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Mak, A., & Kennedy, M. (2012). Internationalising the Student Experience: Preparing Instructors to Embed Intercultural Skills in the Curriculum. *Innovative Higher Education*, 37(4), 323-334. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-012-9213-4>

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Internationalising the Student Experience: Preparing Instructors to Embed Intercultural Skills in the Curriculum

Anita S. Mak and Monica Kennedy

Anita S. Mak is Professor of Psychology at the University of Canberra, Australia. Her current research focuses on internationalisation and intercultural social competence. She received her Ph.D. from the Australian National University in psychology.

Monica Kennedy is Associate Dean International in the Faculty of Business and Government at the University of Canberra, from which she received her Ph.D. in management. Her research interest includes learning and organisational knowledge in higher education.

Anita S. Mak (corresponding author)
Centre for Applied Psychology, Faculty of Health, University of Canberra, P O Box 1, ACT
2601, Australia
e-mail: Anita.Mak@canberra.edu.au

Abstract: The Internationalising the Student Experience Project was devised and piloted as a teaching innovation to improve the intercultural awareness of instructors and, subsequently, that of their domestic and international students. In this article we claim that instructor preparation in the use of the Alliance Building and Cultural Mapping tools of the international EXCELL (Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership) Program can provide a base for institutionalised support. We report and discuss this approach and the outcomes to the challenges of and opportunities for internationalising the curriculum in the broader higher education context.

Keywords: international students, student diversity, internationalisation, curriculum

Major destinations of international education and migration, such as Australia, have seen rapid increases in international student enrolments and the funds generated. Recent Australian Education International (2009) figures show that the export income from Australian education services has nearly doubled from \$8.6 billion in 2004 to \$15.5 billion in 2008, placing international education as Australia's top export service industry. In 2010, onshore international student enrolments in the Australian higher education sector grew by 7.6% in just one year to 227,230 (Australian Education International, 2011).

Due to differences in styles of learning, teaching, and communication, multicultural classes present challenges for instructors and domestic and international students (Ho, Holmes, & Cooper, 2004). Many international students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience English language and social difficulties, which occur in academic,

residential, and community settings and can impact educational outcomes and psychological adjustment (Neil & Mak, 2007; Smart, Volet, & Ang, 2000; Ward, 2006). Students who are proficient in the English language may still lack the confidence and social skills to participate in group discussion, make contact with locals, and ask for help from authority figures.

Consequently, the practice of culturally responsive teaching is vital for engaging international students in classroom discussions and improving interactions between domestic and international students (Ho et al.; Leask, 2009; Otten, 2003).

Like many developed nations, Australia's population is also becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse. Between the 2001 and 2006 Australian Census surveys, the proportion of persons born overseas rose from 23.1% to 23.9% (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009). The 2006 Australian Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007) indicates that the top 15 overseas birthplace countries included seven Asian countries. Tertiary [higher education] institutions are faced with the challenges of preparing students for effective team work with an internationally diverse workforce and providing appropriate professional services to address matters of diversity, both nationally and internationally.

Trends towards globalisation, demographic changes in the general population and the student body, and the lucrative funding that international students bring have prompted many universities to incorporate internationalisation into their strategic plans. An internationalised university experience, including contact with international students and an internationalised curriculum, is beneficial for preparing domestic students for working across cultures (Parsons, 2010). The innovative Internationalising the Student Experience Project (ISEP) reported in this article aimed to explore the possibility of embedding cultural awareness and skills development in curricula and practice. The innovation was to adapt an existing intercultural training resource

to provide professional development and support to faculty members in order to improve their ability to internationalise the curricula and subsequently develop the intercultural awareness and sensitivities of their international and domestic students, thereby supporting the internationalisation agenda of higher education institutions.

Here we report on three strands of ISEP project outcomes that we analysed using three different research methods. First, we analysed instructors' evaluations of the two curriculum development workshops (in the first two months of the project) for perceived value and appropriateness of content and intended applications. Second, upon completion of the year-long project we assessed curricular changes through case study analysis of the extent to which cultural learning was perceived to be embedded in the courses as taught. Third, one to three years from the beginning of the project, we examined its impact and that of the instructor training tools on University policy and the wider higher education community. In the discussion we provide integrated critical analyses of the project outcomes, along with suggestions for future research and adoption in the broader higher education sector.

Background

Internationalisation of Curricula

In response to the shift towards internationalisation in higher education and the changing needs and expectations of students, universities and colleges are explicitly designing programs that seek to internationalise the curriculum. The term, however, is variously defined in the literature and broadly interpreted in application. Consensus about what internationalisation means is yet to be reached (Elkin, Farnsworth, & Templer, 2008). The term curriculum in higher education remains similarly ambiguous (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006). Regardless of these uncertainties, however, higher education institutions are committed to moving ahead with policies and

programs designed to enhance the experience of students and to prepare them for the work world of an increasingly global economy.

Knight's (2003) definition of internationalisation is well accepted in the Australian higher education sector and is indeed used in the reporting by the Australian University Quality Agency (Stella & Liston, 2008, pp. 8-9). Knight defined internationalisation as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education." While this definition provides a neat summary of three dimensions of internationalisation, the complexity of the concept is more clearly recognised in other works. Elkin and Devjee (2003) explained their understanding as follows.

Internationalisation should aim to create values, beliefs and intellectual insights in which both domestic and international students and faculty participate and benefit equally. They should develop global perspectives, international and cultural and ethical sensitivity along with useful knowledge, skills and attitudes for the globalised market place. (p. 11)

A curriculum that supports such aims is one that extends beyond a narrow interpretation of the structure and content of a learning program. It is one that recognises the dynamic and interactive process of teaching and learning. These more sophisticated notions of curriculum incorporate graduate outcomes, reflective practice, changing student world views, and the interaction of student and teacher knowledge (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006) as integral to academic experience.

It is the recognition of intercultural capability in this definition that promises new and fruitful advances in policy and practice in internationalising the curriculum. Compared with global and international dimensions, intercultural skills and perspectives are often less readily incorporated into course design. The complexity of the concepts and practices that underpin

interculturally sensitivity contributes to the exclusion of intercultural skills development from mainstream courses. At the same time, the development of intercultural competencies as a learning outcome is a key goal of an internationalised curriculum (Leask, 2008, 2009). In support of this goal, a range of personnel across tertiary institutions, especially instructors, needs to be engaged over time in the internationalisation effort (Leask, 2009; Stone, 2006).

Building Intercultural Awareness

Cultural experiential learning or active learning in classes and elsewhere in the curriculum that involves intercultural engagement and reflections on that experience can contribute to the development of all students' intercultural competencies (Ho et al., 2004; Leask, 2008).

Proficiency in academic English is necessary for international students' success in completing formal learning tasks and conducting conversations with host nationals. However, this proficiency may be insufficient for their social integration into a multicultural educational environment and practicum placements. Embedding cultural experiential learning into classroom practice could validate students' diverse cultural backgrounds, provide opportunities for meaningful and rewarding intercultural contact between international and local students, and foster social cohesion on campus (Mak, Barker, Logan, & Millman, 1999). Experiential learning methods represent a strategic approach to engaging students in active learning and facilitating deep learning outcomes while simultaneously enhancing students' university experience (Barber, 2007; Kolb, 1984). Cultural experiential learning activities have the ability to meet the dual educational goals of internationalising the curriculum and cultivating all students' intercultural communication skills essential for working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Research has shown that being in a multicultural environment has the potential to enhance intercultural relations, but low quality intercultural contact could in fact breed prejudice

against out-group members (Pettigrew & Troop, 2006). Ward's (2006) review draws attention to the impact of international students on educational institutions and recommends four types of strategic interventions that could promote quality intercultural contact and social integration on campus. They are cooperative learning, peer pairing, programs in residence halls, and the EXCELL (Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership) Program for developing students' generic cross-cultural social competencies.

EXCELL

EXCELL was initially developed by Mak, Westwood, Barker, and Ishiyama (1998) as a personal development and learning support program for international and immigrant students. It is a structured training system built on an integrated model of learning paradigms incorporating experiential learning (see Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama, & Barker, 1999 for the conceptual basis). EXCELL competencies include three culture access competencies (seeking help, making social contact, and participation in a group) and three culture negotiation competencies (refusing a request, expressing disagreement, and giving feedback).

The EXCELL training system includes tools referred to as Alliance Building and Cultural Mapping (Mak et al., 1998). Alliance Building aims to validate the participants' original culture and to support sharing their experiences and observations in a group. Cultural Mapping is a schematic framework for describing a sequence of micro verbal and non-verbal behaviours to support participants' effective engagement in a specified social scenario. Appendix A provides an illustration of applying the Alliance Building and Cultural Mapping tools to engage international students and explain one socially effective way for an Asian international student to seek course advice from an instructor in an Australian higher education institution. The complete EXCELL process teaches each competency in five stages. It begins with Alliance Building and

then Cultural Mapping, followed by the practice stages described as Cultural Coaching, Contracting, and Transfer to Real Life (Westwood, Mak, Barker, & Ishiyama, 2000).

Evaluation studies of the complete EXCELL Program in Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, have shown benefits for both local and overseas-born students, in terms of increases in social interaction skills and cross-cultural social confidence (Mak, Barker, et al., 1999; Ho et al., 2004). Recently, the full incorporation of EXCELL social competencies training as a module in a first year communication course (Mak & Buckingham, 2007) and in an international human resources management subject (Woods, Barker, & Daly, 2004), has been shown to provide social benefits, to improve students' general and intercultural social skills, and to facilitate professional preparation.

In many instances, though, it is not feasible to devote six tutorial sessions to cover the full range of six EXCELL competencies and to include all of the stages of training in the curriculum. It could be beneficial to use the Alliance Building tool alone to create a culturally inclusive learning environment and the Cultural Mapping tool to enable both instructors and students to have an effective framework for understanding the Approach, Bridging, Communicating, and Developing/Departure (or simply ABCD) phases of a cross-cultural social interaction. By providing educators with awareness and skills through these EXCELL tools, higher levels of participation and social integration in culturally diverse groups can be achieved. This practical approach to instructor preparation could develop their capability to embed cross-cultural alliance building and communication skills in ways that suit their particular disciplinary areas and cultural mix in their classes (Mak, DePercy, & Kennedy, 2008).

The Internationalising the Student Experience Project

The Internationalising the Student Experience Project (ISEP) at the University of Canberra, Australia, was funded by the University Education Committee as a year-long (2007-2008) pilot teaching project that provided faculty development and support in the use of cultural experiential learning practices based on the EXCELL tools of Alliance Building and Cultural Mapping. The project had two related goals. The first was the development, implementation, and evaluation of culturally responsive curricula that would provide students at the University with an international perspective and develop their cross-cultural interpersonal skills. These initial project outcomes would then be used to support internationalisation of the curriculum within the institution and the higher education community more broadly, so as to prepare students for professional practice in a multicultural society.

The initial stage of the project was the recruitment of instructors interested in undertaking training in the use of the EXCELL Alliance Building and Cultural Mapping tools with their students. This training consisted of two days of interactive Curriculum Development Workshops, facilitated using also experiential learning methods. The instructors then adapted one or both of the tools to initiate changes in the content as well as learning and assessment practices of selected courses within their disciplines.

Project Outcomes

Curriculum Development Workshops

Faculty development was central to this project and included the opportunity for instructors to participate as volunteers in two full-day interactive workshops – Cross-Cultural Alliance Building@UC and Cultural Mapping@UC, held a fortnight apart. One of the co-developers of the EXCELL Program facilitated the workshops, which were tailored to the curriculum development needs of the faculty members involved. The workshops used active learning and

incorporated abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation, concrete experience, and reflective observation, mirroring the experiential learning cycle described by Kolb (1984).

The goals of the Alliance Building Workshop were (1) to enhance higher education instructors' awareness and skills in engaging and building alliance with students from culturally diverse backgrounds, (2) to develop the instructors' ability to instil in all students an awareness of the importance of developing international and cross-cultural perspectives, and (3) to facilitate the sharing of relevant learning and teaching strategies among instructors. The Cultural Mapping workshop was designed (1) to increase instructors' awareness of the social learning needs of students new to a culture and (2) to introduce instructors to the EXCELL Cultural Mapping tool for developing students' cross-cultural, interpersonal skills in accessing and negotiating in new cultures.

While altogether ten instructors from four disciplines were involved as volunteers, eight instructors participated on each of two workshops. Timetable clash and a family emergency prevented two instructors from attending on both workshop days. At the end of each day participants were invited to complete a brief anonymous, one-page evaluation form, which surveyed their satisfaction with various aspects of the workshop using five-point rating scales (1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, and 5 = Excellent). The forms also included an open-ended question inviting reflection on intended applications. Demographic questions were not included to ensure that respondents could not be identified.

The satisfaction ratings on various dimensions of the workshops – workshop activities, course materials, and value of the workshop for professional development – were all rated, on average, as “Good” to “Excellent”(with a mean rating ranging from 4.31 to 4.56, and *SD* ranging from .52 to .74). Participants further gave a highly positive overall evaluation of each workshop

and reported that they had enjoyed the experience (with M ranging from 4.50 to 4.69, and SD ranging from .46 to .76).

At the end of the Alliance Building Workshop, we also asked participants to respond to an open-ended question on one strategy that they were intending to *apply to engage* culturally diverse classes. Two intended applications were value-driven: “develop ways to foster a sense of hospitality and trust within the groups I teach” and “consciously develop my sense of social justice, i.e., equality) and consciously incorporate this in my teaching.” Three other responses could be classified as promoting inclusive practices. One instructor hoped to “develop more strategies for recognising and affirming cultural and linguistic diversity.” Another planned on “getting students to share their experiences and building on them” and said that “[t]here never seemed to be enough time to do this, but I will try again.” Yet another instructor simply said “alliance building.” Two other applications pertained to the specific and intentional invitation to invite all students to participate in class activities. One instructor wrote, “. . . preventing dominance of Anglos by inviting students by name. Look at other nonverbal clues for preparing to speak.” Another respondent attested to “the ability to invite students to participate. N.B. – I think it is an important terminology as it is inclusive and not forceful.”

At the end of the Cultural Mapping Workshop, instructors responded to a two-part, open-ended question on one aspect that they would like to apply to their teaching, such as in changes to their curricula. A recurrent theme in six respondents’ comments pertained to the cultural mapping process and applications. Another referred to learning about the “same value, different behaviours”, which had been covered in the workshop, for example, different manifestations of the same underlying value across cultures and the ways in which respect is shown. Instructors indicated interest in using cultural maps in classes to increase participation and break down class

activities as well as to explore disagreements and improve negotiation around requests for extension to deadlines for submitting assignments.

Changes Implemented

On completion of the year-long ISEP, the first project goal was reviewed in relation to the development of culturally responsive teaching of a range of undergraduate and graduate courses across two faculty groups. Seven workshop attendees reported having implemented culturally responsive practices in nine courses. Five were undergraduate courses in accounting, management, politics, and psychology at first, second, and third year levels. Changes were also introduced into four graduate courses in accounting, management, and psychology. We now explain the kinds of changes that instructors made.

In an undergraduate accounting course with an enrolment of 120 students, including a substantial number of South Asian students, the faculty member devised a new lecture and a tutorial to cover generic communication skills for accountants. The new material included a presentation on the impact of culture on graduating students seeking employment and career success in accounting. The tutorial incorporated an experiential activity that had been demonstrated in the Alliance workshop called the Name Game, which invites students to introduce each other using their name in native language and script and recounting the name's meaning, and cultural mapping of scenarios involving social conversations including those occurring at a cocktail party. Cultural mapping was also conducted with international students preparing for job interviews in Australia.

For a first year political science course with over 400 students, the faculty member applied experiential learning methods to foster the development of cultural awareness, cross-cultural skills, and a comparative international perspective (Mak et al., 2008). Students were

encouraged to role-play cultural maps set in various case study countries to highlight the contextual nature of socially appropriate body language and eye contact. International students in particular were perceived as subject-matter experts by their peers in leading class discussions on what were considered effective verbal and nonverbal behaviours in a given social scenario in their original countries. End-of-semester feedback from students and teaching assistants showed that the ISEP had indeed improved students' cultural awareness, particularly the contextual nature of appropriate interpersonal behaviours. Moreover, students were able to learn from each other's cultural experiences. Teaching assistants' observations also suggested that these activities had significantly increased student participation in discussions and debates as the EXCELL tools had given the international students, in particular, a "voice" in the classroom (Mak et al., 2008).

In redesigning a graduate course on Organisational Behaviour for 54 students, a faculty member in management made cultural diversity awareness and alliance building skills central to the course content and pedagogy. She assigned students to work in culturally diverse groups to prepare for a group debate assessment task, a process requiring intensive communication about the allocation of roles and tasks, development of arguments, and strategies for rebuttal. The success of the changes led to the continuation of these elements in the next semester for a further 80 students. In the following year (for a total of 134 students across two semesters), she required students to submit critical reflection reports on their experiences and observations of working with a diverse team and to link these with the relevant literature in management studies. One Australian student reflected that "this subject has an international flavour to it, so that is what I love most about this subject; and this is probably due to students being given a voice." In end-of-semester feedback, one international student commented that the group activity had provided

him with his first opportunity for socialising with Australian students since his arrival in Australia.

Impact on the University and the Higher Education Community

The second goal of the project was to contribute to the University and higher education community's attempts to support internationalisation of the curriculum. As a result of the ISEP, the University's Equity and Diversity Advisory Group decided to fund another professional development workshop on Alliance Building for faculty members. At the time of writing, three additional workshops had been offered to faculty members since the completion of the year-long ISEP project. The University's Education Committee has plans to continue to make these workshops available to faculty members, but this would depend on funding.

The ISEP approach supported the institutionalisation of cultural awareness strategies and skills within University policy, curriculum and teaching practices. Its influence became evident in the University Education Committee minutes, International Education Committee meetings, and criteria for teaching excellence awards within the University. In particular, the ISEP approach has contributed to a recent update of the University's policy on internationalisation. Drawing on the ISEP experiences and feedback from the instructors, students, and peer reviewers involved, the University of Canberra (2010) has adopted an updated definition of the internationalisation of the curriculum as

The development of content and processes, in both formal and informal curricula, that support international and global perspectives, and intercultural capability (including sensitivity, engagement and competence). The knowledge, skills and attitudes required of global professionals are developed through appropriate course content, teaching methods,

assessments, campus environments, and preparations for work in a culturally diverse and international environment. (para. 7).

To disseminate the results of this project, the ISEP use of cultural experiential learning practices was presented at the International Conference on Experiential Learning in Sydney (Mak et al., 2008), eliciting discussion on the challenges of incorporating and evaluating such practices in the higher education sector. In 2010, the ISEP was presented as a national showcase at the Australian Business Deans Council Teaching and Learning Networking meeting in Canberra. The showcase stimulated considerable interest among deans from 25 Australian universities, particularly in regard to the embedding of EXCELL strategies and subsequent outcomes in Business courses across Australia. Peer feedback from these presentations also corroborated the ISEP team's observations that institutional support is vital for internationalisation of the curriculum to take hold, and training and supporting staff in experiential cultural learning methods should be an ongoing process requiring commitments in funding support and time release for staff.

Discussion and Suggestions for Future Research

In advanced economies across the world, the increasing interest in the export of higher education has contributed to a changing focus on the "big business" (Altbach and Knight, 2007, p. 291) of education. This effect is exacerbated in Australia, as in other countries as well, by increasing government pressure for educational institutions to compete for funds and contribute to the national [and state] economy. Within this context, attention to providing cultural support to a rapidly increasing international student body is critical, not just from a pedagogical point of view, but also from one of comparative advantage. Additionally, an internationalised classroom and university experience is beneficial and vital for preparing domestic students for working in

multicultural work teams and with clients from culturally diverse backgrounds (Otten, 2003; Parsons, 2010).

Integrating intercultural capability into the teaching of mainstream subjects is complex and challenging (Leask, 2008). ISEP curriculum development workshops endeavoured to provide instructors from a range of disciplines with practical understanding of how to internationalise their own courses. The Alliance Building process, which builds safety and mobilises support, and the Cultural Mapping tool, which provides a cognitive schema to break down the phases of intercultural interaction, provide the framework for developing intercultural engagement and communication competence.

ISEP focuses on faculty development using EXCELL tools to influence curriculum design, student experience, and institutionalisation of cultural awareness and skills. While the project took place within a single university, its features and influence could conceivably apply to the wider higher education sector within Australia and other countries. In our experience, participating instructors' reflections on the ISEP suggest that the Alliance Building and Cultural Mapping tools made the task of engaging a culturally diverse class and teaching cross-cultural communication more rewarding for instructors. We also found that the ISEP supported instructors (from such diverse disciplines as accounting, politics, and management) to embed, over time, the development of cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills through multicultural group work, changes to course content, assessment tasks, and consistent use of inclusive teaching practices.

Comments from the wider audiences have also noted that engaging faculty members and students in the development of intercultural competencies is challenging, costly, and time-consuming. Strong institutional support is essential for providing instructors as well as

professional and administrative staff with professional development in internationalising the student experience. Ongoing additional faculty development, such as the formation of communities of practice, will maintain the momentum of internationalising the curriculum at the institutional level. To move beyond the status quo, strong leadership support from department chairpersons, deans, and administrators is vital to drive the development of intercultural competence through modification of courses across an institution (Freeman et al., 2009).

We have reported on a single faculty development effort, and we do not claim definitive, generalisable results. Rather we have explored in some depth our experience as a prelude to further research. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the ISEP in a single institution have clearly been favourable and indicate the potential value of introducing similar faculty development projects in the broader higher education sector. While English language and academic skills support for international and recent immigrant students is fundamental to their academic progress, culturally responsive teaching methods and curriculum re-design are also needed for developing students' ability to engage fully in the classroom and campus life generally (Ho et al., 2004; Leask, 2009).

More rigorous evaluations of larger samples could incorporate standardised measures of outcomes and include interviews with stakeholders. Future research could investigate the factors and processes in enhancing faculty members' and students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards internationalisation and, in particular, their intercultural competence and could explore the relationships between disciplinary area, institution type, and the success of EXCELL strategies. Comparison across different disciplines within single institutions, as well as within disciplines across institutions, would provide insight into the generalisability of the preliminary results reported here. The relationships between internationalisation strategies and the nature of

discipline and course, year level, and cultural mix in the classes could also be investigated so that approaches can be more closely targeted to specific courses and cohorts.

Future research could focus on educational outcomes of an internationalised curriculum for domestic students (Parsons, 2010) as well as for international students. Longitudinal research that seeks to track faculty and student cohorts' changes over time (e.g., in intercultural communication attitudes and students' satisfaction with the social climate on campus), could be useful.

The teaching project reported here implies a change of intensity in contact between domestic and international students with the use of the EXCELL activities, and future research could examine the changes in the quantity and quality of contact between international and domestic students in the classroom and on campus life generally (Leask, 2008).

Conclusion

Internationalisation, particularly intercultural skills development, is a complex and challenging agenda for contemporary higher education institutions. Academics, international students, and domestic students could all benefit from intercultural engagement in classes and the development of cultural awareness and cross-cultural interpersonal skills. The outcomes of our project here suggest that the ISEP represents an approach to support internationalisation of the student experience across the sector. Providing faculty training in practical strategies for validating the diverse origins of students, involving them as expert informants of their own cultures, and using cooperative learning exchanges can support the internationalisation agenda. With strategic institutional support, cultural experiential learning tools, such as EXCELL Alliance Building and Cultural Mapping, could improve the intercultural capability of higher education instructors and

subsequently that of their students. We recommend further adaptation and more extensive research about this issue.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported in part by the University of Canberra Education Committee. We wish to acknowledge the dedication and contributions of the other Internationalising the Student Experience Project team members and participating instructors, especially Michael DePercy, Mark Hughes, Andrew Read, Michele Fleming, Leonie-Ruth Acland, Doug Jackman, and James Neill.

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Appendix A

The following, adapted from Mak et al. (1998, p.35) illustrates how an instructor/student counsellor can apply the EXCELL Alliance Building and Cultural Building tools to suggest how international students from culturally diverse backgrounds (e.g., the Asian-born) could seek help or information (e.g., course advice) from faculty members in Australia.

Alliance Building

Students are encouraged to explain how they would seek help from instructors in their original culture and the underlying values for such behaviours (e.g., showing respect towards teachers, demonstrating hard work on the part of the students). They are then encouraged to share their observations of how local students would seek help in the host culture (e.g., being quite direct) and how the international students think of such approaches (e.g., apparently rude, little opportunity for warming up to the request). Within a supportive group environment, international students can share difficulties they may have experienced in obtaining help effectively in the new culture and identify individual goals in seeking help effectively within a specific academic context.

Cultural Mapping

The instructor/counsellor can then produce a generic cultural map on seeking help from instructors on a computer screen or a handout or on a sheet on a large flip chart. The cultural map is laid out in four stages of interaction. The trainers identify the Western cultural values underlying the recommended actions that are likely to lead to successful results. For example, in

Western culture, respect for authority figures is indicated by respect for their time, and hence polite and effective requests for their help should be direct, clear, specific, and succinct.

The *first stage* in this cultural map is approaching the instructor. This includes choosing an appropriate time to see the instructor (e.g., during office hours), knocking on the office door, and waiting for a “come in” response before moving into the office, making eye contact and orienting body towards the instructor, and maintaining an open body gesture. The *bridging stage*, which links the initial approach stage and the following stage of actually explaining the request, comes next. Appropriate bridging word phrases and short questions include, spoken with a normal clear voice, “Excuse me....” “Do you have a minute?”, “Is this a good time for me to ask you...”, and “I would like some help with....” The *third stage* is the commenting stage where the request is clearly explained. The task here is to state the request or issue clearly, directly, and succinctly, supporting the request with relevant documents if appropriate. The student may check if the meaning is clear. The *fourth stage* is the developing/closure stage where the dialogue may continue around the responses to the request, eventually leading to a closure of the social encounter. At closure, the student can briefly thank the instructor for his/her time and advice (e.g., by saying “I really appreciate your help with this”, or “thank you, I will see you at the next class”) before leaving.