

Chapter 9

A New Border Pedagogy: Rethinking Outbound Mobility Programs in the Asian Century

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ABSTRACT

Australian universities have implemented outbound student mobility programs focused on the Asian region and hyped them as a ‘powerful’ educational strategy with the potential to positively transform students through opportunities to acquire intercultural competence. It is assumed students’ intercultural competence will give them ‘the edge’ they need to be successful when working with cultural others across diverse contexts. While outbound mobility programs can build students’ intercultural competence, this does not happen just because they study abroad. This chapter presents a new border pedagogy based on the concept of hybridity that is being used to transform an Australian outbound mobility program. The new border pedagogy works by intentionally putting what is ‘known’ into crisis by constantly blurring and problematising boundaries, binaries and identities. Outbound mobility programs that leverage a new border pedagogy underpinned by hybridity can build students’ intercultural competence by encouraging them to embrace potential miscommunication and intercultural conflict.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important predicaments of our time can be described in deceptively simple terms: how are we willing to live together in the new Century? ‘We’ and ‘together’ are key sites of contestation here. (Ang, 2001, p. 193)

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To thrive in what has become known as the ‘Asian Century’ or the projected 21st Century dominance of Asia, presents unprecedented challenges for Australia (Commonwealth Government, 2012). The Asian Century is an unparalleled invitation for Australian universities to think creatively and imaginatively to design robust outbound mobility programs whereby students successfully engage in ‘border crossing’ (Giroux, 1992) to develop intercultural competencies and skills that better enable them to live together mindfully in the new Century. This invitation

...speaks to the need to create pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities. (Giroux, 1992, p. 28)

Outbound mobility—when viewed as border crossing—is much more than students simply traveling to, living and studying in another country and experiencing or adapting to cultural change. Rather, it signifies students’ ability to recognise cultural borders and be ready, through prior preparation, to creatively and successfully deal with the dissonance that arises when their own cultural experiences and knowledge are at conflict with their new host nation’s different educational and social environments.

Students’ ability to recognise cultural borders requires instruction in contemplative practices that encourage them to develop deep knowledge and skills before, during and after their outbound mobility experience. In other words, they need pedagogical training where they learn mindfulness strategies to listen to and hear what others have to say. They also need to learn and practice how to respond positively to individuals who may have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds by drawing on informed frames of reference. These learned skills can then assist them in adapting—being flexible and empathetic—and embracing an ethnorelative view so they are better prepared to appropriately and effectively communicate in different intercultural encounters.

Few universities, if any, have student mobility programs grounded in the pedagogical notion of border crossing to foster an intercultural competence that prepares students to embrace the inherently multicultural, linguistic and economic plurality of the Asian Century. To actually ‘hear’ someone culturally different, Australian students need mindful learning experiences that require them to critically acknowledge their Western (as well as other), often postcolonial, biases. Otherwise, they will likely engage in ‘othering’ by default, thereby reinforcing and reproducing positions of domination and subordination. This is an initial step towards developing an intercultural competence that prepares students to successfully border cross and embody new identities that contest those taken-for-granted views that dichotomies of otherness are ‘natural’.

A pedagogy that embraces border crossing positions universities well to assist students in understanding that pluralistic social identities are *not* natural, but actually represent an established social order or hierarchy that needs to be disrupted. A pedagogy where border crossing is the norm, or expected, can potentially assist outbound mobility students in understanding they have agency to contest the practice of ‘othering’. With that understanding, ‘we’ and ‘seizing the opportunities of the Asian Century’ are then already challenged to not mean just Australians, but all peoples in Asia and the world. ‘Together’ is also contested when, ‘to build on *our* collective strengths and shape *our* future’ (p iii, Commonwealth Government, 2012) actually implies disrupting colonial narratives and creating new possibilities (Bhabha, 1996).

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