

## Teaching Fellowship 2012 (Aug. 2012 – Feb. 2013)

### 'Supporting Students' Intercultural Learning on Exchange: A Three-Stage Intervention Model'

#### Background

As a Faculty and as a University we routinely send students on exchange programs and we expect their experiences to result in an increase in intercultural competence or 'cultural literacy' as a result of their time on exchange (eg. FAHSS Handbook states that 'Exchange is an opportunity to broaden horizons, enhance global understanding and increase cultural literacy'). But new research by Martin Forsey, Sue Broomhall and Jane Davis (UWA) demonstrates that contrary to our expectations, these processes are not taking place. Students find it difficult to articulate exactly what it is that they learn on exchange. Even when they were asked specifically what they learned about the culture of the country in which they studied, the students interviewed by Forsey et al gave relatively superficial answers about food, the cost of transport, student social life and even the weather: 'there was little insight or deeper understanding of the differences or similarities between "home" and "away".' (Forsey et al, 2011: 6). The researchers concluded that universities need to actively intervene to ensure that students do increase their 'cultural literacy' through participation in exchange programs: 'Enhancing the experiences of students requires mechanisms for reflective practice through a preparatory workshop, in-country support of the learning trajectory of students, and a more structured follow-up on their return, inviting students to reflect rigorously on their experiences, their learning, and how to use these experiences to better effect into the future.' (Forsey et al, 2011: 10) This conclusion is supported by research findings in the United States: Michael Vande Berg, for instance, writes that if we want and expect students to 'learn things, and learn in ways, that they will not if they stay on their home campuses', then we need to 'intervene actively in our students' learning – before, during, and after their experiences abroad.' (2007: 392) Currently no such support is offered to UWA students who undertake exchange or study abroad programs.

#### Aims

My project will pilot the support of students' intercultural learning with a small (c.20) group of students who will complete an intensive short-course exchange at Stuttgart University (Germany) in January and February 2013. Students who volunteer to be part of this project will participate in a pre-departure workshop, contribute to a photoblog during the six weeks of their exchange, and take part in a re-entry workshop shortly after they return from Stuttgart in February 2013. The long-term goal is to make this three-stage intervention program available to all UWA students who undertake an exchange or study abroad program (support of International Centre)

#### Project Description

Based on the research I will develop and implement a three-stage intervention model for students participating in the short-course exchange in Stuttgart in January and February 2013.

This will consist of a pre-departure workshop, a photoblog and a return workshop:

1. The pre-departure workshop will be based in part on a workshop on reflective practice developed by Jan Gothard, Greg Downey and Tonia Gray in the ALTC-funded project *Bringing the Learning Home*. In addition to the principles of reflective practice covered in the BTLH workshop, my workshop is likely to cover learning expectations, aspects of intercultural communication, and Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The US model of regular instructor intervention in in-country reflective projects such as the photoblog – also a feature of the *Bringing the Learning Home* photoblog – is unlikely to be sustainable in the Australian context due to funding constraints. An innovative aspect of my project will therefore be the development of instructor materials on teaching students to effectively intervene in each other's reflection and learning by providing peer feedback. The teaching of these skills will be a central focus of my pre-departure workshop.

2. The photoblog<sup>1</sup> will be explained during the pre-departure workshop and set up before students depart Australia. Students will have been assigned to groups during the pre-departure workshop (4-5 students per group) and the members of each group will be responsible for responding to each other's blogs with questions, ideas and feedback. This approach is in line with research on teaching and learning which emphasises that 'students learn by constructing, rather than simply passively absorbing, knowledge' (Vande Berg, 2007: 396). The efficacy of this student-centred approach to in-country support of intercultural learning will be assessed at the end of the project.
3. The return workshop will be based on the workshop developed for *Bringing the Learning Home*. It will give students the opportunity to revisit their learning expectations and reflect on whether these expectations were met, to reflect on aspects of intercultural communication, and will help them to articulate their experiences in terms of the transferable skills and competencies they learned while on exchange.

### Long term applicability

This project has wider relevance and applicability for the School of Humanities, the Faculty of Arts more broadly and the University as a whole:

- Once tested and refined, the three-stage intervention model could be made available to other students in ELS who participate in comparable short-term exchange programs (French and Italian). It could also be trialled among students of French, German and Italian who undertake semester or year-long exchange programs which include an immersion component.
- Next, it could be extended to include comparable programs for students of Asian languages
- The longer term goal is to roll out the three-stage intervention to all UWA students who undertake exchange programs, whether these involve a language component or not. This goal is supported by the International Centre.

### Education priorities addressed by the project

- **ED2:** UWA's current mission and vision emphasises an international focus, and the teaching and research priorities stated in the Operational Priorities Plan 2009-2013 reflect that emphasis. Student exchange, for example, is explicitly supported in operational objective ED2.4: 'Continue to develop and embed work place practicum, field work opportunities and study abroad'. The importance of developing cultural competence is supported in ED2.6: 'Encourage breadth of study and cultural competence among all students'. This project thus addresses the second of the university's education priorities, '**to improve the University's courses**'. The project represents a development and improvement of study abroad for a small cohort of students, with the longer-term goal being to open up the pre-, in-country and post-exchange support to all study abroad students. The workshops and support developed specifically target the development of cultural competence in the students participating in the project.
- **ED3:** The third education priority, '**to extend high-quality teaching approaches and improve learning outcomes**', is also addressed by this project. UWA's new Vice Chancellor, Paul Johnson, has stated that he would like to see student participation in study abroad and exchange increase from 12% to 50%. If these students are to experience the full benefit of international exchange, it is imperative that we intervene to facilitate and support their learning before, during and after their exchange program. My aim is to improve the intercultural learning of students undertaking exchange and thus help them to develop the cultural literacy required to act as global citizens. Furthermore, the return workshop will teach students to articulate their exchange experience in

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<sup>1</sup> A photoblog differs from a traditional blog in that photos act as the stimulus for reflection rather than being used primarily for illustrative purposes. The use of photoblogs as reflective practice has developed from photo elicitation, the practice of inserting a photograph into a research interview. Photo elicitation has been used by sociologists and anthropologists since the late 1950s and proponents argue that interviews which use photo elicitation evoke 'a different kind of information': since 'images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words', photographs can 'jolt' subjects into a new view or awareness of their social existence (Harper, 2002: 13, 21).

terms of the skills and competencies developed, which is crucial in today's competitive jobs market.

- **ED4:** The project addresses the fourth education priority '**to further develop the links between teaching, learning and research**' by drawing on current Australian and international research on intercultural learning through study abroad and exchange. The project aims to translate research findings on intercultural learning through study abroad/exchange into better teaching and learning outcomes for UWA students who undertake international exchange. It is also linked to my current research project with Chantal Bourgault, Mark Pegrum and US colleagues, which in addition to being funded by an Improving Student Learning Grant has to date received \$2000 from the International Centre and \$5000 seed funding from the University's Teaching & Learning Committee. We have undertaken to provide some recommendations to the TLC and to work towards the goal of a national Learning and Teaching grant application, with a view to strengthening UWA's internationalisation objectives, as well as links with other universities in Australia and overseas. This project will further contribute to these research developments.
- **ED5:** Finally, although the students targeted by the project will not be on campus at UWA during the second stage of the project (photoblog), the project nonetheless supports ED5: '**to improve student engagement in a high-quality campus community**'. ED5.7 addresses the need to 'implement teaching practices which encourage and support students to engage deeply with their learning'. The pre-departure workshop, the in-country photoblog and the return workshop all aim to facilitate students' reflective practice and their acquisition of cultural literacy, which is a key objective of study abroad and exchange.