Developing global citizens through psychology curricula: Increasing cultural awareness of self and others

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Background

❖Moving towards 2020, we are reminded of the need to prepare psychology students for work within a highly technological and globalised society. However, the extent to which the current APAC (2010) graduate attributes will prepare psychology students to work in global contexts has been the focus of debate with commentary in Australia suggesting that modifications will be required. Proposals for change include a focus on three key concepts: psychological literacy, employability and global citizenship (Cranney & Dunn, 2011).

❖Traditionally, undergraduate psychology curricula has offered little in the way of explicit training with respect to practical skills required, for example, to communicate in a globalized society. Similarly, an overreliance on North American literature within the psychology curriculum has resulted on education founded on principles of 'ethnocentrism'. Such an approach is unlikely to produce culturally competent global citizens.

❖Garvey (2007, 2008) argues that critical self-reflection is a necessary precursor to the development of cultural competencies. Yet, engaging in 'reflection' has been discouraged in undergraduate psychology with the dominant pedagogical approach emphasising the importance of 'objectivity'.

❖Few resources exist to teach undergraduate psychology students intercultural competencies for communicating. Nevertheless, models used in other contexts may be appropriate. For example, the EXCELL program (Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership; Mak, Westwood, Barker, & Ishiyama, 1998) has been used to assist International students to increase their cross-cultural awareness of self and others; and to improve their intercultural communication competencies across cultures (Mak & Buckingham, 2007).

❖Thus, combining an on-line reflection exercise utilising materials provided by Garvey (2007) with explicit teaching of intercultural competencies via application of the the EXCELL model, we aimed to facilitate an in-depth reflection of students' sense of cultural understanding and connectedness.

Reflection Activity

❖ Students were asked to reflect upon an in-lecture introduction by posting onto an on-line discussion forum. The lecturer posted the question: What do introductions tell us about ourselves and others? Students were also referred to the materials in Garvey (2007) which included Dorothea Mackellar's poem, My Country, and specific questions regarding the poem aimed at encouraging students to reflect upon their connections to culture (see Garvey, 2007, Activity 2.1, Question 3, p 31).

❖ Engagement with this activity was evident via 125 voluntary posts onto the form. Results indicated that domestic students, in particular, initially posted expressing their anxiety regarding introductions. Students linked this anxiety with the need to be accepted or due to a desire to make a good impression. International students – perhaps due to the expression of anxiety by local students, also posted onto the forum. The y wrote about disclosing the amount and type of information based on their observations of others.

❖ Statements pertaining to disclosure were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of analysis. The analysis revealed that depth of disclosure was linked with subthemes including: trust/distrust, cultural rituals, situation or context, and the development of friendships.

❖ When reflecting upon MacKellar's poem, local students wrote about their connections with the Australian landscape, as described in MacKellar's poem, and International students wrote of their dual allegiance between host and home countries.

Cultural Mapping

❖Tutors modelled the EXCELL mapping method of breaking down a dyadic interaction into the ABCD stages of Approach, Bridging, Commenting and Departing/Developing using a scenario depicting an Australian male student.

❖In small groups, students were given one of several scenarios which involved two specific intercultural competencies i) making social contact ii) making a request. The scenarios included: Indonesian male student (aged 19 years), a Saudi-Arabian woman, and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman (aged 45 years).

❖Students were able to develop EXCELL cultural maps incorporating the ABCD stages for their given scenarios; however, students' maps were more detailed and rich for those scenarios involving a male Indonesian student and a female Saudi-Arabian student than the scenario involving an an Aboriginal women.

Evaluation

❖Of approximately 125 students who attended the tutorial, ninety four students (Mean Age =21.6 years, SD = 6.4) completed an on-line survey that included items measuring the extent to which the unit had led to the development of intercultural competencies.

❖Measures included Mak's (2012) measure of students' cultural learning and an open-ended question asked students to indicate ways in which they could apply their learning.

❖The University of Canberra Committee for Human Research approved the online survey research evaluation project (#11-70). An invitation containing a hyperlink to an online survey, hosted on qualtrics.com, was distributed to students in the final week of Semester; an opportunity to go into a draw for a $200.00 value was offered as an incentive.

❖Generally students reported that they were somewhat in agreement that their cultural compentce had been developed through the introductory psychology unit (see Table 1). Analysis of qualitative data using Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network method of analysis is shown in Figure 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Self-perceived Change in Cultural Competence

Statement	M	SD
I enjoy interaction with people from different cultures.	2.10	.89
I am now more conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.	2.51	.92
I am better prepared to adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from an unfamiliar culture.	2.55	.93
I have gained awareness of the role of culture in my chosen field of study.	2.56	.94
I have become more comfortable participating in multicultural groups.	2.60	.94
I have become more ready to make social contact with culturally different others.	2.63	.88
I have become more confident with communicating with people from culturally different backgrounds.	2.64	.92
I have developed a greater awareness of cultural diversity.	2.65	.90
I have developed a better understanding of cross-cultural interpersonal skills.	2.65	.91
I am now more conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions.	2.65	.97
I am now more certain that I could deal better with adjusting to a culture that is new to me.	2.69	.99
I am now more confident that I could socialise with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar.	2.71	.94
I am now better equipped to enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	2.77	.98

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Self-perceived Change in Cultural Competence

Figure 1. Hierarchical thematic analysis of responses to open-ended question regarding application of learning in intercultural competencies

Conclusion

❖We have provided some preliminary evidence that practical skill based activities can be successfully integrated into an APAC (2010) accredited undergraduate program.

❖Teaching approaches that incorporate practical skill development will aid in ensuring that psychology graduates are prepared and ready to work in a globalised society.

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