires us to trust each other more than ever before. It's like—we have to trust students, and students have to trust us that we're doing our best to make this online teaching possible and interesting. Even if sometimes we know some of them may do some improper things, but we have to trust them first. So, it was a very special experience for me. In this, I think trust between teachers and students is really important, especially in a challenging situation.

M: Yeah, that's true. If you don't trust them, they can sense it.

J: Yeah, they can.

With the high percentage of international students in some of the Chinese courses, Jindan and her colleague, Jing, decided to move those Chinese courses online before the university's official announcement that all classes would be moved online. However, many international students enroll in Japanese courses as well. Maki attended workshops for online teaching and was mentally and technically prepared to some degree before the transition commenced. She remembers those workshops were inundated with colleagues after the university's official announcement about the drastic change

of course delivery mode, which resulted in delays for some academics receiving support for online teaching.[3] By proactively preparing for the upcoming turn towards online teaching, both Maki and Jindan were able to gain some advantages to navigate through the unprecedented change in the pedagogical environment. As Gacs and others have pointed out, sudden remote teaching is by no means comparable to planned online teaching because the latter is well-prepared in materials, resources, and most importantly, staff training, technical infrastructure, and the required digital literacy for both students and teachers (Gacs et al., 2020, p. 382; Maican & Cocorada, 2021, p. 1).

Although our overall teaching experience during the pandemic was never easy, mentally or physically, we strived to provide the best teaching and learning environment we could and obtained some positive results in those challenging times. For instance, we saw the possibility of expanding online teaching and learning, as well as trust-building between teachers and students. With the acceleration of technology developments and the precarious future of the Australian tertiary language courses, the incorporation of online teaching and learning may continue to be one of the key course delivery modes for tertiary language education in Australia. In this context, language teachers and academics are not only required to equip themselves with online teaching skills, but also need to conduct extensive research on the effectiveness of online teaching versus face-to-face teaching (Tarone, 2015, p. 393).

To navigate through the predicament caused by the pandemic, both teachers and students need to develop competency in exploring and endorsing the new possibilities of language education in this challenging and uncertain time.

In/Conclusion

In this chapter, we described how our personal experience—particularly our experience during the pandemic, educational background, linguistic abilities and disciplinary expertise—were entwined, and how these intersections guided our life trajectories and helped us to understand who we are and what we can do as language teachers and academics. As our dialogues unfolded, we came to a deeper understanding of the significant role that language education can play in developing and increasing intercultural understanding and communication, especially in uncertain times. We began our conversations recalling why we were interested in foreign languages and different cultures as teenagers and how this interest profoundly transformed our life journeys and professional commitments. We then focused on what we considered indispensable in language education and what we had been striving to bring into our language classrooms during the pandemic and into the future. Beyond the ability to speak an additional language fluently, there are other important abilities, such as the ability to empathize with the "other," that language teachers need to impart. In the last section of our dialogues, we focused on the institutional and pedagogical changes that the pandemic brought along and how these

changes required us to adapt swiftly. We also exchanged our perspectives on teaching practice and motivations during the pandemic and we believe it is more urgent than ever to establish and strengthen the bond among people who come from different ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic and other backgrounds.

Language education can be both a platform and a stimulus for multicultural and multilingual communication and global citizenship. It is achieved not only by teaching grammar and syntax but also by raising students' critical awareness of ideologically constructed otherness and providing opportunities to negotiate their identities vis-à-vis existing and new norms in language classrooms. It is common that academics who teach languages at tertiary level are from diverse disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. For instance, Maki's research interest is gender and sexuality in Japanese language education while Jindan's research focus lies in comparative literature and translation studies. Language teachers are keen to incorporate their scholarly interests and findings into the classroom to enhance students' capacity for "critical and systemic thinking, collaborative decision-making, and taking responsibility for present and future generations" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 12).

As this section is titled "In/Conclusion," we would like to remind our readers that one of the most important characteristics of duoethnography is to avoid definitive statements and conclusions. As Sawyer and Norris eloquently

state, "generalizability does not rest with the researcher; rather, readers take what they read and generalize from particulars in one context, create a universal parallel connection, and apply these generated meanings to their own contexts" (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 93). Instead of providing our readers with a fixed conclusion drawn from our dialogues, we hope that the dialogues in this chapter would work as a conduit to connect and resonate with our readers, assisting them in pondering further on language education and the way it intersects with individual experience.

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Notes

[1] For instance, Swinburne University cut all its language courses in late 2020 and La Trobe University stopped offering

Indonesian in late 2021. See news articles Lost in translation: universities drop languages to save cash despite fee reduction and The Death of Indonesian Studies at La Trobe University.

[2] For instance, 57% of the respondents to Northwood and Thomson's (2012) questionnaire, targeting students studying Japanese at four universities in the Sydney area, answered that they speak Chinese.

[3] The abrupt transition from face-to-face to online delivery was not exclusive to RMIT University. As Gacs et al. write that some faculties in the US were given only a few hours' notice to switch the delivery mode. See Gacs et al., 2020, p. 381.

CHAPTER 13 DIGITAL LEARNING AND TEACHING: INSIGHTS FROM WHAT WENT WELL IN 2020-2021

Chapter 13

Digital Learning and Teaching: Insights from What Went Well in 2020-2021

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Abstract

The onset of the pandemic led much teaching at universities around the world to be conducted online. Students and teachers alike recognised at that time the limitations of online learning and the experience put into relief what was beneficial and taken for granted in face-to-face teaching experiences. This chapter acknowledges this, but seeks to dwell on both the practices in the online experience of university that went well, or which were practices that made the most of the circumstances we all found ourselves in. The authors of this chapter participated in RMIT University's online learning and teaching experience in 2020 and 2021 in various capacities, including as students-and-teachers, as teachers and course coordinators, or as a member of senior leadership. In these reflections, this chapter draws on the concept of 'positive outliers' (aka 'positive deviance'), which holds that in an area of life or endeavour where there are problems, there will already be practices in the community that address these problems. Rather than innovate to create solutions, the notion of positive outliers focuses attention on existing good practice, the benefits of which can then be shared.

Keywords: Online teaching, pedagogies in higher education, flipped classrooms, quiet pedagogy

Introduction

The present authors were all resident in Melbourne,

Australia, during the onset of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which resulted in long periods of lockdown in the years 2020 and 2021. The conditions of Melbourne's lockdowns have been described as among the world's harshest, with travel constraints of as little as five kilometres being imposed in August 2021 (e.g., Brunt, 2021). For those coordinating classes at RMIT and elsewhere in Australia in those years, learning was rapidly put online when face-to-face classes abruptly ceased. At the time, collegial conversations about the experience tended to focus, quite naturally, on the challenges of teaching online; the loss of the diverse elements of the in-class experience was deeply felt, especially at such time of anxiousness and uncertainty when in-person communion would have been especially beneficial.

In relation to the ability for teachers to reach the learning objectives and experiences they wanted to achieve, among the things many felt first was the changed ability to get a sense of how the students in the class – whether as a whole, or segments of it, or particular students – were responding to ideas and activities. In a face-to-face class, a teacher can gauge that an activity or a question hasn't gained traction or been understood through non-verbal cues, which can be used as a prompt to inquire as to what hasn't been understood and to attempt a different approach. And likewise, if one group of students working through questions or an activity have finished, or if a group just isn't functioning as well as others, tutors can perceive this and respond proactively. In a

classroom, even if a teacher is assisting one group, they still receive, whether consciously or non-consciously, inputs through the corners of their eyes – such as through changed seating postures of students, as when they think they are done, or bored, or unhappy – and through the audible changes that occur when students become excited or when their conversation has petered out.

Online, however, whether the class that has been split into breakout groups is humming along well or has gone flat is more difficult to gauge. Pressures on teachers mount when, furthermore, they are *the* conduit for all communication online. Whereas natural cross-cutting conversations between students can more readily occur face-to-face, teachers often need to mediate turn taking in online conversations, read out textual chats that have been posted during discussion, and, of course, work harder when students seem unresponsive to prompts to contribute to discussion.

These and other challenges of online teaching have fuelled many collegial discussions as well as research and opinion. A report released in November 2020 by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) based on a survey of 118 university students found that, with respect to online learning and teaching, the 'characteristics of what worked well [...] were relatively few', while 'More detailed feedback was provided by students on what did not work well' (TEQSA, 2020, p. 1). The report noted that 'a very large proportion' of students 'did not like the experience of online learning and did

not wish to ever experience it again' (TEQSA, 2020, p. 8). This will be unsurprising to most university teachers, especially given that the report was been founded on those early experiences of online teaching in the pandemic, and certainly prepared by course coordinators and tutors who themselves were harried, frazzled and quite possibly anxious themselves. Furthermore, as observed by Pauline Taylor-Guy and Anne-Marie Chase in *The Conversation* in March 2020, 'Many university teachers have had no experience themselves of online learning and have not been upskilled in online course design and pedagogy' (2020). This lack of experience more likely leads then to a poor experience for students, leading in turn to the sentiments captured in the report by TEQSA.

This chapter recognises this, but seeks to focus on the positive experiences of some teachers in their online teaching in 2020-2021. This is not to say that all or any of the present authors regard online teaching as superior per se; it is to say that the present authors did find that one or another practice that they had implemented or experienced had, in their view, either worked well or at least better than expected, or was a useful ingredient for beneficial online learning and teaching despite the drawbacks of digital teaching.

This focus on *what worked well* is inspired by the concept of 'positive outliers', which is also sometimes referred to as 'positive deviance'. It takes the view that, with regard to a given issue or problem, there will likely already exist practices that address it, and because these have been already tested in the

context in question, they are more likely to be effective than practices that are invented to address the problem. Duncan Green advocates for adopting the approach of seeking positive outliers in his development-related book, *How Change Happens* (Green 2016). There he writes that 'Before cooking up our own strategies, we ought to look around' (Green, 2-16, p. 242). He draws on the work of Pascale, Sternin and Sternin (2010) whose book *The Power of Positive Deviance* focuses on this concept, and quotes them to stress that it is important to 'look for outliers who succeed against the odds' (Pascale et al. 2010; Green, 2016, p. 25).

The present authors know firsthand of the amazing efforts by every colleague who, despite challenges on every front – social, personal, professional and technical, among others – strove to keep students engaged and connected while also delivering on the learning outcomes of the courses they taught. However, the experience of teaching online in this context can lend itself to a focus on the comparative shortcomings of online learning, and have a (very understandable) tone of lament. While these shortcomings are real and the laments sincere, we wish to reflect on the fact that there are learning and teaching practices which can either work well digitally, or which are important when teaching online.

The present authors reflect on aspects of the experience of being a member of RMIT University over 2020-2021 with various responsibilities, including as students-and-teachers at the same time, as teachers and course coordinators, and as

a member of the senior leadership of the university. These personal experiences are shared so that others might benefit from them, and also to encourage readers to spend a moment reflecting on what went well in their own teaching. Each section is authored by one or a pair of the co-authors of this chapter, and the writing convention that is followed here is that the author(s) of that section will refer to themselves in the first instance in the third person, and thenceforth in the first person (a convention that Lee describes as the 'third person personal'; see Lee et al., 2019).

Responding as an institution

As Sherman recollects the experience of the pandemic across 2020 to 2022 in his capacity as Deputy Vice Chancellor Education, there are several elements that came together that enabled RMIT University to respond to crisis that confronted us, especially at the onset of the pandemic in Australia. My reflection here canvasses some of the institutional thinking that occurred as part of the pandemic response, and reflecting on how the combination of institutional guidance and individual contributions helped our University navigate the pandemic.

The first engagement with COVID-19 at RMIT occurred in late January 2020. The Australian Government had introduced a ban on travellers from China which impacted both returning and commencing students from that country. Given that it was also Lunar New Year, many existing students had returned to China to celebrate the holidays and were

prevented from re-entering Australia. As a consequence, the initial COVID response was designed to provide learning to those students, identified across a limited range of programs; and work focused on identifying those programs, and ensuring that there were online alternatives available for any timetabled face-to-face activities.

In common with most Australian universities, RMIT had an existing baseline for online learning across the institution. Its recent implementation of Canvas not only ensured a common learning platform, but it also enforced a number of mandatory elements, e.g. all courses underwent a Quality Assurance process. RMIT also had opt-out lecture recordings in Echo 360 and an implementation of Collaborate Ultra for online tutorials, alongside other tools on the Canvas platform. Given those resources, it was 'straightforward to address the needs of those students initially affected. We expected to have to deliver online courses for at least the first half of semester one, 2020.In hindsight. that was overly optimistic.

The initial work consisted of identifying impacted students, ensuring that there was appropriate online offerings for those unable to return to campus, and providing the resources (professional training, quality standards and technology infrastructure) necessary to deliver online classes. This included creating online learning guidelines, confirming the availability of technology across global geographies (acknowledging the challenges of the Great Firewall of China'), and increasing professional development resources.

University level governance around this activity was built around a collaborative 'small fast team' (SFT) that consisted of senior educational leadership from across RMIT's colleges, and its central education team. Even during the early China-only phase, this SFT met weekly to agree on approaches and make key decisions.

However, it soon became apparent that the COVID situation was worsening, and as the pandemic impacted more people in Australia and in Melbourne, RMIT's crisis team was making daily situation assessments. By early March, there was an increasing nervousness from staff and students around any face-to-face activity, and in mid-March, the SFT agreed that the entire University would cease face-to-face classes. Given RMIT's baseline online activity, the SFT felt that a rapid shift was possible, albeit challenging, exacerbated by staff needing to work from home, as Melbourne campuses minimised their on-campus activity.

Given the suddenness of the shift, there was no expectation of complete course redesign. Instead, the agreed intent was that courses could be delivered as already planned with activities shifted online as far as possible. Therefore lectures could be recorded and uploaded, and tutorials, and seminars could be delivered synchronously through Collaborate Ultra. Those learning activities (laboratories, studios etc.) that required particular facilities or significant reconsideration could be delayed until a return to campus was possible.

Of course, as the pandemic played out, its continually

evolving nature required constant iteration of the guidance and resources we could make available across the University – which involved crafting a set of L&T principles to help guide activity for our colleagues. Rather than outline more than two years of evolving responses, identifying the learnings from the pandemic is perhaps more useful for this piece. From my perspective, there are three broad areas where lessons have been learnt.

The first is the growing realisation that any institutional change requires a combination of top-down and bottom-up thinking. Whilst the activities I have just described represented a RMIT-wide approach, it was always the case that individual academics would have the most impact on the student experience, and that in some ways, my job was to provide permission to act (through an agreed framework) and enable and empower activity within the framework. What we can see in this chapter in the sections are the recollections of some of our teachers and coordinators about how they experienced these shifts and made the most of the circumstances and even found unexpected educational opportunities. The second insight was around that agreed framework though – we had a responsibility to our students to ensure that there was a baseline standard for our online offerings, to ensure that the learning experience was appropriate given the COVID circumstances – and that we had the right support in the form of professional development, technology platforms and other resources to ensure that requirement. Clearly, such an

approach applies even in non-pandemic times and reinforces the need for an enabling educational framework, with a baseline requirement that empowers educators to be engaging and innovative in their teaching. The final insight is that the pandemic pushed us towards a more sophisticated understanding of 'blended learning'. This understanding goes well beyond a simplistic online/on campus dichotomy and requires a thoughtful approach to reconsider what education can look like when all expectations are reset, and how we best work with our educators to co-create the best educational approach for the future.

Cultivating active participation in online classes

In 2020, Laura was both a student pursuing a Masters degree and a teacher at RMIT University, delivering a course for exchange students in Australia. Being on both sides of the teaching fence allowed me to comprehend how easy it was for me to become a passive student online, and then to try to enable the students I was teaching to get the most out of their experiences by being actively engaged and participating, thereby contributing to their own and others' learning through a dynamic and mutually beneficial class environment (see also Sherman & Teemant, 2021). In this section, I will describe, first, how I came to be and feel like a passive student, and then, second, how I worked to establish a positive environment where active student engagement – which, as Wendy Steele describes below, is not to be confused with 'noisy' engagement – was the norm.

In the first few weeks of online learning, whether it was due to the technology limiting interaction or the stress of the pandemic, I noted the unwillingness of myself and other students to participate. I found, as a student in my two-hour classes, that I felt inactive and had little desire to contribute. In thinking about my own passivity, I wondered whether the habitual non-active role we assumed while we consumed media on screens may have transposed itself on to our interaction with online education. Viewing internet content, whether on Netflix, YouTube or social media, is largely a passive pastime. When teachers requested responses from my classmates, most of whom had their videos off, there was an inevitable extended period of stunned stillness, as if a television programme had just asked for our opinion.

I pondered whether while teaching, a few modest adjustments may rouse students from their pre-disposition towards passivity. I realised that not all screen time is passive; in some online games, such as Fortnight, Roblox and The Sims, individuals play a central role in world-building and collaboration (Bonning, 2019). Considering this, I implemented in my classes a number of modifications that, I am pleased to say, worked to engage students . In the first online class I taught to undergraduates in 2020, I acknowledged that we would be learning online via the screen and prompted students to discuss their own personal screen usage, based on weekly usage data that could be extracted from

our mobile phones. We were all, it turned out, using our phones for between four and seven hours every day.

In our first class, we discussed this ans agreed that this was essentially passive time, so Could we commit, I asked, to taking an active part for the remaining hour of class? Then, we discussed what an engaged learning style might look and sound like. The students' responses on what they wanted in their class were unambiguous: screens on and microphones on. We decided, as a class, that this would be expected henceforth, though for equity reasons this was not compulsory.

Also, as in a game play, I provided learning choices. I utilised the polling option on the platform we were using, enabling students to experience the impact of their active participation by collectively determining their own future steps in the learning process. "Should we review the texts together today, or would you rather discuss them in small groups?" This "choose your own adventure" format adopted from video games contributed, I believe, to the development of a positive and active online learning environment. The shift towards framing students as having agency in their learning, and towards forming an engaged online community, where students felt empowered in their roles, fostered an online learning experience that seemed much more vibrant and beneficial than the ones in which I was a student. Although I might have wished for a better experience as a student, my insights as a student did enable me to consider and attempt

a different approach which, I believe, made the most of the online learning.

Discovering the positive qualities of chatting during class

Like Laura, Freda also gained an insight into online teaching because of her experience as a student. As a teacher, I felt quite ambivalent about the use of the chat function on Collaborate Ultra; I wanted students to speak and interact as they would in a classroom setting. I created breakout rooms and activities that would require discussions after presenting concepts or having watched videos or certain topics. Initially, I was always trying to find ways to mimic the face-to-face classroom but understandably, this was not to be. I clung on to the hopes that students would talk. Instead, they chatted through a written medium.

It was not until I was a student at a Summer School that I attended as part of my PhD candidature in 2022, that I realized the importance and value of chat. The Summer School was comprised of presentations by esteemed professionals on career guidance and counselling. It was organised in a hybrid format, more students attending online and some (like me) face-to-face. The pause moments during the presentations gave the opportunity for one of the organisers to read the comments and questions made on chat by online students. When I listened to the comments being read out, I realised the value of these short written contributions as an opportunity for students to reflect on what they were learning as the

presentation was unfolding; it also enabled their colleagues to be part of a community and reflect on the comments they were reading. Simultaneous 'chatting' would enhance their learning as well – listening to what the expert says and at the same time having other people verify what they were hearing, asking questions and providing examples on how the subject relates to their career practice and experiences. Students physically present in the room obviously had the opportunity to speak and ask questions, but there was something about the simultaneous input of the different voices through the chat function that made the learning experience seem richer. Through 'chat' created a feeling of connection to others; it was conversational and dynamic, and the content felt more accessible. Even though I sat in the room listening to relevant and interesting content, without access to the chat, I would not feel a connection with the content *as it was unfolding*.

This experience and subsequent reflection on it reminded me of a webinar I attended in my capacity as a career counselor, which was about how to engage with clients remotely in counseling sessions. The importance of text-based interactions in counselling was noted for many reasons – it created a "disinhibiting effect", it allowed clients to reflect on how they communicated their issues, but also helped the counsellor develop rapport with the client as they understood a client's cognitive processes through their written comments (Anthony, 2000; Suler, 2000). This instigated thinking about how I could use the written word as a reflection tool for the

(student) writer and the (student) audience to keep students engaged in the online classroom. By encouraging students to write in the chat and reflect as I spoke or as their peers presented, I realised that this wasn't a distraction but, instead, could foster engagement and aid learning. There are many exemplary techniques to make online teaching more engaging, but I needed to be a student, to empathize with the needs of the online learner, to be able to value the relevance and benefits of the chat function which I had previously underappreciated (see also Burnett, 2003).

Making the most of and creating opportunities in a university moved online

Virtual classes may not have been initially attractive for those students who had enjoyed the vibrance of campus-life prior to 2020. For Riccardo Serbolonghi, who was a third-year International Studies undergraduate in 2020, the difference in learning environments was acutely felt. However, despite the shortcomings of a fully remote learning experience, I came to appreciate some of the benefits, and sought to make the most of an online university experience. Between 2020 and 2022, I moved from being an undergraduate to an Honours year conducting research for a minor thesis in 2021, and then acting as a tutor for a first-year class that I myself had taken four years prior. Thus, like Laura and Freda above, I experienced the pandemic as both a student and a teacher, and holding multiple roles within the university enabled me to understand the value of being a proactive student who engages

in crafting their own study, whatever the circumstances at hand. While acknowledging the alienation inherent in online learning, in what follows, I draw on the concept of study crafting, and also outline how students can make the most of a virtual learning environment, drawing on my own experiences 2020-2022.

As Laura discussed above, remote learning can generate a feeling of alienation among tertiary education students (see also Rudolph et al., 2021). As a third-year student in 2020 I was already aware of RMIT's various services to support students and had made connections with my peers. However, I imagine that the shift to online learning for those in their first year of university could have felt extremely isolating, since students frequently left their webcams switched off during tutorials, which made it hard to ascertain who was really engaged and there to share ideas about the content we were covering. The alienation seemed heightened by the fact that, upon the conclusion of classes, there was the realisation that there was no distinction between one's learning and leisure space, particularly at a time when stay-at-home orders were in place.

Despite these circumstances, there was scope to engage. Having classes online offered opportunities to take breaks in ways that were less likely pre-COVID, such as going for walks around the block or spending more time with relatives (whether virtually or in person if they lived nearby enough). Further opportunities to interact with peers were developed by

some outstanding members of my cohort in the Bachelor of International Studies. They organized informal virtual sessions that aimed to bring together students for various activities. An example was the "Definitely Maybe" social gathering, which centred on the discussion of political events. Academics from my degree also created occasions to socialise, for example by reinventing, for the virtual space, a decade-old tradition of gathering International Studies students for 'tea time'.

Group work for classes also remained possible online. Pre-COVID, group work would often take place both in class but also, by arrangement, outside of classes. These latter meetings required some coordination and when I worked on group projects in early 2021, even though we could meet physically, we often chose not to. Meeting online had positive aspects; it was much easier to coordinate and host meetings virtually, without having to consider the time required for the commute to campus or to find days when people were coming in anyway. And while I do not suggest that an online university experience is superior, I do believe that it is not only characterised by that which it lacks and by absences.

Empirical observations have demonstrated that a university experience that incorporates study crafting leads to higher levels of satisfaction with one's tertiary education experience (Mülder, 2022). My own university experience was not distinguished by the classes I attended and the completion of assignments. Instead, it was the level of academic support and extra-curricular opportunities that were available to me, such

as leadership workshops and library services to name but two, which enabled me to appreciate my experience as an RMIT student and to make the most of it. What is required, however, is not only a proactive student, but also a dedicated cohort of peers and supportive university staff that can draw in those students who might not be as proactive or aware of all available opportunities.

As a student, I found ways to enrich my university experience through online seminars and sessions held by the JobShop, RMIT University's careers' department. I vividly recall a session I attended run by the JobShop which offered the opportunity to receive insights from an industry partner who dialled in from Vietnam. The purpose of that session was to provide recommendations for virtual interviews and, as Glenda Mejia notes in the following section, the opportunities for global engagements were made more accessible by our shift to online learning.

The value of proactivity, for students seeking opportunities and for the university that creates them, is, for me personally, evident in the fact that, despite the poor job market at the time, I sought and acquired employment through RMIT's JobShop portal. This paid professional employment opportunity has contributed to developing my workplace experience and my soft skills and opened up possibilities to be involved in short-term paid projects in various parts of the university. The array of online engagements I experienced show that there is more

to an 'online university' than what one misses out on by not being on campus.

The global collaborations/possibilities of online teaching

When the pandemic hit our classrooms, Glenda put on her creative hat as an educator and thought how to deliver her lectures (sessions) once face-to-face lectures were no longer possible. In 2021, she inherited a course called Global Mobility and Ethnic Relations (henceforth GloMo) from a colleague who left RMIT during the pandemic. Glenda began to create a new course using a decolonial lens and a 'sensing thinking' approach (Falds Borda 2015; Rendón 2008). In order to see im/migrants, refugees, and displaced people as humans we need to *sentir* (feel), and here is where 'sensing pedagogy' comes in. This pedagogy refers to teaching and learning with the heart/spirit and mind. Orlando Fals Borda, a Colombian sociologist, wanted to know the culture of fishermen of the Colombian coast and while learning and working with them, he learnt the concept of *sentipensantes* (sensing thinkers), a term that means that one acts with both heart and mind, and is now used by some scholars, including myself. The purpose of these approaches is to bring other voices, particular from the People of the Global Majority (PGM), who could share their knowledge/s with us, and to create a co-teaching and co-learning space in which we can be in dialogue with every text in a sensing-thinking form about local and global im/migration, mobility, and displacement topics (e.g., Indigenous, settlers,

refugees, asylum seekers, among others). With this in mind, as we moved to online teaching, I was encouraged to use a pedagogy that fostered a critical review of already established cultural and historical content in an open and a dynamic form within my online sessions. The best way to do this was to invite guest speakers from other areas, who knew a particular field better than myself, to our sessions.

I know guest speakers have long been part of lectures at universities, but most of the time theirs have been in-person presentations, and often the guest speakers have been colleagues within the same university. However, I saw a crack and heard the voice of Catherine Walsh (2020) reminding me about how to *agrietar y sembrar* (to crack and to sow), and how, if we pay attention, we can see seeds growing from those cracks. I then put that insight into practice for the benefit of the course, the students, and my own un-/re-learning journey.

In the past, I have often contacted the author of a book, an article or book chapter that made an impact on my teaching, and in my life, without expecting a response. It was just as a gesture of gratitude for teaching me a new way of seeing things. Starting in 2021, I began to contact some of those writers, educators, activists, and researchers who had responded to me in previous years. I then asked if they could do a session for my course on a particular topic in any style they wanted, either recorded or online in real time.. In 2021 and 2022, I invited ten guest speakers from different fields (Anthropology, Politics, Gender, Education, Media, Economics, Human Rights,

Development, Memory, Diaspora and Feminism), and from various local and global institutions (Griffith University, Deakin University, Melbourne University, Wollongong University, RMIT University, Ontario University, National University of Mexico (UNAM)). I even had a guest speaker who has agreed to present early in the semester but who at the time of her presentation was in quarantine, and whose presentation therefore happened to be embedded in the topic of borders and displacement, without it being planned that way.

These presentations were topical because of the global events at the time. This allowed students to see a reality outside of a classroom through a different lens, and be closer to real human experiences. Some of the students' feedback via the Course Experience Survey (CES) expressed that "one of the best aspects of this course was the guest lecturers and their insight, and the visual and audio resources that broke up the chunks of pre-reading"; "the content of the lectures, the weekly readings were eye-opening and definitely sharpened my hunger for more knowledge in the field." (CES 2021); and "I loved having different people presenting the topic of the week in lectures. It was great to hear their stories as well as their studies" (CES 2022).

In my thinking and rethinking the teaching, I have realised that it does not matter where I teach, the real question is how and why I teach the way I teach. As I (un)learned, I also thought of ways to better teach the rich pluralism that already

existed across the diversity of mobilities and cultures, and how I could I bring all this into my classroom, either face-to-face or online, and share it with students so we can engage in critical dialogues. The shift to online teaching opened a crack, which I intend to keep open, and to continue sowing into.

A new geography for group work in tutorials

As Glenda has pointed out above, online learning and teaching opens up opportunities to traverse geographies, but what caused discussion and investigation by Tricia and Kathy in their online teaching was the change in the group dynamics and a 'new geography of students' in both of their Education classes. Previously students would sit or arrange themselves so that they would always drift towards friends and known peers when asked to discuss things, work in a small group to solve problems or even plan group assignments. Essentially, we felt students did not want to mix much, especially after the first year of their degrees; they had settled into a "classroom geography" that was difficult to change.

When teaching face-to-face classes, it was really hard to get students to "sit" in different areas, share work with others they did not know, and even arrange group assignments with new people. If we "forced" new groups, there was often disgruntlement, resigned "non-engagement", or even downright refusals to work in designated groups. There were often complaints about peers with whom they had been "made" to work.

Once the transition to online classes during COVID

occurred, we both felt that students' attitudes changed and this was a discussion we pursued together, examining what had happened and why.

Using a flipped pedagogy of collaborative active learning activities for the students who suddenly found themselves online seemed the logical approach. Adopting a flipped approach enabled our pedagogy to pivot to quality online provision (Salmon, 2020), rather than simply placing materials online for students to churn through at their leisure, if at all. The online participants were encouraged to complete their hand-in work together during the classes, collaboratively building understanding. This necessitated the use of peer learning and group work. Thus, a social constructivist view of learning where learning is considered as an experience-based, social activity was modelled and implemented (Beck & Kosnik, 2006).

The actual reasons will require more investigation over time, but perhaps because of the technology, or the lack of physical presence of "set groups", or even because of the new online delivery mode, we discovered students were happy to be "mixed" at random or into pre-decided groups by us. The technology facilitated new, more diverse discussion groups. The nature of the technology we were using – Collaborate Ultra – which could sort students randomly or in pre-arranged groups was a bonus as it meant constant change and new, diverse perspectives were exchanged in the small group "rooms".

Students worked with new peers in online threads and appeared happy to be assigned new partners for assignment work. It was like the online space became common ground and everyone was welcome. We found that students who were well prepared were the drivers of the group discussions and thrived in this social constructivist 'new geography' but even students who were normally reticent or less prepared were engaging with each other and had opportunities to hear new perspectives.

Both Creelman (2020) and Cunningham & Bergstrom (2021) have identified that online discussion rooms, where everyone can observe everyone else, can afford students a more intimate environment for interaction. This endorsed our social constructivist approach and we believe contributed to changed attitudes of students working with their peers in online sessions. We found from group work presented as assessments and from student feedback that the 'new geography' of online group work was embraced by students. Although this phenomenon was not deliberately planned, nor designed as a learning outcome, the changed behaviours of students in groups working online, we believe, led to improvements in learning based upon changes to group dynamics and illustrate some potential future value and possible research into online group work.

Discovering a Quiet Pedagogy

The 'Anthropause' was a term coined by Christian Rutz and colleagues and published in *Nature* in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 global health pandemic. They noticed that people were referring to the lockdown periods as 'the great pause', describing the unprecedented slowing down of human activity in the face of the unfolding pandemic. This pause, they argued, was revealing – of the nature and extent human and more-than-human interactions – and the interdependencies between the two. Bringing together Anthropos (humans) with 'pause' allows the term to neatly riff of broader discussions around the Anthropocene.

Great pauses are not necessarily new –historical plague pandemics, , an economic crisis such as the Great Depression, or indeed the creation of special military zones or wilderness areas – all create different temporalities and types of pauses. However, for many, COVID triggered something akin to an existential crisis, its cascading impacts affecting not just the health and mortality of the physical body, but also the lived sense of community and human connectivity. It is this sense of crisis, when things collapse or break down, that helps to render visible the complexity of modern life, and in doing so forge new, alternative ideas.

As an urban educator-activist in higher education, I found new ideas formed in the spaces and places, the nooks and cracks of online learning and teaching practices during COVID. The entanglement of the personal and the professional for both educators and students was ever present.

In a physical sense through the relocation of the classroom to bedrooms (even beds!), dining rooms and kitchen tables; in a technical sense through the uptake and steep learning curve of negotiating online technologies and their virtual tools; and in a socio-political way in that new and unfamiliar forms of community and collaboration were being trialled, enacted and revised. I spent whole semesters during lockdown interacting weekly with students that to this day I have no idea what they look like. There was a strange irony that the 'student body' became so disembodied.

I teach 'Planning Theory' and 'The Urban Age' at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Both courses focus, in different ways, on deep reading, critical reflection and the exploration of speculative futures in climate change. In face-to-face classes my style tends to be performative with stories, provocations, and lots of loud discussion. I like to fill the space with activity, physicality, and 'noise'. Some students love this, but this style did not translate well to the online platform. The virtual space was very different, and the interactions felt more personal, even with cameras mostly off and names I didn't recognise. Over the semester I had to become more comfortable with silence and stillness, with quieter forms of expression and engagement. Out of my computer came thoughtful responses from the darkness. Voices mostly, but not always, as some students prefer to type, draw or attach links to articles and videos. I learnt to listen more deeply and

collaborate in different ways – to be quiet and to find my own ways to pause within the context of the Anthropause.

In my work on climate activism, I have been interested in longstanding feminist critiques of normative visions of 'activist behaviour' as necessarily loud, vocal and antagonistic versus more modest, embodied acts of care, connection and creativity. Much of the focus in this diverse work is on the local, informal, socially innovative and engaged nature of quiet practices: e.g., women's work at home, at work, in the academy – to support and advocate for women's rights and reconfigure the nature of work (see Eisenmann, 2005); or creative activity and engagement with local placemaking, equity and sustainability issues through, for example, the 'Knitting Nannas' and counterfeit crochet movements.

In lockdown, I noticed that these 'quiet activist practices' resonated in my courses, contributing to the depth of collective discussion; reflection was greater and more diverse. Some students responded by turning their microphone on, others typed simultaneously in the chat and, in doing so, as described by Freda earlier in this chapter, were able to share their thoughts, reactions, and experiences in real time. Others engaged with the tutorials while walking in the park. A few students really liked to keep their cameras on. One asked if I minded if she knit during the tutorial. Every week she would sit in her chair and knit with the camera on whilst listening and contributing to the conversation. The dialogue in the classes

became less of a performative dialogue between extroverts, and more quietly polyvocal in nature.

As we emerge, blinking, from the latest COVID-19 lockdown and into the climate crisis, we have to navigate the moment of 'unpausing' through hybrid practices and blended modes, as we work to reset out pedagogical practices again. Part of this involves reflecting on *who* is afforded the privilege to pause or 'unpause', where, and why, and in what circumstances. Asking such critical questions helps to make more visible the inequalities experienced during COVID-19 across lines of race, gender, and class, and the ways we can collectively respond to this.

In writing this reflection I do not to seek to privilege or polarize online modes of learning above face-to-face or hybrid modes or interactions, but rather to be more attentive to the power and potential of quiet pedagogical practices in my own work . For me, this has involved more care-full consideration of the shared learning journey and experience as the basis for responsible relationships while we navigate uncertain futures.

By way of conclusion: Let's see where this goes

It was in the less uncertain-seeming past of 2015 that the practice that was important for Julian in his transition to teaching online in March 2020 began. In that year, I ran a course that I had created, titled 'Digital Technology and Globalisation'. Although by then I had already started posting many of my lectures online, I had not conducted a fully online course before. In 2015, I had decided to so as an experiment, in

the knowledge, as I confessed to my manager at the time, that it would likely not be as good as a regular face-to-face class. It was this willingness to experiment with digital teaching technology – to be allowed to run a course that *might* 'not work' – that enabled me to react with some confidence that I could at-least-adequately conduct a course entirely online in early 2020. This I believed I achieved with my tutorial team; we didn't miss a single class and the feedback from students was reassuring.

In preparation for delivering that course in 2015, I asked a few students if they had ever done a fully online course before, and a very small number had, in other parts of the university. I asked about how the course was run and learned; at the time, the bar was low. In some examples, there were not necessarily even online tutorial classes or any form of interaction. At the time, the learning management system (LMS) in use was relatively rudimentary and there was not a prescribed platform for hosting an online tutorial. In order to create an intuitive and straightforward student experience with the course's content, I hosted my lecture content and readings on a Google Site and scheduled tutorials to take place in Google HangOuts.

I attempted to temper student expectations for the course by emphasising that experience would be entirely new for me, but also that we would not only be learning *about* the intersections of globalisation and digital technology, but also *experiencing* the nature and opportunities (and the limitations of) digital technology. Students seemed to understand and accept this premise of experimentation. It turned out that

many of my suspicions about the shortcomings of fully online courses were confirmed. This included challenges in building rapport, the impact of the technology on the ways students interacted, and the turn taking in conversations, which became less fluid and more serial. This is not to say that it was all bad. The efforts I had put into creating watchable and engaging lectures seemed to be appreciated, and we all acknowledged that the medium enabled people to participate from afar.

In my opinion, the benefits of this experiment that I felt in 2020 were not related to specific online teaching skills or awareness of how to use specific tools or platforms; the benefit was more abstract. The key benefit for me in running this course experimentally in 2015 and 2017 was the confident state of mind I had when we all had to transition all our teaching online. Even though I had to use a completely different learning management platform in 2020, I felt that throwing my courses online was well within my abilities and that I could deliver them to students in a way that would be at least regarded as satisfactory, under the circumstances.

Among my inspirations for this attitude towards experimentation and curiosity came from the author and economist Tim Harford, whose book *Adapt: Why success always starts with failure* (Harford, 2010) I had read with enthusiasm some years before. In it, he advocates experimentation, but has three key principles to guide it:

First, try new things, expecting that some will fail. Second, make failure survivable: create safe spaces for failure or move

forward in small steps. [...] And third, make sure you know when you've failed, or you will never learn. (Harford, 2010, p. 224; see also Harford, 2011).

Although Harford's book revolved around the notion of failure, the spirit of Harford's first and second principles combined to make me feel okay about running a course in a way that might not work too well. I expected the course to have a small enrolment and thus, if it went badly, it would at least have done so 'on a survivable scale' (fortunately, the student feedback was positive and kind). My intention was to observe what transpired in this online course to inform future practice, to observe the experiences that were beneficial and those that were not – with more attention undoubtedly paid to the latter. This probably captures some of the spirit of Harford's third principle which focuses on learning from what doesn't work well.

My relative feeling of confidence in making the transition to online teaching resonates with a point made by Jane McGonigal in her book *Imaginable* (McGonigal, 2022). In it, she describes a simulation she ran in 2010 involving nearly twenty thousand participants who, over a six-week period, imagined what it would be like to live through a global pandemic involving a respiratory virus, that originated in China, during which there was widespread misinformation on social media about it. When a real global pandemic struck, McGonigal's participants reacted relatively well. She writes:

In January 2020, I started receiving emails and Facebook

messages from people who had participated in the pandemic simulation. They wrote things like, "I'm not freaking out, I already worked through the panic and anxiety when we imagined it ten years ago." [...] Simulation participants kept telling me, in their own ways, that pre-feeling the future helped them pre-process the anxiety, the overwhelming uncertainty, and the sense of helplessness, so they could move more rapidly to adapt and act resiliently when the future actually arrived (McGonigal, 2022, pp. xxvii-xxviii).

Thus, the practice I felt worked for me during the pandemic wasn't, in fact, a specific digital learning and teaching practice, but a more general disposition and practice of experimentation. "Let's see where this goes," I thought. Although the time and mental headspace for experimentation may often seem limited in the scramble to deliver our teaching and research goals, the value of these experiments can be great in fostering both resilience and creativity in teaching practice, as well as potentially being sites for the cultivation of 'positive outlier' practices, which can be drawn upon and shared, which is something to which we hope this chapter contributes.

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