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Navigating intercultural competence at home

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Abstract

A globalised world brings diversity into the classroom and internationalisation to higher education, where intercultural competence comes to the fore. Accommodating interculturality, however, extends beyond the international student cohort and includes heterogeneous domestic cultures, including Indigenous cultures. In the Australian context, historically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced limited access to culturally appropriate health, social and educational services. Accordingly, higher education institutions can be vehicles of change in this regard. More specifically, just as many higher education providers have moved towards internationalised curriculum, there is increasing evidence and intention to introduce Indigenised curriculum where respective educators delivering indigenised curricula need to be culturally competent. Institutions therefore, are offering cultural training programs for educators delivering Indigenised curricula, where recognition of Indigenous cultural competence amongst educators would be useful. Yet, the review presented in this paper demonstrates a gap in literature regarding measurement of cultural and intercultural competence in the context of Australian higher education. To that end, an instrument specifically designed to measure educator intercultural competence in Australia as related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is proposed. This instrument will enable higher education institutions to document educator Indigenous cultural competence, demonstrate the intercultural skills of their educational staff and continuously improve intercultural competency within the institution.

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Introduction

Internationalisation in higher education is an increasingly important issue in a globalised world. (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2020; Buchmüller, Malhotra, & Bath, 2021) because a globalised world requires graduates with well-developed international and intercultural perspectives (Jones, 2022).

Internationalising higher education generates the benefit of intercultural knowledge and skills (Knight & de Wit, 1995). International students bring the benefit of cultural diversity to a domestic context and international students help to facilitate intercultural learning for domestic students (Sawir, 2013). Yet, internationalisation in higher education largely focuses on the postcolonial, Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking, Western world (de Wit et al., 2021). The recognised dominance of Western perspectives in higher education curriculum, which are largely white perspectives, reinforce traditional power dynamics, inequities and social injustices (Montgomery & Trahar, 2023; Stein, 2017; Stein, Andreotti, & Suša, 2019). This academic ethnocentrism (Marr, 2023; Stier, 2009) and academic colonialism (Heleta & Chasi, 2023) continues to minimise the potential contribution of diverse voices, as well as local and Indigenous knowledge (Stein, 2021; Stier, 2009).

Internationalisation of higher education implies an openness of cultural diversity (Sawir, 2013). Working towards inclusive and intercultural learning, creates respect and tolerance of diverse cultures, contexts, agendas and perspectives (Deardorff, 2011; de Wit et al., 2021). A conducive and inclusive learning environment necessarily must address the intercultural competences for both international and domestic students. Being able to relate to, and interact with, people from vastly different cultural and ethnic backgrounds is an increasingly important aspect of competency both domestically and abroad (Rawal & Deardorff, 2021). In this way, local and global needs are highly connected (Jones et al., 2021; Kudo, Volet, & Whitsed, 2020). As Jones and de Wit (2012) assert, learning from non-Western cultures can benefit students, employers and institutions and enhance the quality of education in a meaningful way. More specifically, internationalisation of higher education contributes to the social and cultural development of communities and the broader goal of global social responsibility (Jones et al., 2021).

With a strong intention to support their students, higher education institutions strive to understand and meet the needs of international and culturally diverse students (Ammigan, 2019; Arkoudis et al., 2019). Consequently, internationalisation of the curriculum has become a central focus, with an embedded emphasis on cultural diversity and intercultural perspectives (Sawir, 2013; Leask, 2008). More holistically, as Jones (2022) suggests, internationalisation is a response to diversity but interculturalisation enables inclusion of all students. Accommodating interculturality, extends beyond the international student cohort and includes heterogeneous domestic cultures, such as Indigenous cultures. In the Australian context,

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have historically experienced limited access to culturally appropriate health, social and educational services (Betancourt, Green, & Carillo, 2002; Clifford et al., 2015; Jongen, McCalman, & Bainbridge, 2017; Smith, Fatima, & Knight, 2017; Spencer, 2006; Universities Australia, 2011; Westwood & Westwood, 2010). This experience has historically affected and continues to impact their general wellbeing and social mobility in the community. Accordingly, educational institutions have a distinct opportunity to position as agents of change and positively influence the intercultural competence of educators and students (Frawley, Russell, & Sherwood, 2020; Pitman, 2017; Universities Australia, 2011), especially regarding Indigenous cultures.

Efforts towards the internationalisation of curriculum and integration of intercultural perspectives is also evident with Indigenisation of the curriculum (Williams et al., 2022; Williamson & Dalal, 2007). Indigenisation of curriculum intends the culturally appropriate use of First Nation theories and practices as a means to transform the deeply embedded Westernised values, norms and philosophies (Bennett & Gates, 2021). The development of Indigenous cultural competence is a process of learning to understand and respect Australian Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing, being and doing (Bennett et al., 2016; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Documented examples of indigenised curriculum in Australia are provided by Romano et al.'s (2023) indigenisation of a capstone Information Technology unit, Williams et al.'s (2022) Indigenisation of geography curriculum and Bodle and Blue's (2020) indigenisation of business curriculum.

Notably, in delivering Indigenised and culturally infused curriculum, the educator's role is critical (Rigney, 2017). Educators delivering Indigenised curriculum for example, have a frontline responsibility to ensure that content is culturally accurate and Indigenous students are culturally safe (Fredericks et al., 2023). To achieve that end goal in a culturally sensitive manner, institutions are implementing cultural training for educators. To establish the effectiveness and appropriateness of such institutional strategy requires recognition of the varying levels of educator intercultural competence, before and after training interventions. In the educational context of Australian Indigenous culture, this point is especially important given historically, evaluation related to Indigenous policies and programs has been poor (Smith & Robertson, 2020).

With an intention to document educator cultural competence, a search for an appropriate measure of Indigenous cultural competence began. The literature review presented here identifies and describes relevant cultural and intercultural competence measures but shows the lack of a measure for educator (inter)cultural competence. More specifically, this review identifies a gap in the literature, regarding the measure of intercultural competence as related to Australian education and Indigenous peoples and cultures. Therefore, the effectiveness of institutional implementation of cultural training programs for educators who may be charged with the responsibility of delivering culturally infused coursework, may not be well evidenced. In reviewing relevant instruments, a proposed instrument that accommodates this gap and incorporates a culturally sensitive consideration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture, is presented in Appendix A.

The Australian cultural context

The cultural context of Australia entails one of the oldest cultures on earth with the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples evidenced as existing more than 65,000 years ago

(National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2022). Yet, when British colonisers arrived in 1788, Australia was declared *terra nullius*. *Terra nullius* is a legal principle meaning the land of Australia was uninhabited, which enabled the British government to justify and begin settlement. Fast forward to 1992, the landmark Mabo decision by the Australian High Court ruled that Indigenous peoples had indeed inhabited Australian land for thousands of years with their lands gradually dispossessed as the Australian nation developed (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Islander Studies, 2022). In 2008, then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a public apology on behalf of the Federal Government for the *Stolen Generations*, where successive governments from the mid-1800s to the 1970s forcibly removed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, communities and country. On the 15th anniversary of this apology, in 2023, the current Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, reinforced the Australian commitment to address the profound intergenerational grief, trauma and loss incurred. More specifically, Prime Minister Albanese announced a Closing the Gap Implementation Plan with \$424million investment, designed to address Indigenous disadvantage related to housing, food/water and education. In October 2023, Australia voted down a national referendum to amend the Australian Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Peoples with a Voice to Parliament (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2023).

As part of the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, a target is set to increase the proportion of Indigenous Australians 25-34 years with a tertiary qualification to 70% by 2031. Baseline data from 2016 identifies 42% of Indigenous Australians hold a tertiary qualification as opposed to 72% for non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021). Notably, between 2010 and 2019, the number of Indigenous students enrolled at university nearly doubled from 11,024 to 21,033 and there was 108% increase in the number of higher education course completions by Indigenous students (DESE, 2020). Despite this progress, Indigenous students remain an under-represented cohort comprising 1.9% of the domestic higher education student population, whereas Indigenous Australians make up 3.3% of the total Australian population.

A whole-of-institution approach

In the Australian context, Indigenous peoples present a unique position given their experiences of history, racism and power (Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2021). Cultural competence built on an Indigenous foundation includes three domains: knowing, doing and being (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). According to Martin and Mirraboopa (2003), knowing is about understanding history, culture, customs and beliefs; doing is about culturally appropriate action and behaviour; and being is about awareness, authenticity and openness of values and beliefs. Attempts to better services for Australia's Indigenous population began with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support programs first established in South Australia in the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s Indigenous support programs were more broadly adopted and Indigenous academic units or Schools were developed to improve quality education for Indigenous students, increasing funding and improving awareness of Indigenous issues.

In 2008, Ellen Grote, a non-indigenous person writing from the Noongar country in the south west region of Western Australia, was funded by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) via a grant from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. This project was in response to the call for more culturally appropriate health, social and

educational services for Indigenous Australians and the purpose of this grant was to explore the principles and practices of cultural competency at some of Australia's leading tertiary institutions. Three specific cases demonstrate the value of community partnerships and the transformational potential of a new generation of culturally competent professionals (Grote, 2008). These cases are the University of Western Australia medical school, University of South Australia psychology program and the Charles Sturt University institution-wide approach to Indigenous cultural competency. Each of these cases involve the implementation of Indigenised curriculum and in the case of Charles Sturt University, delivery by Indigenous academics. Yet, evaluation of these efforts focused on student feedback and student outcomes rather than any measure of educator cultural competence.

In the past 50 years, much academic research has been conducted on the topic of Indigenous cultural safety, inclusivity and competency (recent examples include Curtis et al., 2019; Fowler et al., 2018; Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Saltwater et al., 2021; Wylie, McConkey, & Corrado, 2021). Multiple national reports, inquiries and reviews have also been conducted and include for example, the 1991 *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*. This Royal Commission highlights the need for Indigenous cultural competency to be embedded in professional training in Australia. The Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008) also emphasises the value of Indigenous knowledge in higher education and the need for Indigenous knowledge to be included as a graduate attribute. Building on the *Queensland Health Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability framework 2010-2033*, the Queensland Government (2017) developed the *Queensland Cultural Capability Framework*. The *Queensland Cultural Capability Framework* is designed to facilitate better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by ensuring their cultural perspective is core to the services provided.

Specific to the context of higher education, in 2011, Universities Australia conducted the Indigenous Cultural Competency project with the objective of informing the direction and providing guidance for cultural competence within Australian higher education. The outcome of that project was the *National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities*. Universities Australia (2011) highlighted the under-representation of Indigenous staff, the general lack of cultural knowledge, understanding and recognition, the historical marginalisation of Indigenous peoples in education and the challenge of overcoming transgenerational injustices. The overall emphasis of the Universities Australia (2011) national framework positions education as a leading vehicle of change and supports a whole-of-institution approach (Fowler et al., 2018; Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Smith & Robertson, 2020). A range of key priorities and strategies were put forward to achieve engagement and commitment across Indigenous communities and institutional partnerships (Bennett et al., 2016).

Implementation of identified Universities Australia (2011) priorities and strategies were proposed as a three-stage design, with the first stage comprising a national stocktake of Indigenous cultural competency activities in Australian universities. Stage Two investigated three universities cases related to cultural competency interventions and Stage Three put forward a National Framework. Yet, the national stocktake did not include any measure of cultural competence of the educators delivering Indigenised curriculum throughout Australia. Rather, Stage One and Two entailed a focus on pedagogical programs, activities and interventions. Consequently, the *National Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency* produced by Universities Australia (in

collaboration with IHEAC) is focused on a call for inclusive curriculum across the disciplines, with Indigenous cultural competence flagged as an intended graduate attribute. Specific to the Indigenous context in Australia, the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al., 2012), proposed investments to support Indigenous pathways in higher education and acknowledged evidence to assess success of specific programs was lacking (Behrendt et al., 2012; Smith & Robertson, 2020). Strategically, in seeking change on this front, a whole-of-institution approach is advocated (Behrendt et al., 2012; Fowler et al., 2018; Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Smith & Robertson, 2020).

From culture, to multiculturalism and interculturalism

The concept of culture is fundamental to the question of intercultural competence.

A static conceptualisation of culture is based on demographics such as, religion or nationality, as per Hofstede and Hofstede's (1982) dimensions of national culture. More dynamically, culture can be considered as, "networks of knowledge consisting of learned routines of thinking, feeling and interacting with other people...and ideas about aspects of the world" (Hong, 2009, p4). In this way, culture is not a static concept but rather is conceptualised as fluid and socially constructed.

Pre-1990, multiculturalism was widely considered as a positive way to accept individual differences in a non-discriminatory and respectful manner (Mansouri & Modood, 2021). Tolerance of difference requires a recognition that different people have different needs and equality requires the accommodation of differing needs, where such accommodation may be existentially important for the survival of certain people. An example of how this plays out, is found within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, where limited access to culturally appropriate services negatively impacts the community (Betancourt, Green, & Carillo, 2002; Clifford et al., 2015; Jongen et al., 2017; Spencer, 2006; Universities Australia, 2011; Westwood & Westwood, 2010). Consequently, growing and fostering culturally competent graduates destined to become service providers came to the fore, along with a recognition that, like culture, cultural competence is not a static concept (Bennett, 2017, 2013, 1986; Smith & Robertson, 2020; Stier, 2009).

Efforts to develop cultural competence tools and interventions largely stem from the work of Cross et al. (1989), That original work from Cross and his colleagues was commissioned by the US Department of Justice and developed from the context of mental health services for minority children. From the perspective of Cross et al. (1989), cultural competence comprises behaviours, attitudes and/or policies that enable higher education academics, professionals and students to navigate intercultural contexts. While the Cross et al. (1989) perspective on cultural competence is widely cited and long accepted, cultural proficiency is achieved through a developmental process (Bennett, 2017, 2013, 1986; Campinha-Bacote, 2002). As per Cross et al. (1989), cultural competence is usually investigated at the individual level, whereas cultural competency is a fundamental consideration at the institutional level (Hollinsworth et al., 2017). As such, Hollinsworth et al. (2017) suggests a whole-of-institution approach to improving cultural competency includes cultural training for Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff where positionality is a prime consideration.

From a meta-analysis of cultural competence, Gozu et al. (2007) reviewed 45 instruments focused on measuring the cultural competence of health professionals. This meta-analysis identifies 15

instruments with established reliability and validity. Further analysis of the identified 15 reliable/valid instruments, several instruments were inaccessible (ie. not published, not shared), three more instruments were excluded because of unrelated content and/or not measuring cultural competence. As a result, six instruments were identified (CSES, TSET, M-CCSAQ, CAS, MAQ, SAMI) and are described in the following discussion. From these identified and accessible reliable/valid instruments, Gozu et al. (2007) put forward four dimensions of learner outcomes related to cultural competence: knowledge (8 items), attitude (30 items), skill (7 items) and behaviour (5 items).

The Cultural Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES) (Bernal & Froman, 1993) measures cultural self-efficacy of community health nurses and is developed from social cognitive theory. This instrument comprises 26 items with three items asking respondents to rate their confidence in general cultural concepts, 16 items asking respondents to rate their confidence with different aspects of various racial/ethnic groups and seven items asking respondents to rate their confidence in skills related to cross-cultural care. In line with the work of Bernal and Froman (1993), Loftin et al. (2013) identify four reliable/valid instruments measuring cultural competence in nursing including the Transcultural Self-Efficacy Tool (TSET) (Jeffreys & Smodlaka, 1998, 1996), the Inventory for Assessing the Process of Cultural Competence – Revised (IAPCC-R) (Campinha-Bacote, 1999), the Cultural Competence Assessment (CCA) (Schim et al., 2003) and the Nurse Cultural Competence Scale (NCCS) (Perng & Watson, 2012).

The TSET (Jeffreys & Smodlaka, 1998, 1996) comprises cognitive, practical and affective subscales and 83 items in total (Loftin et al., 2013). Based on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, this instrument is designed as an educational tool for nurse educators teaching cultural competence. Further testing of this instrument is presented by Jeffreys and Dogan (2010), Osmancevic et al. (2021) recommends this measure of cultural competence for nurses and an Australian application for nursing students is presented by Lim, Downie, and Nathan (2004).

Like the TSET is designed for nursing, the IAPCC-R (Campinha-Bacote, 1999) is also designed for nursing professionals. IAPCC-R comprises 25 items measuring the cultural competence across the dimensions of cultural awareness, cultural desire, cultural knowledge, cultural skill and cultural encounters. Unlike TSET and IAPCC-R, the CCA tool is more generally focused on the context of health care providers and comprises 26 items and measures cultural competence across the dimensions of cultural diversity, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and culturally competent behaviours.

The NCCS builds on the work of Campinha-Bacote (1999) and comprises 20 items across the dimensions of knowledge, sensitivity and skill. Notably, Gozu et al. (2007), Loftin et al. (2013) and Lin, Lee, & Huang (2017), along with Betancourt (2003) concur in that knowledge, attitude and skills are the most widely used dimensions to measure cultural competence and more specifically, the IAPCC-R, TSET, and NCCS instruments have this base with established reliability and validity.

The Modified Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Questionnaire (M-CCSAQ) (Godkin & Savageau, 2001) comprises 50 attitudinal items related to race, culture and social issues, three knowledge items and 21 cultural awareness items. Also developed by Godkin and Savageau (2003), the Cultural Assessment Survey (CAS) comprises eight attitudinal items and seven

cultural awareness and knowledge items. The Multicultural Assessment Questionnaire (MAQ) (Culhane-Pera et al., 1997) comprises six knowledge items, six skills items and four attitudinal items but this instrument is specifically related to curriculum design. The Sociocultural Attitudes in Medicine Inventory (SAMI) (Tang et al., 2002) comprises five items related to sociocultural knowledge and 21 items related to which sociocultural factors influence clinical care. Like the MAQ however, the SAMI is focused on measuring the impact of particular curriculum.

Overall, the instruments reviewed to this point measure an individual's self-perception of their cultural competency (Kumaş-Tan et al., 2007). In other words, individuals may choose to report a socially acceptable response rather than provide an accurate answer. Another limitation is that the majority of these instruments are designed as general measures of culture developed to assess the ability of health care providers to care for people from diverse backgrounds (Loftin et al., 2013). In contrast, Bernal and Froman (1993) developed the CSES instrument to specifically assess the confidence levels of nurses caring for people from Hispanic, African American and Asian cultures. However, there is a distinct gap in the development of an instrument to measure cultural competence for educators and especially so with regards to cultural competence related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the context of Australian higher education. In further seeking to identify an appropriate measure, discussion turns to a review of intercultural competence and respective instruments.

Intercultural competence

Higher education providers are responsible for providing students with the knowledge and skills they require to compete in a complex global job market. Against this background, a common element in internationalisation of higher education and intercultural education is the recognised importance of intercultural competence (Stier, 2009, 2003). Advancing intercultural competence amongst educators, therefore, is an important topic in the discourse on internationalisation of higher education (Deardorff, 2011). More than that, intercultural competence is an essential element in international education contexts as well as the context of domestic education (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Mak & Barker, 2013). Given this recognised importance of intercultural competence, educational institutions are strategically prioritising intercultural skills (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Griffith et al., 2016).

Since the 1990s, interculturism is recognised as a pro-diversity position (Bouchard, 2015, 2011; Cante, 2016, 2012; Zapata-Barero, 2017). While multiculturalism focuses on a macro perspective, interculturism focuses on a micro perspective (Mansouri & Modood, 2021). More specifically, interculturism emphasises relational engagement at the individual level, with an awareness of cultural biases that may be at play. Development of intercultural competence therefore requires relational engagement skills teamed with a consciousness of cultural biases (Bennett, 2017, 2013, 1986).

There are many comprehensive reviews of intercultural competence (see for example, Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Fantini, 2020; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Griffith et al., 2016; Guillén-Yparrea, & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023; Müller et al., 2020; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). These various reviews indicate that generally accepted dimensions of intercultural competence include knowledge, skills and attitudes (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Bennett, 2017, 2013; Deardorff 2011; Griffith et al., 2016) and awareness (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Fantini, 2020; Almeida et al., 2016).

These reviews also demonstrate there is no intercultural competence instrument specifically designed for the context of Australian higher education. In working towards arriving at a customised instrument sensitive to the intercultural competence necessary to accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the classroom, and as per Spitzberg and Changon (2009), this review begins with foundational models and dimensions.

From a social process perspective, intercultural competence is about the capability to gather, interpret and act on various cues to function effectively across diverse cultural settings and multicultural situations (Fantini, 2020; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Yet clarity of intercultural competence as a construct is lacking (Griffith et al., 2016). As a recognised authority however, Deardorff (2006, p247-248) considers intercultural competence as, “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.” Adding clarity, Deardorff (2014) further defines intercultural competence as a very complex and broad learning objective that includes various learning outcomes including behavioural and communication skills. More recently, Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya (2023) concurs in that intercultural competence integrates a range of complex contextual knowledge essential to effectively interact and collaborate within different cultural contexts. More specifically, Chen and Starosta (2000) who developed and validated the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), identify awareness and understanding of cultural conventions that affect how to think and behave as the cognitive aspect of intercultural sensitivity.

In a systematic review of social, emotional and intercultural competences, Müller et al. (2020) identifies 45 instruments focused on measuring intercultural competence. Many of these instruments were designed for migrant respondents, those working with migrants or marginalised groups. Instruments designed for specific groups focused on issues like racism; instruments such as the Everyday Discrimination Scale (Müller et al., 2020; Clark, Coleman, & Novak, 2004). The Everyday Discrimination Scale however is a measure of daily racial discrimination experienced (English et al., 2020) rather than cultural competence of service providers or educators. Instruments measuring teacher intercultural competence focused on teacher ability and the dimensions of cultural engagement, multicultural experiences, language acceptance and general perceptions. Yet, none of these identified instruments appropriately address intercultural competence for the specific educational context of Australian Indigenous peoples.

There are many more intercultural competence instruments than that of the 45 instruments identified by Müller et al. (2020). According to Sierra-Huedo and Nevado-Llopis (2022), the most popular instruments include Hofstede’s (2011) model of national culture, Bennett’s (2017, 2013, 1986) Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), and Byram’s Multimodal Model of Intercultural Competence (Byram, 2020; Byram & Zarate, 1997). While Hofstede’s model is based on a static conceptualisation of culture based on nationality, Byram’s model is focused on foreign language teaching, empathy and respect, whereas Bennett’s model is developed from a constructivist, grounded theory approach focused on how to acquire and develop intercultural competence and understanding of cultural differences.

Importantly, effective intercultural experiences are positive and life altering (Buchmüller et al., 2021; Fantini, 2020), which emphasises the importance and significance of establishing and improving intercultural competence amongst educators. As a fluid and interdependent concept (Müller et al., 2020), intercultural competence and the development of intercultural competence,

is an ongoing process. While complete intercultural competence may never be fully achieved, developmental efforts are crucial to continuous improvement (Bennett, 2017, 2013, 1986; Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2020). Measurement of particular aspects of intercultural competence, such as awareness (Chen & Starosta, 2000), however, enables an indicative assessment of intercultural competence.

With institutional strategies focused on developing cultural competency via educational training programs, evidence to document impact is critical to justify investment. This requirement reinforces the need for a customised instrument to demonstrate impact. This review shows the basic dimensions of cultural competence includes knowledge, skills, attitude/affect (Bennett, 2017, 2013, 1986; Byram, 2020; Deardorff, 2009) and awareness (Chen & Starosta, 2000), which are indeed confirmed by Fantini (2020). The review of cultural and intercultural instruments to this point identifies an instrument customised for the context of Australian higher education is missing.

Measuring intercultural competence

Having identified this gap in the literature and based on this review, a proposed instrument for measuring intercultural competence that is customised for the context of Australian higher education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture is presented in Appendix A. This proposed instrument draws on items comprising identified reliable and valid instruments and includes four dimensions: knowledge (five items), attitude (18 items), skills (eight items) and awareness (six items). Notably, as is standard and in line with Lim et al. (2004), the identified items have been modified to suit the context of education and cultural context of Australia's Indigenous peoples.

Efforts to establish face validity for the proposed instrument presented in Appendix A included consultation with local Indigenous leaders. This consultation resulted in a recommendation to offer survey respondents an optional interview. This recommendation was made to enable the opportunity for any depth of knowledge to be shared and to encourage dialogue. This advice will be heeded with follow-up interviews built into the research design.

In terms of implementation, a pilot survey will be used to inform and refine the instrument prior to broader distribution. From there, the instrument will be adjusted as needed and a Qualtrics link will go to institutional educators at the beginning of the semester. This pre-test will establish a base line measure. During the semester, educators will have the opportunity to undertake cultural competence training and those educators who opt-in for that training will be invited to complete a post-test measure. In this way, a comparative analysis will establish any improvement in cultural competency.

Implications

Understanding culture beyond one's own culture is a key concept for developing intercultural competence. This process of developing intercultural competence is fundamental to Bennett's (2017, 2013, 1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. As Bennett (2017) discusses, not recognising the heterogeneity within a culture inappropriately neglects unique perspectives. Shifting awareness from an ethnocentric approach towards ethnorelativism, requires recognition of the cultural complexities and difference that are just as important as our own cultural perceptions and experiences. The assumption here is that *otherness* is a perceptual

condition that is inadequate for communicating effectively with cultural outsiders (Bennett, 2017). The ability to recognise the complexities related to different cultures and the ability to communicate and interact across cultures in an appropriate manner, is referred to as intercultural sensitivity. Fundamental to the development of intercultural competence is interculturally sensitive behaviour that allows meaningful interaction across cultures. Empathy, for example, demonstrates appropriate behaviour in diverse contexts and cultures and is a behavioural form of intercultural sensitivity.

In the context of Australian higher education, embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives within curriculum is foundational to embracing First Nations cultures and promoting diversity in the classroom. An assumption to achieving this goal however, is that educators delivering Indigenised curriculum are well versed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. While some institutions offer a repertoire of cultural training programs, without a baseline measure of cultural competence before such programs are undertaken, the efficacy of institutional cultural training remains unknown. Measurement of educator cultural competence, before and after cultural training is complete will enable institutions to recognise educator cultural competency levels, then work to improve those levels. Once a baseline measure of educator cultural competence is established, a later comparative measure can inform continuous improvement strategies. From there, developmental strategies as per Bennett (2017, 2013, 1986) can be put in place as appropriate for the institution. Implementation of Bennett's (2017, 2013, 1986) is flagged here as an intention for further research.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions are potentially important sites of cultural engagement and development and intercultural competence is critical for educators on the front line of that institutional strategy. Striving to improve cultural competency and train educators for the purposes of delivering curriculum comprising embedded cultural competence, institutions are investing significant time and money to achieve a socially responsible goal. Evidence on the effectiveness of such a strategy will serve the institutions and Indigenous Australians well. This work enables relevant evidence to be generated and demonstrate impact of institutional cultural competency strategies at the educator level. To this end, Appendix A presents a recommended customised instrument for the Australian higher education context.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) disclose that they have no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The authors disclose that they have not received any funding for this manuscript beyond resourcing for academic time at their respective institution. The authors have produced this manuscript without artificial intelligence support.

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Appendix A: Proposed measure of intercultural competence in the context of Australian vocational and higher education

Dimension	Item	5-point Likert Scale	Instrument
Knowledge	How well are you able to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures?	Not at all–Very well	M-CCSAQ
	How well do you know the greeting protocol within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures?	Not at all–Very well	M-CCSAQ
	How knowledgeable are you about the ways culture influences vocational and higher education?	Not confident–very confident	TSET
	I am confident interacting with people from different cultures.	Not confident–very confident	ISS
	Indicate your knowledge level regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.	Very little knowledge–Very high knowledge	CSES
Attitude	A student who continually arrives late for class is showing disrespect.	Strongly agree–Strongly disagree	M-CCSAQ
	Access to education is not a privilege but a right, regardless of social status.	Strongly agree–Strongly disagree	M-CCSAQ
	I am more comfortable with students from backgrounds similar to my own.	Strongly agree–Strongly disagree	M-CCSAQ
	It is not easy to treat all students the same way.	Strongly agree–Strongly disagree	M-CCSAQ
	I tend to feel uncomfortable with people whose cultural background differs from my own.	Strongly agree–Strongly disagree	M-CCSAQ
	Cultural traditions rarely influence educational decisions.	Strongly agree–Strongly disagree	SAMI
	The influence of culture, beliefs, and individual practices do not influence how education is delivered.	Strongly agree–Strongly disagree	SAMI

Dimension	Item	5-point Likert Scale	Instrument
	There may be a few exceptions, but in general Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are pretty much alike.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	SAMI
	I am aware of your own biases and limitations.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	TSET
	I accept differences between different cultural groups.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	TSET
	I appreciate interaction with people of different culture.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	TSET
	I appreciate cultural sensitivity and awareness.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	TSET
	I respect students' cultural behaviours and values.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	MAQ
	I appreciate the variation that exists within and across cultural groups.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	MAQ
	I want to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	CAS
	I include culturally relevant information in my classes.	Strongly agree– Strongly disagree	CAS
	I willingly deal with different ways of perceiving, expressing, interacting and behaving	Not at all – Extremely well	ICC Fantini
	I demonstrate flexibility when interacting with people from other cultures	Not at all – Extremely well	ICC Fantini
Skill	How well can you demonstrate cultural sensitivity?	Very poorly–Very well	ISS
	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.	Disagree—Agree	ISS
	How well can you incorporate culturally relevant information into a lesson plan?	Very poorly–Very well	CAS
	Rate your degree of confidence for the following cultural topics: - Traditional teaching/learning beliefs	Not confident–Very confident	TSET

Dimension	Item	5-point Likert Scale	Instrument
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acceptable teaching/learning behaviours - Role of elders - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attitudes about education - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and beliefs 		
Awareness	I realise the differences and similarities across my own and other cultures	Not at all – Extremely well	ICC Fantini
	I realise how my values and ethics are reflected in specific situations	Not at all – Extremely well	ICC Fantini
	I recognise varying cultural styles and language use	Not at all – Extremely well	ICC Fantini
	I realise the dangers of generalising individual behaviours as representative of a whole culture	Not at all – Extremely well	ICC Fantini
	I am aware of my level of intercultural development	Not at all – Extremely well	ICC Fantini
	How aware are you of the obstacles faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in seeking access to vocational and higher education?	Not at all–Very well	M-CCSAQ