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## Reconceptualising how to internationalise-at-home: Using dialogue to stimulate intercultural capacity within university students

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### Abstract

In an increasingly globalised world approaches to internationalisation continue to evolve within the education sector. Calls to reframe how higher education approaches internationalisation are clearly noted in the literature. Additionally, most education institutions have adopted mission statements promising to produce graduates with the capacity to work successfully across international borders and cultures. This means creating students who are interculturally competent and capable of interacting effectively in a range of contexts. However, in the current global climate, a host of challenges have presented obstacles for moving the well-intentioned internationalisation agenda forward, and in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, many Australian higher education institutions have been left questioning how internationalisation-at-home can best be achieved, if at all. This paper presents findings from a purpose-built internationalisation-at-home program piloted at a regional Australian university. A mixed group of domestic and international students participated in this program, founded on dialogic forums designed to promote intercultural interactions. This paper reports on shifts found in participants' knowledge, attitude, and skill development, all framed as vital for intercultural competence to flourish. The importance of adopting a dialogic approach to stimulate intercultural competence development in students was key to the success of the internationalisation-at-home initiative. Embracing dialogic interaction as a teaching and learning pedagogy is presented as one way to promote internationalisation as we grapple to move the internationalisation agenda forward in a much-changed higher education arena.

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## Introduction

This paper focuses on one way to develop students' intercultural competence (IC) within the "home" context. Discourse around intercultural dialogue in educational spaces suggests it can improve critical thinking and reflection (Cui & Teo, 2023; Lundgren et al., 2019; Teo, 2019; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020, 2023). Despite this, little work has empirically explored how dialogue, especially the practice of dialogic interaction, can promote growth in the knowledge, attitude and skill required for intercultural competence to develop within university students (Deardorff, 2006). This paper presents findings from an Internationalisation-at-home (IaH) program that purposefully used a dialogic approach to build intercultural capacity amongst a mixed group of domestic and international students. Comparing findings from a range of qualitative data sources gathered over the semester, students' intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills were traced to determine shifts related to the students' intercultural competence resulting from student participation in a IaH program (Einfalt, 2019, 2020; Einfalt et al., 2022).

This paper responds to questions and concerns raised by a changing international education sector. It is timely, and perhaps critical, to revisit the somewhat stalled internationalisation agenda, to capitalise on the return of international students to Australian universities. In doing so, I argue we can build intercultural capacity in our students through the implementation of Internationalisation-at-home initiatives. Since 2020, response to and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a significantly altered terrain in Australian universities, impacting both how students learn and how teachers teach. This has resulted in a reduced amount of physical face-to-face contact time experienced between students and teachers, and an increase in asynchronous delivery of units offered to students via online platforms (Lin & Nguyen, 2021). In the wake of this change, academics have grappled to adopt practices aimed to promote meaningful engagement and interaction in spaces of learning, fully aware that it is crucial to make the most of the face-to-face contact time university students.

Building on earlier work (Einfalt et al., 2022; Einfalt, 2020) that presented findings from an IaH initiative conducted at a regional Australian university in 2018, this paper will revisit data taken from this study. The lens used to determine shifts in students' intercultural competence in this paper will focus on the foundational components required for intercultural competence to develop in students. Informed by the extensive work conducted by Deardorff (2006), developing attitudes, knowledge, and skills are clearly recognised as key components required for IC to develop (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). Moving forward, universities in Australia need to rethink, embrace, and reconceptualise opportunities afforded by new times to intentionally consider how to activate intercultural capabilities in university students. This is necessary if we are to become true internationalised institutions able to produce graduates recognised as globally capable.

This paper revisits a purpose-built IaH program that is empirically underpinned by Deardorff's model of IC and a dialogic approach (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). As a focus, dialogic interaction was carefully promoted in a series of facilitated forums that made up the IaH program. The study sought to understand if and how new thinking around intercultural differences and understandings would emerge. The research question guiding findings reported in this paper is: What shifts in

intercultural knowledge, attitudes and communication skills are reported by students participating in the internationalisation-at-home program?

## Literature

Over past decades, Internationalisation has emerged as a prominent trend in the university sector across the globe, often seen as a strategic vehicle for transforming higher education, and one that has also been contested, especially from a post-colonial or neo-liberal perspective (Jurkova, 2021). Impacted by technologies, online e-learning markets, and vulnerabilities in the wake of the pandemic, has given witness to a highly changed higher education landscape (Antonopoulou, 2021; Baer, 2022; Didge & Doyle, 2022; Yue et al., 2023). More recently, there are calls to reconceptualise our approaches towards international education, advocating for a more humanistic view to be taken toward internationalisation, especially to challenge economic drivers and become more values-driven (Tran et al., 2023). Equally, calls to prioritise pedagogical practice in line with a world that requires students to have intercultural competence (IC) continue to persist in the literature (Antonopoulou, 2021; Holliday, 2021).

Globally, several questions have been raised around what it means to internationalise higher education. In the UK, the Internationalising Higher Education Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2014) argues that universities should adopt a “transcultural perspective” to promote a “global learning experience” for all learners if we are to achieve a “global academic community” (Ryan, 2015, p. 21). Intercultural scholars elsewhere have advocated for a move away from a monolingual focus by education institutions (Horner et al., 2011; You, 2018). One important point echoed in this ongoing discourse is that “difference”, in terms of students’ origins, experience and language, should be embraced as a resource rather than a barrier, as it can help to develop globally competent students. Welikala (2021) and Jukova (2021) also argue for a reconceptualisation of culture away from a notion of something that is fixed or static, towards viewing it as fluid and dynamic. They advocate for a move towards developing one’s transcultural competence where an understanding of the relationship between the self and others becomes more holistic and inclusive. Such thinking can make way for more effective encounters and positive transformation in views and thinking.

Internationalisation is often seen as a response to the push and pull of globalisation processes. The focus on internationalisation by universities is reflected in graduate skill statements related to working across borders and successfully interacting in diverse contexts. Historically, Australia had successfully recruited international students to its shores and the growing focus on internationalisation in Australian higher education has been closely aligned with the concept of developing students who are globally ready, often referred to as global citizenship (Bourn, 2011; de Andreotti, 2014; Trede et al., 2013). However, despite claims that developing students’ intercultural competence is an imperative for progressing the internationalisation agenda (Leask, 2015; Mak, 2013), the impact that such internationalising efforts have had on university students remains unclear to date (Jackson, 2018; Jones, 2010).

The updated understanding of the concept of internationalisation-at-home (IaH) entails fostering a multicultural learning environment through teacher and student collaboration, while incorporating course content into a shared curriculum (Beelen & Jones, 2015). This updated

understanding of laH aims to provide an international learning experience for all students on home campuses, not just those participating in mobility programs abroad (Antonopoulou, 2021). This is important in the Australian context, as a small proportion of students have access to mobility programs (Hong, 2021), but all students might benefit and learn from incoming international students at home, if they are facilitated and willing to engage. One assumption often made within Australian universities is that international and domestic students will automatically interact with and learn from each other if they study together. However, to the contrary, evidence to date suggests a distinct lack of interaction between international and domestic students (Blackmore et al., 2022; Mendoza et al., 2023), highlighting a concerning lack of shared intercultural understanding between students on Australian campuses (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Gregersen-Hermans, 2017; Willoughby-Knox, & Yates, 2021). Home students are often found to resist intercultural group work, and generally to avoid contact with their international peers, and this has raised concerns about unequal access to transformative experiences for students to gain an internationalised education, let alone develop intercultural capacity (Harrison, 2015).

A review of literature reveals initiatives in the laH space in the UK (Antonopoulou, 2021) and Europe (Borghetti & Zanoni, 2019; Pleschova & Simon, 2022). Fifteen laH case studies and models were reported in a recent report by Antonopoulou (2021). However, in this reporting the University of Technology Sydney were the only Australian example, citing a virtual global short-term program established in 2020 where 335 students engaged in global exchange via face-to-face and virtual activities. Tran et al.'s (2023) special issue around re-conceptualising international education pointed out the transnational program between Western Sydney University and Vietnam as offering intercultural knowledge transfer for Australian and Vietnamese students (Field, 2023). Through this program, Australian students have opportunity to engage in a cultural exchange and immersion through short study tours to Vietnam. Based on the success of this transnational collaboration, another offshore WSU campus is now planned for establishment in Surabaya, East Java, and due to open in 2024. This will also offer short courses and cultural exchange opportunities to Australian and Indonesian students (Western Sydney University, 2023). However, despite the success of such outbound student mobility programs that have clearly established intercultural capacity and competence within Australian students, (See Hepple et al., 2017; Grainger & Willis, 2023 findings related to pre-service teachers). It should be noted, however, that these programs are generally reliant on funding from the new Colombo Plan (Hong, 2021), involve small numbers of students and involve mostly of final year Australian university students. Yet, Jones (2021) claims that laH can easily be achieved for all students on campus or online simply by taking small steps in safe spaces through "domestic internationalisation" (p. 4), as she calls it. This would enable all students, not just the mobile ones, to develop skills and understandings to better understand different cultural perspectives and to think more globally rather than just locally. Despite this claim, reporting around laH initiatives operating in the post-pandemic Australian higher education sector remains concerningly absent.

The Covid-19 situation gave rise to significant changes in the higher education sector, resulting in technological investment, a rise in the concept of "super-diversity" (Vertovec, 2019) and the moving of many courses online, or to a blended delivery mode (Zhai, 2020). Additionally, there was a growth in virtual intercultural competence learning (World Council of Global and Intercultural Competences, 2022) in response to the lack of in-person mobility during the recent

pandemic (Andrew et al., 2021). Australia's shift to wholly online learning, through the utilisation of synchronous virtual learning environments during the forced move to the online space during the pandemic, has presented both unique opportunities and challenges for higher education institutions (Hews et al., 2022; Zai, 2020). In this changed higher education landscape, it has become more important to maximise student engagement by modifying teaching practices. For example, Lin and Nguyen's (2021) study on student perceptions around e-learning during this time reported emotional instability, signs of disconnection, and isolation. Doidge and Doyle's (2022) focus on Australian universities during the Covid era reported 41% of international students were under substantial levels of stress, and Song and McCarthy (2020) reported that this was attributed to home sickness, racial discrimination, and loss of educational and personal support. It is now important and timely to reconceptualise how we might develop intercultural capability and competence in our students by revisiting ways to promote IaH initiatives, such as the one presented below and will be reported on in this study.

## **The internationalisation-at-home (IaH) program**

The IaH program comprises of three 90-minute forum sessions conducted over three weeks at the beginning of the study semester. Discussion activities are facilitated in groups of three or four, involving a mix of international and domestic students, and the remixing of student participants throughout the three sessions in each forum is important. The three forums are themed around intercultural topics, aligned to concepts of identity: self-identity, student-identity and global identity. A brief overview the focus of each forum is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Overview of Forum Focus Questions and Topics

<b>Forum 1:</b> Self-identity	Thinking about one's sense of self and gaining awareness about different beliefs, values and cultures. Final discussion question: Is Australian/university academic culture open and flexible?
<b>Post-forum reflection:</b>	What is culture and how do I relate to others? What is my story? How do I communicate with others about myself?
<b>Forum 2:</b> Student-identity	Thinking about the role of assumptions and stereotypes. Consider interactions encountered so far as a new university student and how culture, communication or assumptions relate to these. Final discussion question: Is it fair to share work?
<b>Post-forum reflection:</b>	What is my understanding of the university context and discourse? What does it mean to be a student? How do I view and interact with others who are different to me?
<b>Forum 3:</b> Future global role and identity	Thinking about how developing IC might be relevant to students as graduates and in their future roles. Communicating and interacting in groups. <i>Final discussion question:</i> Should English be the dominant language for global communication?
<b>Post- forum reflection:</b>	How do I see my story changing? What will be my place and role in the bigger global picture? What skills will I need to grow to reach my future vision and global identity?

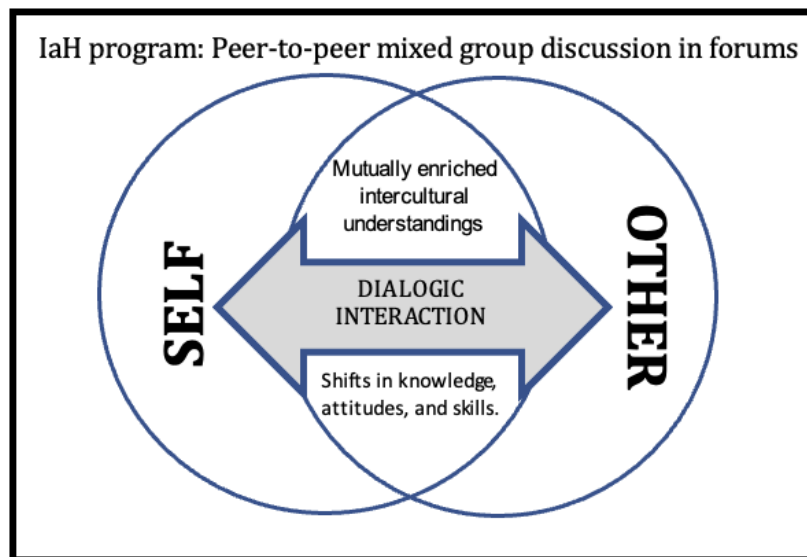
## Theoretical and Conceptual Framing

This paper draws on scholars viewing intercultural competence as ongoing and relational in orientation, rather than being static or stable (Dervin 2016; Trede et al., 2013). Deardorff's (2006) widely accepted definition of IC was adopted, being "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in learning and teaching across cultures and intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p. 247). Deardorff's (2006) process model of IC framed this study by providing 22 elements agreed on by a range of intercultural experts as representative of IC capability and development in an individual (Appendix A). Based on this model, individuals need to have, and develop, a combination of conducive "attitude", "knowledge" and "skill", if a desired "internal outcome", or shift, is to occur (Deardorff, 2006, p. 256). This shift in one's "informed frame of reference" is represented by elements of "flexibility", "adaptability", "empathy", and an "ethnorelative" perspective (Deardorff, 2006, p. 256). Acquiring capacity in these elements makes way for the desired external outcome, that is, effective and appropriate communication and behaviour when interacting in an intercultural situation. Using a theory-focused lens to identify components of attitude, knowledge and skill in the data helped to tease out potential internal outcomes in participants and enabled a tracing of potential shifts in the participants' intercultural competence development.

Figure 1 provides a theoretical visualisation of how the foundational components of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, as inherent in an individual - the *self*, might operate in a more relational and interactive way with the *other*, that is, those who are different.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Representation of the Role of Dialogic Interaction in the IaH Program*



When one interacts dialogically with (different) others, it is envisaged that new insights to diverse views can be gained. Adopting dialogic thinking, it is essential for individuals to engage with a variety of different perspectives to better understand a particular context and themselves (Bakhtin 1981, 1986). Here, as visually represented in figure 1, dialogic interaction represents the mutually productive activity between the self and other. This interaction has been described as "working

the self/other boundary” (Harvey, 2016, p. 373), an exchange which makes way not only for new insights to others’ views but also more effective intercultural exchanges. This conceptualisation of potential IC development was used to frame both the design and analysis in the exploratory study investigating the pilot IaH program delivered at a regional university (Einfalt 2019).

The IaH program was guided by dialogic theory in both design and delivery of the forums. Students were instructed to follow the principles of dialogic interaction as rules for engagement during group discussions (Figure 2). This ensured that forum discussions remain dynamic and encourage students to be flexible, to run with ideas raised by stimulus activities and feel free to change their minds and recycle ideas (Simpson, 2016). To move talk beyond mere conversation towards dialogic interaction, the facilitator introduced activities being mindful not to dominate these at the expense of students’ own voice and meaning-making processes (Alexander, 2006). Forums were organised around three interactive sessions with the final session aiming to stimulate evocative intercultural discussion and reflection through a “*final discussion question*” (See Table 1). This final session encouraged students to challenge ideas, be reflexive, and comfortable to disagree with views around topics raised during the forums. As part of the program, students provided written reflections in response to forum sessions and stimulus questions. Reflection has been identified to promote deeper understanding required for IC to develop (Dervin, 2016; Jackson, 2018). Table 1 includes the post-forum reflection questions used to gain responses from the participants. More detail about other logistics for this program can be found in Einfalt (2020).

Prompt cards were also offered as a tool for student use (Simpson, 2016), aiming to promote inclusivity and to stimulate dialogic interaction. Cards were placed in the centre of the table for students to hold up and indicate their intention during discussion. Group members were encouraged to respond to students when they held up a card, applying the dialogic principles of (4) and (10) (Figure 2). Students were especially encouraged to utilise these prompt cards during the final discussion session, and then to reflect on their ability to express ideas, as well as think about their personal communication styles and those of others. Additionally, as part of this program, students were encouraged to complete short pre-forum activities, for example, to watch a short video or complete a self-assessment questionnaire to identify perceived levels of intercultural competence based on agreement to 15 statements, using a 10-point Likert scale (Appendix B). This IC questionnaire help create a baseline, as a starting point for each student in terms of self-reported IC knowledge, attitudes, and skill levels; this questionnaire was also used as a tool to stimulate conversation and reflection in Forum 1.

## Figure 2

### *Tools Used to Promote Dialogic Practice During the Forums*

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**Dialogic principles:** Students were instructed to:

- (1) Be flexible and run with questions and ideas;
  - (2) Feel free to change one's mind about ideas and topics;
  - (3) Challenge your ideas and rethink your existing beliefs;
  - (4) Allow other students to have a say to make their own meaning in their own time;
  - (5) Move talk beyond conversation towards more critical talk and interaction;
  - (6) Rethink and challenge the propositions of others;
  - (7) Show respect and openness towards others;
  - (8) Negotiate feeling uncomfortable when encountering difference;
  - (9) Practice communication skills: listening, observing, probing, questioning, interpreting, paraphrasing, relating, using appropriate body language, interrupting, reflecting, rephrasing and empathising;
  - (10) Practice turn-taking so everyone can have a say.
- 

**Dialogic prompt cards provided to discussion groups:**

**+** = show when you want to add a comment to another student's comment.

**?** = show when you want to question another's comment to better understand or clarify.

**!** = show when you want to challenge a point and offer another opinion.

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From "Making talk work: Using a dialogic approach to develop intercultural competence with students at an Australian university," by J. Einfalt, J. Alford, and M. Theobald, 2022, *Intercultural Education*, 33(3), p. 259 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2022.2031903>).

## The Study

### Context and Participants

This paper presents the influence that participating in a purpose-built laH program had on a range of commencing students in 2018. The program was delivered at a regional Queensland Australian university, that typically attracted approximately 20% international students until Covid-19 in 2020 and attracts a high proportion of first-in-family and mature aged students (50%). Ethics approval was gained to conduct this study (QUT Human Research Ethics Committee approval number 1700001076). Student participants were recruited voluntarily, invited to respond to an email to participate in the program, as an extra-curriculum activity. An email invitation was sent out to all students commencing in a compulsory first-year course. Twenty-two students responded and eleven were selected based on availability to attend, with the aim to form a mixed group incorporating both domestic and international students. Students were diverse in terms of travel experience, cultural background, age and discipline. Five were native English speakers and six used English as an additional language (Table 2).



**Table 2**

Overview of Student Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Cultural experience</b>
1. Amber	Australian (local)	17	Bio Medical Science	No travel experience
2. Tammy	Australian (regional)	19	Event Management	US, Cambodia
3. Kyle	Australian (Gympie)	19	Nutrition	No travel
4. Yuan	Chinese	22	Human-Resource Management	Travel in Asian region
5. Elke	Swedish/ Polish	21	Nursing	Extensive travel & hotel work
6. Carol	Canadian	19	Design	French Canada & Italy
7. Stephan	German	34	Bio-mechanical & Engineering	European countries
8.Eva	Swedish	20	Business	Hawaii, Europe & US
9.Bella	Australian (Cairns)	17	Law	Minimal
10.Sunju	South Korea	34	Accounting	Only Asia
11.Jade	Hong Kong	28	Social Work	Minimal

Table 2 provides an overview of student participants. Students' anonymity was protected through ethical protocol, by using pseudonyms and removing identifying details from datasets. It should be noted that only participants 1-8 were able to complete the full program. As Bella, Sunju and Jade were unable to attend forum 3, they were not included in analysis for this study.

## Method

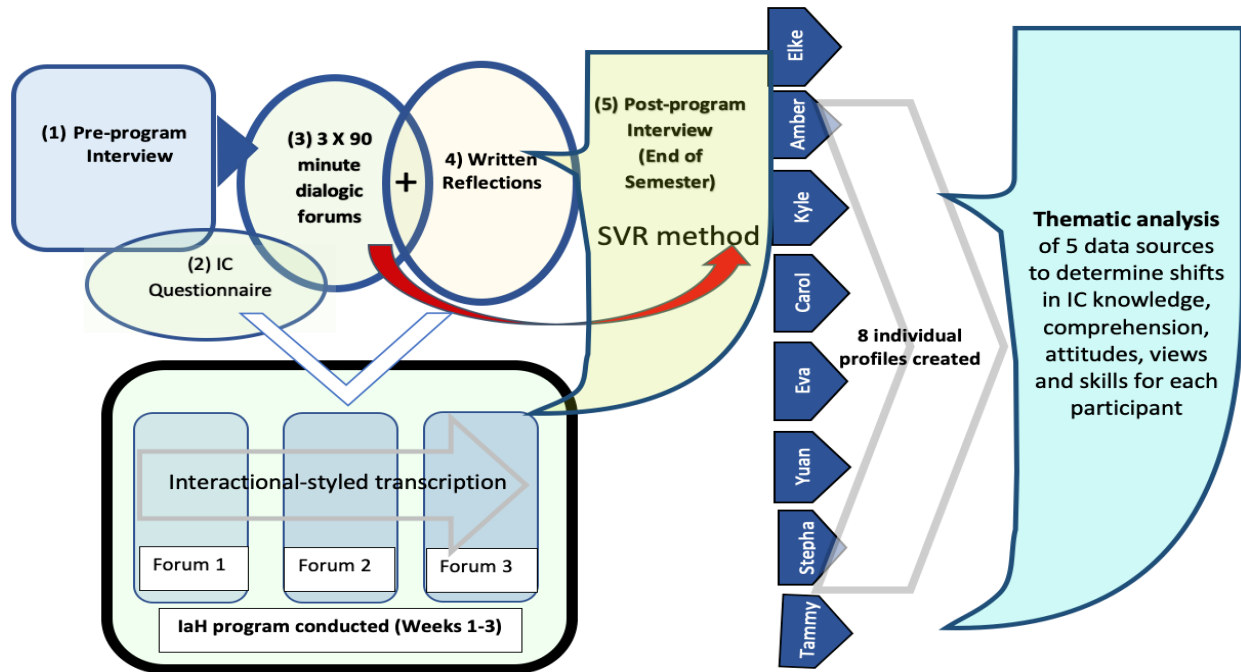
Data consisted of student questionnaires, interviews, video capture of the forums, written reflections, and stimulated video recall sessions. Two interviews were gathered from each student: one before the program and one at the end of semester. Interviews were semi-structured to enable students to talk freely around their personal views and experience in relation to perceived intercultural competence development. The interviews were guided by the IC elements informing the model (Figure 1, Appendix A). The final interview utilised video stimulated verbal recall (SVR) methodology (Dempsey, 2010), which involved recording students' accounts in response to showing them a replay of videoed moments which they had identified as significant during the forums. These moments were identified based on comments in the written reflections which had been collected from the students participating in the study at different times during and after the program. For triangulation, it was important to gain a range of data over the semester to enable analysis for potential IC development. Twenty written reflections were collected from the eight students at different points during the semester. Deardorff's (2006) intercultural competence

model was employed as an analytical tool to explore the data gathered and interactions selected in this IaH program.

Figure 3 presents the study design, demonstrating the connection between the five datasets gathered for each participant, and used for analysis.

**Figure 3**

*Overview of the Research Design and how Data Sources (1)-(5) are Related*



Data source	Analysis: Thematic (TA)
(1) Pre-program interview	• Verbatim transcription/coding for themes (Table 5)
(2) IC questionnaire	• Self-reporting. Focus on starting points for each participant.
(3) Dialogic forums (3 x 90 mins)	• Stage1: Verbatim transcription/coding for themes (Table 5). • Stage 2: Interactional CA transcription.
(4) Written reflections	• Coding for themes. Collated with pre/post interview TA. Identification of significant forum moments (to inform SVR)
(5) Post-program interview	• Stimulated Verbal Recall (SVR) - replay moments for recall. Verbatim transcription/coding for themes (Table 5)

This methodology provided opportunity to develop individual profiles for each student (Simons, 2014) that traced changes in IC elements for the students participating in the program.

## Utilising Stimulated Verbal Recall Sessions

Stimulated verbal recall (SVR) sessions were conducted at the end of the semester to review and explore thoughts developed and held by participants in response to selected scenarios reviewed from the dialogic forums videoed earlier in the semester. Reviewing video moments during a SVR session encourages participants to retrospectively make comment on and evaluate these moments in the forums. Dempsey (2010) states that the stimulated verbal recall interview can give additional insights to how and why participants responded in an event in a specific way. They highlight if participants still have the same viewpoints about the selected session moments or if any change in thought has occurred since the session and why these ideas may have changed (Dempsey, 2010). For this reason, these SVR interview sessions were intentionally planned to occur sometime after the IaH program to enable participants time to reflect on the forums and their semester experience in full. Written reflections offered insight to moments selected for the final SVR interview, Deardorff's (2006) layers of IC elements were used to guide the interview questions, focusing on students' attitudes, knowledge, skills, and perceived effectiveness around previous intercultural interactions. Table 3 provides examples of prompt questions and probes that were used during the final SVR interview sessions.

**Table 3**

Stimulated Verbal Recall (SVR) Probe Questions, as Aligned to the IC Model

IC Elements	Question probes based around explanations of Deardorff's (2012) IC elements
<b>Attitudes &amp; Views:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you think about what X said here?</li> <li>• Were you curious about this?</li> <li>• Were you or X uncomfortable with this?</li> <li>• What do you think about this now?</li> <li>• Did you feel empathy when this happened?</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge &amp; Understanding:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have you learnt about other ways of thinking based on this discussion?</li> <li>• Has this been relevant to any other situations/encounters since? How?</li> <li>• What is your understanding about the way X responded here/ to this?</li> <li>• Why do you think they said that?</li> <li>• How do you think X would see that?</li> <li>• What is your understanding of Australian culture based on this?</li> </ul>
<b>Skills:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you think that X did not understand that/ did that?</li> <li>• How would you respond to that now that you know them better?</li> <li>• Have you had any other encounters like this since the forum and how did it turn out?</li> <li>• What can you do to relate better in this situation, do you think?</li> <li>• How do you think you could improve how you communicated next time?</li> </ul>
<b>Internal &amp; External Outcomes:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you feel about this, about what X said and did here?</li> <li>• What changes did you make here to get your message across?</li> <li>• Why did you change your thinking about that?</li> <li>• What would you do differently if this occurred again?</li> <li>• Do you now see the outcome of this conversation in a different light?</li> </ul>

## Analysis

The developments of IC elements in participants were explored thematically (Braun & Clark, 2012) using a five-stepped approach to ensure the integrity of theme development. Explanation of steps that were followed and the analysis procedures is discussed below and provided in Table 4.

**Table 4**

### Steps Followed to Complete the Thematic Analysis of Data Gathered

<b>Step 1:</b> Data familiarisation stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Transcribed all spoken data (verbatim). All transcripts and written reflections were read to gain a comprehensive understanding of the interactions and to become familiar with all aspects of the data.</li><li>○ Initial ideas were noted down.</li></ul>
<b>Step 2:</b> Initial codes generated for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Used thematic analysis to code across all datasets.</li><li>○ Coded for specific elements of IC (attitudes, knowledge, and skills)</li><li>○ Identified emerging patterns and correspondence between codes.</li><li>○ Collated codes into broader themes aligned to model of IC.</li></ul>
<b>Step 3:</b> Themes reviewed to identify patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Reviewed themes in relation to IC questionnaire responses.</li><li>○ Checking of the themes in relation to coded extracts and against the entire collection of data.</li><li>○ Relocated IC elements into groups.</li></ul>
<b>Step 4:</b> Re-interpretation to define themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Re-evaluated data sets for shifts in informed frame of reference.</li><li>○ Themes were grouped in relation to the model.</li><li>○ Identified content related to sense of identity, the context, the future, to others and cultural understanding.</li></ul>
<b>Step 5:</b> Finalising analysis Profiles created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Performed participant validation and refined interpretations.</li><li>○ Selected vivid and compelling quotes to illustrate concepts responding to the research question.</li><li>○ Collated findings into individual profiles to highlight shifts in IC themes.</li></ul>

Adapted from "Thematic Analysis" by V. Braun, and V. Clarke, 2012, *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological*, American Psychological Association, pp. 62-68.

A top-down theoretical thematic approach was adopted, as guided by Deardorff's (2006) IC elements (Appendix A) and model. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. These, together with reflections, were initially analysed inductively to gain familiarisation and a contextual understanding around each participant. Initial codes (32 in total) were generated, remaining open to the students' broader sense of the self, others, and the learning context. This step was conducted off-stage, allowing the data collected over different points of time to be placed side by side for later comparison. In step 4, a thematic analysis based on Deardorff's IC model and elements occurred. Then each table was reduced and refined, enabling further progressive focussing and re-evaluation of the data (Simons, 2009). At this point, a deductive focus was used to identify any shifts or change in relation to the intercultural competence themes. These theme areas are detailed in Table 5. This important re-interpretation step also involved zooming in to locate evidence indicating student change in terms of adaptation, adjustment, flexibility, development in knowledge, attitude, and skills. At this step, it was possible to locate and verify potential shifts in participants' internal frames of reference around the self, others, context, and sense of IC development.

**Table 5**

Themes Emerging (Step 4) Based on Deardorff's IC Model and IC Elements (Appendix A).

<b>Relating to IC elements 1, 2, 10, 14, 20, 22</b>	
Knowledge & understandings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness, cultural identity as a student</li> <li>• Understanding about others' (cultural differences &amp; worldviews)</li> <li>• Understanding about different academic requirements</li> <li>• Understanding around misunderstanding (different knowledge)</li> </ul>
<b>Relating to IC elements 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21</b>	
Attitude & views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curiosity and sense of discovery</li> <li>• Openness to learning from others</li> <li>• View towards future role and goals</li> <li>• Motivation for study and learning from others</li> <li>• Perceptions about different cultures and stereotype</li> </ul>
<b>Relating to IC elements 4, 8, 16</b>	
Skills & communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different types of talk</li> <li>• How one responded to different opinions</li> <li>• How one interacted in the forums</li> <li>• Connecting with others in forum and class</li> <li>• Skills needed for communicating in the future</li> <li>• Communicating in a new context</li> <li>• Managing different styles of interacting</li> </ul>

## Findings

Findings from the self-reported intercultural competence questionnaires showed each student reported to different degree on how they individually perceived their levels of obtainment in relation to the elements associated with the intercultural competence components of attitude, knowledge, skills and internal outcomes (Appendix A). The findings from this dataset [(2) figure 3] provided a good starting point from which to ascertain students' individual development in different competence areas, thus providing a baseline for the analysis of potential change or shifts occurring over the semester. All participants reported a degree of critical reflection in relation to their sense of identity, personal communication, how they viewed others and certain topics discussed in the forum. Such rethinking was traced back to specific forum discussions, as noted in the SVR dataset. Participants were also found to reflect and elaborate further in the SVR interview on potential shifts in their views, attitudes, knowledge, understandings, and communication skills.

Table 6 outlines the eight dialogic moments that were identified by participants. It was noted that many of these dialogic moments emerged during final discussion in each forum (Table 2), when students were observed utilising the dialogic tools (Figure 2). This gives support to the use of

such tools as pedagogically able to promote fruitful dialogic interaction during mixed group discussion. To explore these moments more closely in the larger study, a fine grained interactional styled analysis was used to analyse how the participants interacted with each other during these moments (Einfalt, 2019). Refer to Einfalt (2020) which presents an analysis of dialogic moment 6 with Eva, Kyle, Amber and Yuan.

**Table 6**

Dialogic Moments Identified by Participants

<b>Dialogic Moment: Topic focus</b>	Participants
<b>Forum 1</b>	
Dialogic moment 1: Do we have a culture? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness around one's cultural identity</li> </ul>	Amber, Elke, Bella, Sunju
Dialogic moment 2: Defining oneself and using voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking up and defining oneself</li> </ul>	Amber, Elke, Bella, Sunju
Dialogic moment 3: Talking about and using non-verbal communication. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding others' views</li> </ul>	Tammy, Carol, Kyle, Yuan
Dialogic moment 4: Are Australians open compared to others? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicating across different cultures</li> </ul>	Elke, Tammy, Bella
<b>Forum 2</b>	
Dialogic moment 5: Talking about assumptions and stereotypes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thinking about Australian stereotypes</li> </ul>	Eva, Kyle, Amber, Yuan
Dialogic moment 6: Understanding Australian greetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding Australians</li> </ul>	Eva, Kyle, Amber, Yuan
<b>Forum 3</b>	
Dialogic moment 7: You are so quiet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women as leaders and using one's own voice.</li> </ul>	Carol, Stephan, Tammy
Dialogic moment 8: But why English? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding different perspectives about communicating in a common language</li> </ul>	Yuan, Eva, Amber, Tammy Stephan, Elke, Carol, Kyle

Table 7 below provides a selection of indicative, and repeated thematic comments that were representative of key shifts for each participant based on the thematic analysis. To identify potential internal shifts in students, a focus was placed on evidence reporting signs of flexibility, adaptability and adjustment, as linked to IC elements 3, 6, 7, 15 (Deardorff, 2006). Investigating key shifts in participants' attitudes, views, knowledge and skills, enabled indicative shifts in students' informed frame of reference to be noted and observed.

**Table 7**

Key Findings Showing Main Shifts and Representative Quotes for Participants

<b>Name Age Nationality</b>	<b>Internal Shifts: based on shifts in Attitude, Views, Knowledge &amp; Skill</b>	<b>Representative Quotations</b>
<b>Amber</b> 17 Australian	Amber identified and located her position and experience of Australia as “in the middle” and reflected that she saw herself differently to others because she was “immersed” in her own culture.	<i>“I’ve a somewhat naïve worldview...”</i> <i>“I’m certainly ready for anything...”</i> <i>“I discovered we do in fact have a culture...”</i>
<b>Tammy</b> 19 Australian	Although she believed explaining and representing Australian culture as more about sharing her own personal story, in the future Tammy has realised she needs to consider the broader perspectives of others, so she can help others understand her better.	<i>“She (Yuan) must be so out of her comfort zone...”</i> <i>“I try to dial it down a bit now...”</i> <i>“It kind of opened up your view of if it is OK...”</i>
<b>Kyle</b> 19 Australian	Kyle was surprised and concerned at how assumptions can determine if people pursue a connection with others or not. He reported he had become more embrasive and accepting of people from different cultural backgrounds, and that this will be useful in the future.	<i>“I strongly identify with Western culture”.</i> <i>“I took for granted how powerful English is...In Australia, like they (other languages) are not valued.”</i> <i>“It’s now obvious to me I will need this knowledge”</i>
<b>“Yuan</b> 22 Chinese	Yuan developed new understandings around how to be a student and about practices in this new cultural and academic context, for example, greetings. Yuan learnt and understood more about communicating with others and felt body language and knowing habits important for this.	<i>“My experience makes me what I am.”</i> <i>“We cannot see people on the inside...”</i> <i>“I never think about doing something to change the world before...”</i>
<b>Elke</b> 21 Swedish/ Polish	Elke had learnt to “triple check” before responding to others in case something was missed as she had learnt it could be different for individuals. She learnt that it is important to respond to others’ views by taking time to think and consider where others are “coming from” and not to always trust her prior learning.	<i>“I’ve taken a step back – it is all one by one...”</i> <i>“Sparked a little critical thinking...”</i> <i>“Taking time to think before I say...”.</i> <i>“Because sometimes we assume-like it’s been true for so many other but...”</i>

<b>Carol</b> 19 Canadian	Carol discovered that she did not really understand her own opinion until it was confronted. She had learnt to say what she thinks to others, to meet her aim to be more open and “extroverted”	<p><i>“I’ve learned to just kind of stick to my ideals...”</i></p> <p><i>“Pushed me forward to open up...”</i></p> <p><i>“It is so hard to think broadly...”</i></p>
<b>Stephan</b> 34 German	Stephan concluded that in the future he needs to adjust his communication style, especially with females, to express himself more and show he is listening. He also learnt that Asian perspectives are not so different to his own based on talking to participants from Asia during the forums.	<p><i>“Maybe sometimes being quiet can be misunderstood...Just express myself more”</i></p> <p><i>“I also learned a lot about myself- I know who I am!”</i></p>
<b>Eva</b> 20 Swedish	Eva gathered new concepts based on her experience gained here. Eva feels she will take back aspects of Australian culture to use in the future at home. Eva realised she prefers to be in charge rather than take a “laid-back” approach.	<p><i>“I believe it’s a good stereotype...”</i></p> <p><i>“Assumptions influence a lot about how we think...”</i></p> <p><i>“I realised I like being the one in charge...”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m still learning with the communication part...”</i></p>

### Shifts in Attitudes and Views

Thematic analysis showed that overall, all participants changed their views and attitude to some degree. The focus of this foundational attitudinal element, according to Deardorff (2006), relates to acquiring and demonstrating notions of respect, openness, curiosity, discovery, and the willingness to move out of ones’ comfort zone to be more open about difference, and willing to see others’ perspectives. The topic of making assumptions and stereotyping was of interest to several participants. Both Eva and Elke shifted their attitude and view on the impact of assumptions and stereotyping of others, realising that this is not always negative, and in Elke’s case, forum discussions helped “pushed back” some of her assumptions. Amber claimed that forum interactions had raised her curiosity and desire to be more open, and her motivation to travel and meet new people in the future. Likewise, Carol felt forums “pushed her forward” to be more open to others. Elke concluded that Australians are open but slightly less open than she had first thought after her discussion in forums with Australian participants. Stephan changed his view on Asian perspectives, as “not so different” to his own, and this helped Yuan gain new insights on how to approach learning in a Western university context. A closer examination of identified dialogic moments, showed participants becoming more open-minded and willing to adopt broader perspectives, which impacted on their own views and beliefs. This was confirmed by Elke who stated that she had learnt to “triple check” before responding to others in case something was missed as she has learnt it could be different for everyone, and that this would be critical in her future role as a nurse.

### Shifts in Knowledge and Understanding

All participants reported personal reflection and shifts in relation to their self-awareness. Elke, Amber, Kyle and Carol, reported change in terms of how they defined themselves. For example,



Elke commented on why it was important for her to define herself to others as having a dual culture, as this was intricately linked to her sense of identity, while Kyle and Amber reported that they had not thought much about themselves as having a culture prior to the forums. Amber described herself as a “citizen of her country” and Kyle saw himself as a product of Western culture, while Stephan claimed he had confirmed that he knew who he was. For Carol, her sense of self was linked to her personal motivation to become more extroverted and open in this new university context. She reported that interactions in the forums had helped her to project a stronger representation of her own voice, enabling her to “stick to her ideals” whilst reflecting her desire for openness and acceptance towards others. For Carol, as with others in the forums, becoming more open and accepting to others in response to forum interactions was also associated with feeling comfortable and connecting with them. Of interest, participants were observed to be co-constructing their sense of selves both culturally and in relation to how they saw themselves as students adjusting and fitting into a new university context.

Several participants reported growth in their understanding around the importance of developing IC for their future role in an internationalised and globalised context. Participants were found to adopt broader perspectives, as they became more aware of the different worldviews offered by other participants. Such topics included: English as a global language, sharing work with others in the university context, and the role of stereotyping and assumptions impacting how one thinks about someone who is culturally different. Such critical discussion topics were observed to promote dialogic interaction, as evident in the dialogic moments selected (Table 6). These moments demonstrated promoting mutual understanding, rethinking and comprehension growth in the students, all of which is critical for skill development.

### **Shifts in Skills and Communication**

Both thematic analysis and close examination of the forum videos showed participants were required to use their skills of listening and observing to interpret, analyse and relate to others. Discussion around relevant communication skills was also linked to developing skills that might be important for future professional practice, especially in the case of Kyle, Eva, Elke, and Amber. Participants also become more aware of their personal style of communicating and commented on this while viewing videos of forum interactions during the SVR. Several of the participants talked about their preferred style of communicating in groups and reflected on the impact this could have on others. Kyle learnt more about his own personal style when generally interacting in groups and claimed the forums helped prepare him to be more assertive in class. Yuan and Amber spoke about the importance of using body language, especially to overcome language barriers in intercultural communication situations, such as those noted during in the IaH program. Carol and Tammy adopted skills that demonstrated empathy, and to rethink and negotiate different opinions raised during interactions. Eva concluded that she prefers to be in charge in a group rather than take a “laid-back” approach, while Stephan decided that in the future, he needed to adjust his communication style, especially with females, to express himself more and show he is listening. However, even though some participants had become more aware about the importance of developing a range of communication skills, they also reported limited opportunities to put these into practice outside of the forums.

## Discussion

Findings support earlier literature proposing that developing intercultural capacity or competence in students requires a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitude elements, in particular: open-mindedness, empathy, interconnectedness, cross-cultural awareness, interaction, and adaptability (Deardorff & Jones 2012; Grainger & Willis, 2023). Relating to communicative skill development, forum interactions were described by participants in the SVR interviews as “real” conversations, “proper” talk, and “sparking a little critical thinking in all of us”. Dialogically, this type of talk offered the opportunity for re-constructing ideas and thoughts enabling them to reframe and rethink concepts (Bakhtin, 1981). This process was observed as necessary for individuals to achieve an internal shift in personal frame of reference, and thus to arrive at intercultural understandings with others in this context (Deardorff, 2006). However, it was also clear that developing the skill to manage and communicate with diverse others, referred to as “strangers” by Tammy, needed time and practice to fully develop. The final forum interactions saw participants becoming more actively engaged in dialogic discussion around topics of interest, especially that of English as a global language. Interaction and engagement was observed with all group members during the final session discussions, making way for internal shifts through a process of sharing and debating (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). The resulting outcomes were productive in terms of achieving conditions suitable for intercultural communication and understanding to occur.

In relation to learning how to potentially communicate across intercultural and global borders, students reported they had become more conscious about their own personal communication styles through participation in this program, and in some cases, reported a desire to adapt for future encounters. Varieties of English spoken by the Swedish, German and Canadian students were observed placing a certain load on listeners in the forum interactions. This raises potential power implications due to different English language proficiency levels in the group of students that may have come into play during the forum interactions (East et al., 2022; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Despite this observation, all participants reported forming better connections and understandings about each other as the forums promoted genuine dialogue and encouraged students to be reflective. This finding is supported by recent studies by Ramasamy and Zainal (2023), using dialogic interaction in the online space, and Collinsa and Callaghanb (2022), demonstrating an increase in intercultural interactions and relationships by using virtual classrooms for group work. Managing language barriers and power implications is noted as a challenge for educators working with diverse students, attempting to unpack complex ideas around culture to generate deeper understandings about these complex concepts (Whitfield, 2022). Returning to the earlier point raised by Tran et al. (2023) highlighting a need for a more social and humanising approach to international education, recent work on engaging Students as Partners (Tran et al., 2023) in global learning has been offered as a valuable approach, and one that aligns well with the concepts of dialogic practice advocated for in this paper.

Current debate around how best to develop IC in places of learning to further advance internationalisation in the higher education sector (Leask, 2013; Mak, 2013) remind us that gaining a strong sense of cultural awareness alone is not sufficient for IC to fully develop. Cotton et al. (2019) demonstrated that raising student awareness of the skills required to communicate with “students who are different” to oneself did not automatically translate into one acquiring the

ability to be effective with this skill. Students need to have more opportunities to apply knowledge and awareness, as well as time to practice and reflect, is vital skill development (Sanderson, 2011). Despite, skills being seen as foundational for IC to develop over time, gaining guidance and opportunities to practice is key, and this includes learning how to negotiate uncomfortable feelings that come up when engaging with unfamiliar or different others (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). As such, this finding supports a range of prevailing literature calling for more intentionally designed opportunities and initiatives to promote domestic and international student interaction in places of learning (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Fozdar & Volet, 2016; Leask & Carroll, 2011; Mendoza et al., 2023).

## **Implications**

Findings confirmed that student engagement and participation in the academic context is highly influenced by relational and socio-emotional factors when interacting with others, and that transition to a new context requires all students to undergo a process of enculturation (Einfalt, 2020), whether being a domestic or international student. As such, it is important for universities to intentionally stimulate connection through intercultural conversations in places of learning (Cook-Sather et al., 2021; Mendoza et al., 2023). This brings us back to the ongoing problem that the presence of a diverse student cohort studying together on Australian campuses is no guarantee that intercultural learning or understandings will develop in these students (Arkoudis et al., 2013) or that students will benefit from this diversity either virtually or in the physical classroom.

Also noted in this study is that the methodological process of engaging students in the video recall saw students become reflexive around their own IC levels and achievement. This finding contributes to growth in using SVR as a productive qualitative research methodology, and as a potential learning tool in both online and face-to-face spaces. Despite the small-scale nature of this study, several practical outcomes from this study are listed below. These might be adopted and applied in other university spaces to promote dialogic practice:

- (1) Even though the forums only occurred over three weeks, dialogic principles were successfully adopted and practiced by participating students and tools were noted to be utilised, especially by the EAL students to engage more fully in group discussion.
- (2) Activities involving moving around the room in the earlier part of each forum, and offering snack food during group activities, helped to establish “small talk” and for students to become more comfortable with each other.
- (3) Use of breakout rooms or providing a space to relocate groups so they would not be overheard by others tended to result in deeper talks and dialogic interaction.
- (4) Minimal use of PowerPoint and observation of body language by the facilitator reduced “teacher talk”, and more importantly, the interruption of potential dialogic moments from developing.

This study highlights that universities and teachers need to find ways to intentionally stimulate dialogic interactions in the classroom, whether virtually or in person. It also recommends using IaH initiatives to engage students dialogically in current learning spaces, to promote the development of IC in students. After all, in the wake of the post-pandemic response, given the significant amount of learning moving to online spaces, a stronger expectation for self-directed

learning by individuals has been witnessed in these spaces (Hews et al., 2022). This has especially been observed in many Australian universities, where students may only interact with peers or teachers in a zoom environment or a face-to-face on-campus tutorial for two hours per week in each subject. Now, more so than ever before, it has become critical for Australian university facilitators to make the most of all face-to-face interactions, to ensure learning objectives are met and more fully utilise diverse cohorts to promote cross-cultural understandings and learning. This is not only timely, but vital if universities are to create global citizens, and thereby honour the claim of being true internationalised institutions.

### ***Limitations***

This study was small-scale and limited by a reliance on self-reported data by self-selected students. It presents one case at a regional Australian university where eight students were found to engage more critically and report their emerging identities, intercultural competence in development, and to reflect forward towards operating in a global world, in response to participating in a purpose-built laH program.

## **Conclusion**

By exploring how a group of students interacted during the dialogic forums, the study contributes a fine-grained understanding of interactions at the dialogic level and how these may have contributed to the IC growth. These findings add support to the value of dialogic pedagogy as a teaching and learning tool (Alexander, 2006). The laH program was shown to promote shifts in knowledge, attitude, and skill as key for developing intercultural competence in all participating students, regardless of the level of capacity with which they arrived. This small-scale study also highlights that guided dialogic sessions enabled a diverse and culturally mixed group of students to better see the differences between themselves and others, as well as to navigate better in a new academic culture (Einfalt, 2020). Findings align with scholarship calling for more deliberately guided opportunities for student interaction on campus and in virtual classrooms. Engaging students in online spaces is one area that clearly requires further research as we move forward to provide quality teaching and learning outcomes in higher education. Overall, it appears that a dialogic approach is well aligned with a conceptualisation of how intercultural competence can develop in students, offering the higher education sector a potential platform to meet the expected role that universities are producing graduates, who are skilled, interculturally capable, and thereby able to operate successfully in a globalised and transnational world.

## **Conflict of Interest**

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

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## Appendix A

### *Deardorff's 22 Elements of IC*

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#### **IC Elements**

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- (1) Understand others' worldviews
  - (2) Cultural self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment
  - (3) Adaptability and adjustment to new cultural environments
  - (4) Skills to listen and observe
  - (5) General openness toward intercultural learning and the people from other cultures
  - (6) Ability to adapt to varying intercultural communication and learning styles
  - (7) Flexibility
  - (8) Skills to analyse, interpret and relate
  - (9) Tolerating and engaging ambiguity
  - (10) Deep knowledge and understanding of culture (one's own and others')
  - (11) Respect for other cultures
  - (12) Cross-cultural empathy
  - (13) Understanding the value of cultural diversity
  - (14) Understanding of the role and impact of culture
  - (15) Cognitive flexibility – ability to switch frames
  - (16) Sociolinguistic competence
  - (17) Mindfulness
  - (18) Withholding judgment
  - (19) Curiosity and discovery
  - (20) Learning through interaction
  - (21) Ethnorelative view
  - (22) Culture specific knowledge
- 

From "Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization", by D. Deardorff, 2006, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), p. 250 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>).

## Appendix B

### Statements Used in the Self-reported Questionnaire

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|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Attitude</b>          | 1. My openness to learning from other people about different cultural practices                  |
|                          | 2. My level of respect for, tolerance and ability to empathise with other cultures               |
|                          | 3. My sense of value for culture diversity   |
|                          | 4. My sense of curiosity and discovery about difference  |
| <b>Knowledge</b>         | 5. My understanding around others' worldviews  |
|                          | 6. My awareness about my own culture   |
|                          | 7. My understanding of the role and impact of culture on the different contexts involved         |
|                          | 8. My awareness of the relationship between language and meaning in different societal contexts  |
| <b>Skills</b>            | 9. My ability to listen and observe others who are different to me                               |
|                          | 10. My ability to interpret, analyse and relate to others in different contexts                  |
|                          | 11. My ability to learn through interaction with others  |
| <b>Internal Outcomes</b> | 12. My ability to adapt to different communication and learning styles                           |
|                          | 13. My ability to adapt and adjust to a new cultural environment                                 |
|                          | 14. My ability to be flexible when I encounter people who are very different to me               |
|                          | 15. My mindfulness and ability to withhold judgment about different beliefs/practices/traditions |
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Adapted from "Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization", by D. Deardorff, 2006, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), pp. 249-250 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>).