

Two Models for Facilitating Cross-cultural Communication and Engagement

This paper introduces and describes two conceptual models for generating cross-cultural engagement. It then applies the models to the Transformations: Culture and the Environment in Human Development Conference held at The Australian National University in February 2005. The first model, the 'Framework for Cross-cultural Engagement', conceptualises Australia as a multicultural environment encompassing a multiplicity of cultures, each with its own language and cultural practices. Cross-cultural engagement is seen as the processes of understanding and communicating with these practices: its verbal and non-verbal behaviours, value orientations, approaches to conflict, its naming, greeting, work, sporting, wellness/sickness, religious and spiritual practices as well as its ways of knowing and communicating. The second model, the 'Model for Cross-Cultural Practices' presents three practical, dynamic strategies that can assist us to achieve this communication: reflective practice, socio-cultural practice and critical practice. The two models are useful in that they conceptualise the processes involved in cross-cultural engagement. The first identifies and makes explicit the specific practices we need to become familiar with if we are to communicate effectively with the culture. The second model provides three practical and dynamic strategies that can assist us to achieve this engagement. Together, the two models provide a means of more effectively understanding and communicating with different cultural groups.

Introduction

Multiculturalism in Australia is being challenged. Cross-cultural anxieties and frictions are evident: in the media, on nightly news bulletins and painfully exposed on programs like *Insight* on SBS television. Tensions are palpable in schools and work places; on beaches and in churches and mosques. The word itself and the concept are actively disparaged. *The Weekend Australian* (Hart 2006, p.3) reports:

...the Howard Government is looking to scrap the word "multiculturalism" as part of a major revamp of ethnic policy...in a move seen as a shift away from fostering diversity and towards increasing integration and responsibility among migrants, the government is canvassing alternative words to describe how ethnic communities harmoniously integrate into Australian society.

This denunciation is a deep source of concern for those of us committed to cross-cultural awareness and engagement in an increasingly complex but also

seemingly simplistic world where judgements are made along unsophisticated, crudely understood cultural boundaries.

This paper introduces two models to better understand and communicate with the diversity of cultural groups and sub-groups present in contemporary Australia. The broadening meanings of cultural diversity are first explored along with deficit responses to dealing with such diversity. An alternative approach, the deficit-diversity paradigm shift, which draws on critical perspectives, is also presented. Two conceptual models which stem from this approach are then developed and explained: the 'Framework for Cross-cultural Engagement' and the 'Model for Cross-Cultural Practices'. The paper next applies the models, first to cross-cultural contexts and then, more specifically, to the *Transformations: Culture and the Environment in Human Development Conference* held at the Australian National University (ANU) in February, 2005.

Revisiting cultural diversity

Definitions of culture are varied, having a wide range of everyday and technical uses and meanings. From a critical perspective, Lankshear et al. (1997) argue that narrow notions of culture tend to categorise people and societies into those who have culture versus those who don't; that you can touch, smell, hear as well as see culture. These narrow definitions associate culture with material objects – dress, dance, diet and drama, visible displays – ceremonies and festivals, and the concrete and tangible – language and dialect. Andrew Robb, parliamentary secretary and de facto minister for multiculturalism in the Howard Government, assumes these narrow understandings of culture: that 'ethnic' groups have 'culture' and a responsibility to 'integrate harmoniously' into mainstream Australian culture (cited in Hart 2006, p.3). Responsibility and integration are viewed as one-way, rather than as two-way processes and a matter only for 'ethnic' cultures. These views reflect moves to replace the concept of 'multiculturalism' with 'integration policy' (Hart 2006) or 'citizenship' (Bolt cited on *Insiders* 2006).

Wider views of culture include the understandings that all human beings, including ourselves, have and make culture and that culture is reflected in people's everyday activities, relationships and social processes. Shor (1993, p.30) argues that 'culture is what ordinary people do every day, how they behave, speak, relate and make things. Everyone has and makes culture...culture is the speech and behaviour of everyday life' (cited in Lankshear et al. 1997). Culture is also seen as being embodied in more specific groups as well as in societies and each of these cultural and sub-cultural groups has its own culture, its own way of life, its own way of knowing and of seeing, its own world-view, its life force (Ferraro 2002). Ferraro (2002, p.194) further contends that:

...we operate within a web of cultures and sub-cultures, including school cultures, church cultures, ethnic cultures and corporate cultures. These cultures strongly influence the way we think and behave, and they often are radically different from other cultures. By understanding and appreciating the cultural differences and similarities throughout the world, we will prepare ourselves from operating in a world that that is rapidly losing its borders.

The questions of how best to respond to such cultural diversity, both locally and nationally, and to the challenges posed by 'difference', are critically important.

The deficit-diversity paradigm shift

Some responses to increasing diversity conceptualise cultural differences negatively, in terms of inadequacies or deficits. Underlying these responses is the assumption that there is one mainstream culture and that languages and literacies other than the mainstream represent a deficit or a deficiency on the part of those who do not possess them. The New London Group (1996, p.72) argue that such deficit approaches involve 'writing over the existing subjectivities with the language of the dominant culture'. Such approaches deny the existence as well as the potency of the concepts of the multiple cultures and cultural diversity.

An alternative approach, conceptualised as a deficit-diversity paradigm shift, prioritises and embraces cultural diversity (Lawrence 2004). The shift characterises contexts like Australia as a dynamic culture encompassing a

diversity of cultures, each with its own language and cultural practices (or literacies). Cross-cultural engagement is seen as the capacity to become more familiar with, understand and communicate with these languages and practices.

The first step in effective cross-cultural engagement is the identification of the cultural practices and understandings present in the culture. These cultural beliefs and practices include practices and languages which are explicit but also those which may be taken-for-granted, implicit, unconscious and hidden. They include:

- Verbal behaviours: direct/indirect ways of talking, implicit/explicit language practices, language expectations, role expectations, face considerations, appropriate (rather than taboo) topics of conversation, colloquialisms, and idioms;
- Nonverbal behaviours: kinesics (body language, facial expression, eye contact, posture, gestures), proxemics (use of personal space), paralanguage (the ways we speak, including accent, pace, pause, pitch, volume etc); chronemics (use of time), use of silence, and haptics (touch);
- Naming, greeting, work, wellness/sickness and grieving practices etc;
- Cultural rituals, in relation to celebration days, birth, marriage, death etc;
- Daily practices in relation to food (the ways we prepare, cook and eat), clothes, living environments, etc;
- Communication practices, for example turn-taking in conversations, teamwork and group participation:
 - Religious and spiritual practices;
 - Myths, stories and heritage;
 - Approaches to conflict: according to Hall (2005, p.229) these approaches include avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising and collaborating;
- Value orientations: according to Ferraro (2002), value orientations are 'those things found in all cultures that are expected or hoped for; they involve embedded assumptions about what is right or wrong, good or bad; and they

involve a set of standards by which behaviour is evaluated' (p.25). Ferraro bases his view of value differences on the use of ideal types, or broad sets of logically opposite traits that can be used to compare different cultures. Ferraro (2002) suggests that value orientations include:

- Individualism-collectivism: the extent to which people pursue their own individual activities and agendas rather than contributing to the success and well being of the larger group;
 - Doing-being: the extent to which people are task centred rather than valuing contemplation, thinking and the development of strong personal traits and the maintenance of social relationships;
 - Equality-hierarchy: the extent to which it is felt that people with different levels of power, prestige and status interact with one another;
 - Youth-age: the extent to which a culture emphasizes youthfulness or the experience that comes with age
 - Tough-tender: the extent to which a particular society defines success, in terms of high status, material accumulations and well rewarded jobs or in terms of less tangible rewards, quality time with family and friends, good relationships and spiritual and/or personal growth;
 - Precise-loose time: the extent to which a society regards the use of time and punctuality;
 - Direct-indirect: the extent to whether a culture values an explicit or implicit communication style;
 - Competition-cooperation: whether a competitive or co-operative relationship is generally more valued by a society; and
 - Structure-flexibility control-constraint: the extent to which a society feels they should be in control of themselves and their environment, whether they are inner-directed or other-directed.
- Worldviews: Hall (2005) maintains that world views are abstract notions about the way the world is. 'Often worldviews operate at an unconscious level, so that we are not even aware that other ways of seeing the world are either possible or legitimate' (p.31). Worldviews conceptualise differences in:
- Ascription/achievement: whether societal positions are ascribed at birth or determined by one's efforts;
 - Good/evil: humans are inherently trustworthy or untrustworthy;
 - Mastery/adaptive: whether we believe that we can control the world around us or co-habit with the world; and

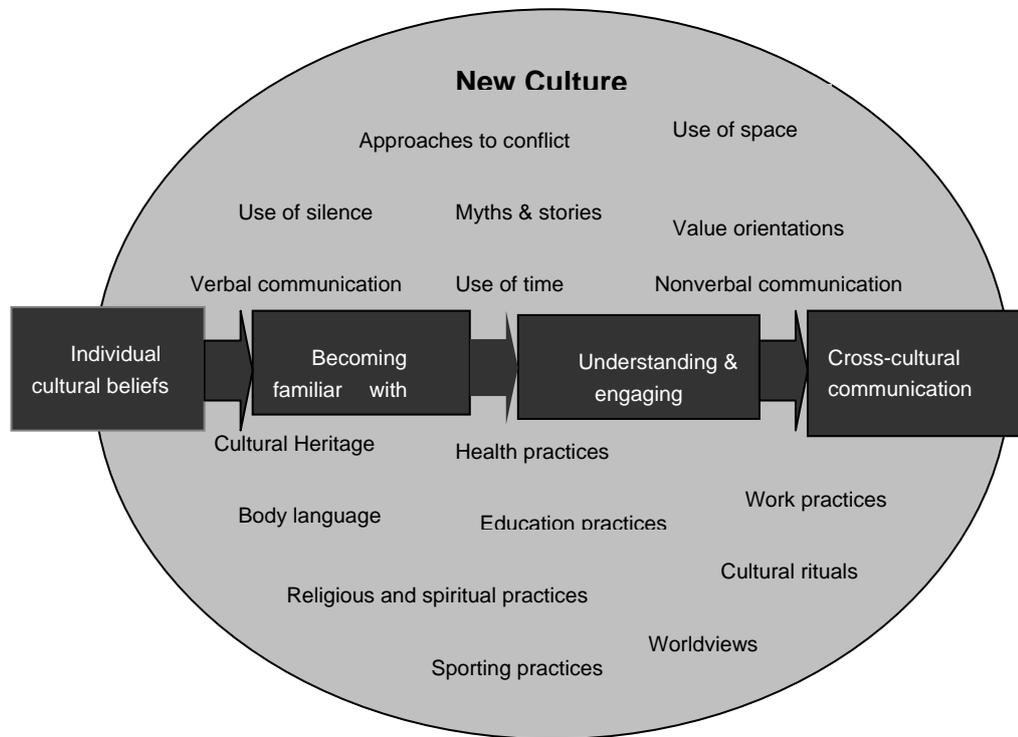
- Social lubricant/information: whether the accuracy of information is of less importance than the immediate social consequences;

The deficit-diversity shift thus provides a means of identifying and making explicit the practices and languages present in a culture. It also reveals the complexities and nuances of cultural engagement. These processes can also be represented diagrammatically.

The Framework for Cross-cultural Engagement

The Framework for Cross-cultural Engagement (see Figure 1) diagrammatically illustrates the processes involved in cross-cultural engagement.

Figure 1: Framework for Cross-cultural Engagement (adapted from Lawrence 2004)



The framework is process-orientated and therefore applicable to a range of cultures and sub-cultural contexts. If applied to a traditional indigenous cultural context, specific cultural practices in relation to a collective value orientation, for example naming, spiritual and grieving practices, as well as nonverbal communication and differences in relation to use of time, silence and space and orientations to power, prestige and status etc can be identified.

If the framework is applied to the *Transformations: Culture and the Environment in Human Development Conference* held at ANU in February 2005, a number of conference literacies, languages and practices can be specified. These include convening literacies, conference organisation literacies – including name badges, satchels and programming, morning, lunch and afternoon tea rituals, pre-conference and dinner function practices, abstract and paper writing discourses, ANU and Manning Clarke literacies, plenary, symposium, keynote and panel presentation practices, sight seeing and social practices, accommodation literacies and networking/lobbying discourses. The 2006 conference has added literacies in relation to the new conference themes and CGPublisher submission and registration literacies.

Complexities in cross-cultural communication

Whilst the framework reveals and makes explicit the specific cultural practices present in a culture, it also identifies complexities in relation to communicating cross-culturally. The first is the recognition that the same act may have different meanings in different cultures. For example, ‘flesh coloured’ stockings/bandaids/makeup etc signifies different colours in different cultures. There is diversity in greetings (bowing, handshakes, business cards, a kiss on each cheek, high fives); in body language like gestures, head touching, exposing the soles of the feet, legs and ankles, and pointing toes (which can be offensive in some cultures but unnoticed in others); in cultural practices like those involved in birthing, naming, eating, dressing, hygiene, dying and grieving; and in expressing emotion (for example with or without inhibition). There are differences in the most basic and personal of our acts and practices: whether to blow our noses or sniff whilst in public; eat with chop sticks, knives and forks, or spoons; use hands, water or paper when toileting; express pain openly or stoically, or employ direct or indirect eye contact in conversation.

A second complexity is that each time we communicate with a different culture we do so from the viewpoint/worldview of our own culture. For example, as we enter a new culture, we embody and bring with us our own cultural knowledge/worldview/discourses and these may – or may not – be in tune with those in the new culture. The processes of gaining familiarity include, then, the awareness that we interpret a new or unfamiliar culture's practices and behaviours from the basis of our own cultural understandings.

Each time we communicate with another culture, we may stereotype or negatively evaluate their culture and ways of behaving, just as other cultures may judge, stereotype or evaluate our culture/ways of behaving through their own cultural filters. Speaking in a quiet voice is a sign of respect in some cultures but a sign of timidity in others; using a direct approach to express disagreement is considered 'normal and natural' in some cultures but a sign of disrespect (and loss of 'face') in others; saying 'thank you' to family members is a sign of courtesy in some cultures but rude in others; a closer personal space is a sign of aggression in some cultures but considered to be 'natural' in others; direct eye contact is a sign of lying in some cultures but a sign of interest and respect in others; and saving face is highly valued in some cultures but not prioritised in others. Gestures too have different meanings in different cultural contexts (the ring signal is interpreted as OK in some cultures but is offensive in others).

Cross-cultural choices

Cross-cultural engagement involves making choices. One choice equates diversity with deficit: assume ours is the mainstream culture and write over any differences with our language and culture; think that there is just one single 'right' way – my/our way – and that this way is normal/natural; assume that if others can't demonstrate these ways then they are deficit or lacking; and consider different ways to be inferior, 'the other'.

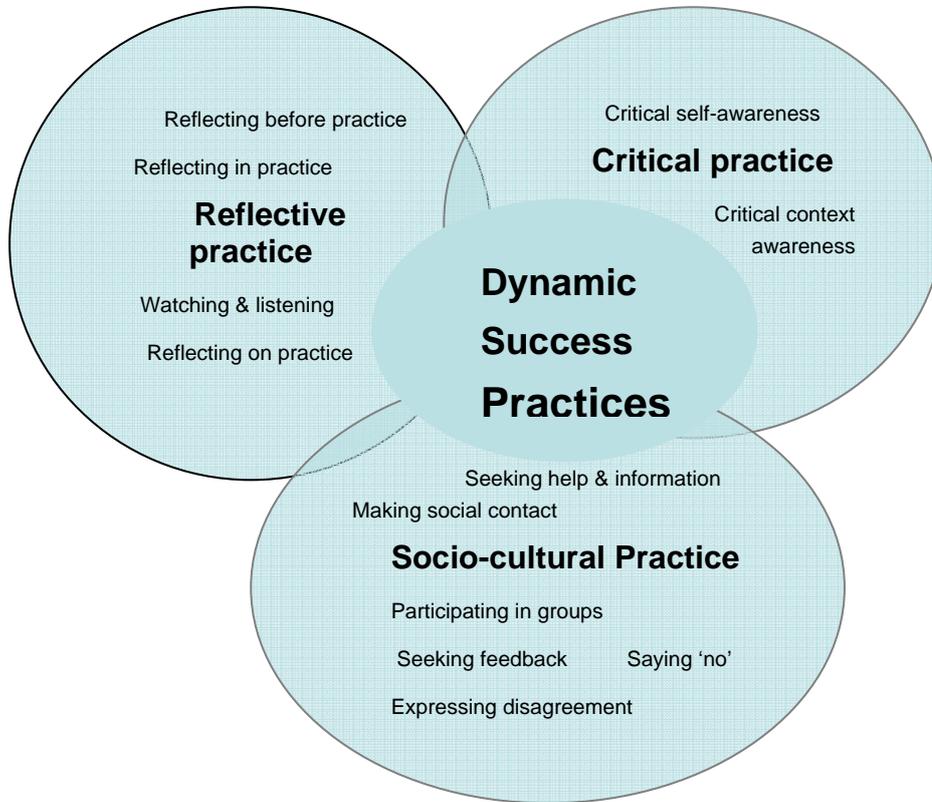
Another choice – the more culturally aware choice – lies in accepting difference: recognising that our culture is just one of many – not better or worse but different. This choice understands that each cultural group communicates using specific verbal and nonverbal behaviours and that these might differ from our own. This choice also recognises that it is important to develop an awareness of different cultures, their understandings and practices and to acknowledge their value and contributions.

That the framework helps us identify the (often less explicit) languages and practices in a culture – whether in cross-cultural contexts or in unfamiliar sub-cultural contexts – is an important first step in helping us raise our awareness of cultural diversity. However the framework doesn't incorporate, in itself, active, practical strategies that we can use to engage and communicate with an unfamiliar culture. A second model, the Model of Cross-cultural Practices, is useful here. The model illustrates and prioritises three practical, concrete strategies that help us to understand and communicate effectively in cross-cultural contexts.

The model of cross-cultural practices

The Model for Cross-cultural Practices (see Figure 2) incorporates three interrelating, dynamic practices: reflective practice, socio-cultural practice and critical practice.

Figure 2: The Model for Cross-cultural Practices (Lawrence 2004)



Reflective practice

Reflective practice emerges from educational (Boud & Walker 1990; Dewey 1933) and sociological (Giddens 1996) literature. Reflective practice gives emphasis to the capacities to observe – to watch and listen – to the literacies/cultural practices of the new culture. Reflective practice also encompasses the concepts of ‘reflection in action’ and ‘reflection on action’ (Schön 1987) as well as ‘reflection before action’ (Boud & Walker 1990). Reflection in action, which occurs immediately, is our ability to learn and develop continually by creatively applying current and past experiences and reasoning to unfamiliar events while they are occurring (Schön 1987). Reflection on action, which occurs later, is a process of thinking back on what happened in a past situation, what may have contributed to the unexpected event, whether the actions taken were appropriate, and how this situation may affect future practice

(Schön 1987). Through the processes of reflecting both ‘in practice’ and ‘on practice’, we continually reshape our approaches and develop ‘wisdom’ or ‘artistry’ in our practice. According to Boud and Walker (1990), there is also ‘reflection before action’, a pro-active tool for simultaneously improving communication and providing insight into priorities prior to reaction, focusing on the person's attitude to experience rather than on the experience itself. It highlights the role of preparation and practice.

The power of observation and reflection in cross-cultural communication and intercultural competence is revealed in many of the presentations to the *Transformations Conference* (2005). Beaumont (p.54), for instance, discusses the value of spiritual reflection in her presentation on ‘Spiritual experience: a key to moving diversity to inclusivity’ whereas Chiswell (p.60) advocates the use of reflection in three areas: to help young Mexican Australians engage in an exploration of their own sense of cultural identity; to help her reflect on her experience of presenting her research; and to assist conference participants to engage in a mini exploration of their own sense of cultural identity through their reflections on her research video. Fialdo (p.67) describes how an enquiring, self-reflective process committed to organisational transformation has informed the Workforce Diversity Strategy at UWA.

Socio-cultural practice

Socio-cultural practice emerges from cross-cultural communication theory (Badley 2000; Bandura 1986; Ferraro 2002) and prioritises the specific socio-cultural competencies of seeking help and information, participating in a group, making social contact, seeking and offering feedback, expressing disagreement and refusing a request (Mak et al. 1997; Lawrence 2004).

A major thread woven through *Transformations Conference* presentations is the pivotal role played by the competency of accessing sources of help and

information¹ with papers prioritising its benefits and/or using the conference to announce sources of support being developed. Cunningham (p.63), for example, discusses a resource location tool, *My Language*, which enables new and emerging communities to access web based services and information sources. Cooke (p.62) emphasises the importance of seeking help and information in relation to the judicial environment while Mosford and Trudinger (p.79) outline the value of two community projects conducted by Fairfield City Council.

An essential feature of the competencies is that they are socio-cultural: that they are socially and culturally appropriate or fine-tuned to the particular culture, subculture or discourse being engaged. As specified in the framework, the verbal and nonverbal behaviours and value orientations underlying the use of the competencies can differ from culture to culture. Seeking help and information, for example, may not be 'culturally' valued, for example in individualist self-reliant cultures², considered a sign of weakness or indicative of a lack of confidence in others. Some people may feel they do not have the right to ask or equate help as 'remedial', perceive it as a sign of 'sucking up' or as 'uncool'. Some may not know how or where to seek out sources of support or are uncertain about the verbal and nonverbal means of requesting helping in different cultural contexts.

Transformations Conference (2005) presenters acknowledge the reticence/reluctance of some communities to request help or access sources of support. Allenby (p.52) argues 'Australian arts/multicultural organisations must encourage cultural dialogues with an (Australian/Palestinian) community which has lost faith in the processes of (multi) cultural community support, and provide assurance that their voice is not being silenced'. The use of refusing a request, expressing disagreement and offering negative feedback can also be problematic,

¹ The importance of seeking help and information cannot be underestimated, recurring repeatedly in everyday discourses, in public relations and media campaigns. For example 'Kids Help Lines' and 'Cancer Help' groups demonstrate the value of this competency.

² In the aftermath of the 2003 Canberra bushfires some residents discussed the difficulties of asking for and accepting help when they themselves had been much more used to providing help to others (*Life Matters* 2003, Radio National).

dependent on culturally appropriate strategies³ and on being fine-tuned to the particular context being engaged. Khan (p.71) outlines the use of development processes to work with disadvantaged groups to overcome exclusion from community life and services. Lawrence (p.74) documents the difficulties of giving (negative) feedback to a high status lecturer in a university context.

Presentations also discuss the role of group participation and making social contact in helping people from both diverse and mainstream cultures become more familiar with 'other' cultures. The competencies' use facilitates the development of mentors, networks, learning communities, friendship groups, and increased access to resources/sources of help. The *Transformations Conference* itself demonstrates the power and efficacy of these twin socio-cultural competencies: as a collaborative process (between FECCA, ANU, UNESCO, ALGA, PIA, ACT government, AMES, Australia Council for the Arts, Australian Multicultural Foundation, Centrelink, Centre for Culture and Health, UNSW, Diversity Health Institute, National Archives of Australia, NPS, SBS, UTS, QUT, and the World Conference Of Religions For Peace); as a context for lobbying and public relations (witness the presence of Coalition politicians and the media strand); and as an opportunity to network and build collaborations.

Individual presentations also provide examples of the critical role played by seeking help and social contact in multicultural engagement. Their role in fostering multiculturalism is confirmed by the plethora of projects and training programs: providing linguistically and culturally appropriate IT and information literacy skills (Cunningham, p.63); community building strategies, like *Cultural Fest* at Townsville, which assist adolescents to develop their cultural identities (Daliri, p.64); community partnerships like the *South Sudanese Woman's Network* in Victoria (Dragic & Kosij, p.65); collaborations like that between Arts Access Australia and disabled groups in Timor-Leste to identify needs and

³ In some cultures, for example in many Asian cultures, it is considered 'rude' to directly refuse a request. On the other hand, Anglo cultures may find it a difficult skill with many self-help programs offering training in the use of assertive formulas like kiss/kick/kiss'.

joint strategies (Wreford, p.92); networks like *Dandenong's Interfaith Network* to remove the 'fear of otherness' promoted by ignorance and to help council staff, police officers and teachers to better understand the communities they serve (Costoso, p.62); and many clubs, programs and partnerships like those fostered by the City of Melville, in Western Australia, to promote the wealth of diversity (Clarke, p.61).

Many research and government projects, community consultations and collaborative ventures depend on the socio-cultural competency of seeking feedback, for example through focus groups and interviews. Forde (p.67) comments about the survey she conducted with a group of Australian journalists in relation to their ethnic and cultural diversity. Jones (p.70) discusses the interviews she conducted with ethnic journalists about the strategies they employed in their work practices whereas Wise (p.91) outlines the research she conducted with local senior citizens in Ashfield, Sydney. Cinta (p.61) reflects about the development of design collaborations that allow for the participation (and feedback) of local communities in creating and supporting, in an on-going basis, their healthcare facilities.

The socio-cultural practices of providing (negative) feedback, expressing disagreement and refusing requests are 'risky' in that there is a potential for offence, however these competencies are essential if diversity is to become a natural part of daily life. For example the use of these competencies can:

- Encourage cultural diversity: Calma (p.57) discusses the difficulties Arab and Muslim Australians have in voicing their anxieties in the climate of fear and uncertainty experienced post-2001;
- Foster sustainability and protect area management: Cater and Dyer (p.58) stress the value of Navarino Island communities raising their concerns about the rate/extent of tourism management;
- Bridge gaps between cultural diversity, community engagement, organisational/professional health cultures and policy development: Chalmers

(p.59) argues against the trend towards mainstreaming marginal, often disenfranchised communities;

- Facilitate moves towards self-determination: Zagala (p.92) describes Vanuatu Islanders resistance to foreign ownership of land and the heated negotiations that ensue between custodial land right claimants; and
- Overcome barriers to workforce participation by skilled migrants: Weeraratne (p.91) highlights the ongoing systemic discrimination experienced by overseas qualified professionals and skilled CLDB migrants in the Australian labour market).

Other presentations were conceived with the objective of providing negative feedback/expressing disagreement with national, local or community practices. Dawson's (p.64) presentation on SBS television provided constructive feedback about SBS's current/future directions while Beattie (p.54) questioned the censorship, and potential marginalisation, of queer couples in mainstream television in a discussion stimulated by ABC's *Playschool*. A theme of the *Conference* itself was the expression of disagreement with the negative labelling of diversity, of 'saying no' to discrimination, intolerance, ignorance and indifference in a plethora of contexts.

Critical practice

Critical practice encompasses twin capacities: people's capabilities for a self-awareness of their own belief systems and cultural practices (critical self-awareness) and their capabilities for language/power critique, including 'their capacities for reflexive analysis of the educational process itself' (critical discourse awareness) (Fairclough 1995).

Kelly (2003) argues that critical self-awareness requires a 'continued attention to the place from which we speak' whereas Gee (1999) describes it as the need to make visible to ourselves, who we are and what we are doing. It incorporates people's capacities for unpacking their own cultural perspectives and belief systems as well as a readiness to challenge these and to transform them if the need arises. Alfred (2002, p.90) maintains:

...we must acknowledge our own socio-cultural histories, identities, biases, assumptions, and recognize how they influence our worldview and our interaction with members of a diverse community. Such awareness results from intense personal reflection and critical analysis of our work as practitioner or scholar. The key is to balance personal transformation with the vision of critical democratic education as a continuous process of social change and transformation.

Critical discourse awareness differs from critical self-awareness in that it concentrates on the power configurations operating in the context or setting and underscores the role of social/cultural critique of the discourses/practices operating at the site.

Conference presentations provide evidence of the importance of applying critical practice (of both self and discourse) in multicultural engagement and communication. Lillian Holt, in her address as Conference Patron, refers to these practices as 'to look within' and 'to look without' and invokes Nelson Mandela's challenge 'to change ourselves'. Lillian Holt also maintains that 'to label was to limit'. The Conference Convenor, Professor Galla, evoked a 'conceptual shift' to overturn negative views of diversity, calling for a new paradigm of human development to make diversity a part of everyone's life, common to humanity. Many presentations called for a redefinition of the way government bodies, and individuals respond to diversity. Laaksonen (p.72) discusses 'cultural rights' in place of 'artificial categorisation' and Lang'at (p.73) advocates the need to address current challenges such as poverty, domestic violence, child abuse, social justice advocacy HIV and AIDs and the preservation of valuable cultural dogmas all pertinent to improving local community living standards.

Dynamic practices

The model symbolises the dynamic inter-relationships that exist between the three practices; that the successful use of one of the practices often depends on the use of another and that, if implemented together, they are more effective in facilitating cross-cultural engagement. For example, observation and reflection are pre-requisites for fine-tuning the socio-cultural competencies to the particular culture being engaged. Likewise, the socio-cultural properties of the competencies rely on an individual's capacity to reflect and provide

(appropriate) feedback about the culture's practices. The socio-cultural properties of the competencies also depend on an individual's capacity to appraise not only their own cultural assumptions and expectations but also the external, and often hidden, assumptions and power configurations present in the culture. The capacities of people to challenge and, where it is possible, to transform unhelpful policies/practices also rely on an individual's use of the socio-cultural practices of offering feedback, expressing disagreement and refusing requests.

Conclusion

The cross-cultural tensions evident in contemporary Australia are a deep source of concern for those committed to cross-cultural awareness and engagement in an increasingly complex world. This paper has attempted to re-think the rush of judgements being made along unsophisticated and crude cultural boundaries.

The paper applied critical perspectives to challenge assumptions of deficit, or negative views of diversity, and to propose a paradigm shift, the deficit-diversity shift. This shift characterises contexts like Australia as a dynamic culture encompassing a multiplicity of cultures, each with its own languages and cultural practices (or literacies). Cross-cultural communication is seen as the capacity to understand and engage these languages and practices. The paper then introduced the Framework for Multicultural Engagement and the Model for Multicultural Practices. The framework provides a means of identifying and making explicit the practices and languages present in an unfamiliar culture, a first step to understanding and communicating in the culture. The model illustrates and prioritises three practical, concrete strategies that help us to better understand and communicate more effectively in cross-cultural contexts: reflective practice, socio-cultural practice and critical practice.

Together, the shift, the framework and the model offer a means of better understanding, engaging and respecting cultural diversity. This is crucial in contemporary Australia where cross-cultural tensions are proliferating,

politically, socio-culturally, spiritually and economically, and where we each (and we all) have responsibilities. These responsibilities include not only the capacity to practise cultural awareness but also the capacities to express disagreement and give negative feedback, for example in relation to mainstream approaches to diversity which discount or override cultural differences and which seek to turn back concepts of cultural diversity and multiculturalism.

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