

Chapter 9

Intercultural Dialogue through Design (iDiDe): A Model of Intercultural Collaboration and Student Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural dialogue through design, globally known as “iDiDe” (pronounced i-dee-dee) was initiated by an Australian university in 2011 for architecture and built environment disciplines. Set within the context of international education and internationalisation, which are the focus of Australian universities this century, iDiDe offers a model of intercultural collaboration and student engagement. iDiDe is more than a generic international study tour. Firstly, there is collaborative academic leadership that comes from institutional partnerships between Australia and five Asian nations (Malaysia, Thailand, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka), secondly, intercultural dialogue and intercultural understanding underpin the pedagogical approach, and thirdly, iDiDe projects extend discipline specific learning into the realms of reality. This chapter is an expose of iDiDe. It seeks to determine what elements of the model contribute to intercultural collaboration and student engagement. Findings are evaluated for their impact upon participants. The potential for transformative learning and response to global citizenship are discussed along with future research.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian government under Julia Gillard, Prime Minister of Australia 2012-2013 published a White Paper titled “Australia in the Asian Century” to provide a plan for Australia’s future success. It called upon Australia and Australians to “play our part in becoming a more Asia-literate and Asia-capable nation” (Australia & Gillard, 2012). Ms. Gillard’s message is a reversal of perspective of Australia being the dominant provider of international education that began with the Colombo Plan. The Colombo Plan, first introduced in 1950s saw deserving scholars from underdeveloped countries

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receive educational scholarships in developed countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia. The New Colombo Plan (NCP), launched in 2014, is the Australian Government's signature initiative with the specific agenda of building a knowledge base of Asia to ensure Australian undergraduates have the skills and work-based experiences, to contribute to domestic and wider regional economy in the century marked as the "Asian century". \$100 million has been committed towards global student mobility (over five years) that includes internships/mentorships, flexible mobility programs, both short and longer-term, practicums and research. Significantly, NCP is intended to be transformational, deepening Australia's relationships in the region, at the individual level and through expanding stakeholder links (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2014).

This chapter introduces an Australian case study of a model of global student mobility for architecture and built environment education called "Intercultural Dialogue Through Design" (globally known as "iDiDe" and pronounced i-dee-dee) iDiDe). iDiDe was initiated in 2011 through leveraging of academic alumni global connections formed in the 1980s, under the auspices of international education, specifically involving Australian graduates from Malaysia who are now academics employed in universities in both countries. It subscribes to the specific agenda of the NCP to achieve transformative and deep authentic learning experiences through a framework of intercultural learning. To date iDiDe has expanded and sustained partnerships to include five Asian nations (Malaysia, Thailand, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka). The letters that spell the acronym "iDiDe" are an abbreviated play on the words "Intercultural Dialogue Through Design". High levels of participant engagement exist intrinsically in a study tour because of the appeal of travel. iDiDe has drawn upon this appeal and activated enriched learning environments through cultural immersion and collaboration with international peers. The learning objectives and graduate learning outcomes are aligned with discipline specific curriculum, and strategies for an internationalized syllabus. iDiDe acts as an intercultural collaborative platform and carries the vision to infuse future architects and built environment professionals with the essential skillset of a global citizen. Worldwide, the professions of architecture and design of the built environment look to teamwork and collaboration to achieve sustainable solutions. National and cultural boundaries are traversed as a matter of practice. Spaces that transcend cultural spheres of understanding offer learning opportunities. What is the nature of engagement that occurs in these "intercultural spaces"; how do they impact students who experience them? This chapter offers a research study of the iDiDe model in three parts. The first provides context to the rationale of the model. It provides an overview to internationalisation of higher education and introduces definitions of intercultural dialogue and intercultural understanding, as well as how these are used towards developing theory that underpins intercultural collaborative learning. The second part explains the iDiDe intentions, academic content, teaching and learning strategy, and the structure of delivery. Each iDiDe has both common and unique elements. A chronological history of iDiDe is presented as a comparative overview of the elements and the direction the programme has taken in the period 2011 – 2015. Each programme has been reflected upon as a trajectory of maturity. The outcomes have been substantiated through evaluation of participant testimonials. The final part of this chapter discusses the lessons learnt. The chapter concludes with direction for further research on future iDiDe offerings that will seek to validate these findings and to consolidate the theoretical framework for a best practice model of intercultural collaboration and student engagement for design.

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