Researchers from four universities organized the International Conference on Intercultural Communication Competencies in Singapore, 6–7 October 2005. This volume reflects the work of almost twenty scholars from all over the world, and their deliberations on intercultural communication competence in a variety of contexts in the comprehensive landscape of education and business.

The research embarked by the editors of this book and the organization of the International Conference on Intercultural Communication Competencies is the result of a project “Cross Cultural Learning Styles” which was generously funded by the ASEAN-EU University Network Programme.

Editors: Siow-Heng Ong, PhD (Singapore Management University, SINGAPORE); Gerhard Apfelthaler, PhD (FH Joanneum, AUSTRIA); Katrin Hansen, PhD (Gelsenkirchen University of Applied Sciences, GERMANY); Nirundon Tapachai, PhD (Kasetsart University, THAILAND)
### Appendix C (cont’d)

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<th>Tradition: The motivational goal of people with Tradition values is respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one’s culture or religion imposes on the individual. A Traditional mode of behavior becomes a symbol of the group’s solidarity and an expression of its unique worth and, hopefully, its survival.</th>
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**Can Structured Intervention Improve Intercultural Communication in Multinational Student Teams?**

Carmela Briguglio

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Group projects or group tasks are a common assessment task in undergraduate business education courses in Western Australia, largely due to educators’ beliefs that such tasks develop valuable ‘team working skills’ that are much sought after by employers. The results, however, would seem to be somewhat mixed, with students sometimes reporting negative experiences in groups, particularly multicultural/multinational groups. Indeed, previous research (Hawthorne 1997; Nesdale & Todd 1997; Briguglio 1998; Volet & Ang 1998) indicates that if students are left to their own devices, they will often prefer to team up with others from similar nationalities/cultural backgrounds. In this ‘Multinational Teams Case Study’, it was decided to have students working in pre-structured multinational teams in order to mirror, as much as possible, the sorts of situations they are likely to meet in the world of work in future multinational companies/contexts. The unit International Management 375 was considered suitable for this case study because the syllabus deals with content that relates to international
workplaces and intercultural issues. Assessment for the unit includes two group/team tasks, which involve the team researching a topic relevant to international management and presenting their findings orally in a twenty-minute presentation (worth ten percent of total mark) and in writing a 3,000 word formal research paper (worth twenty percent of total mark). This was the group task used for the Multinational Teams Case Study. The case study was implemented in Semester One, 2004, which extends from the beginning of March to the end of June, with student interviews taking place in July 2004, after the completion of their unit.

The Multinational Teams Case Study aimed to:

1. examine group interactions and identify communication issues in multinational student groups/teams;
2. establish whether a workshop providing students with insights and techniques for better intercultural communication and interaction in multinational teams actually has a positive effect on the nature of the group experience and the attitudes of students towards such teams.

2. LITERATURE ON MULTINATIONAL/MULTI-ETHNIC TEAMS

Major studies consulted in relation to workplace multinational/multicultural teams include the study by Cox, Lobel and McLeod (1991), the study by Watson, Kumar and Michaelson (1993) and the study by Earley and Mosakowski (2000). Cox et al. (1991) found, not surprisingly, that teams composed of people from collectivist cultures displayed more co-operative behavior than teams composed of people from individualistic cultural traditions. Watson, Kumar and Michaelson (1993) compared homogenous and heterogeneous groups over a seventeen-week period and discovered that, although initially culturally homogenous teams seem better at achieving group objectives, over time culturally diverse groups perform well (that is, after an initial phase of under-performance) and are possibly more creative. The study by Earley and Mosakowski (2000) found that in international contexts, homogenous and highly heterogeneous teams outperformed moderately heterogeneous teams and that those teams which performed best had been successful in creating a new ‘hybrid’ culture.

Other researchers warn that perceptions of the concepts of ‘team’ and ‘teamwork’ are themselves influenced by different cultural perspectives (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn 2001; Camiah & Hollinshead 2003) as are the approaches to coping with cultural barriers (Chevrier, 2003). Ely and Thomas (2001) examined the conditions under which cultural diversity enhances or detracts from group functioning in organizations. They found that the way people viewed diversity influenced whether they used it successfully in achieving work objectives. Those groups which integrated diversity and used it to learn (the ‘integration-and-learning perspective’) were the most successful. Distefano and Maznevski (2000) warn us that although much business literature stresses the importance of utilizing the expected creativity of culturally diverse teams, the research indicates that there are probably as many failures as successes; the synergy of successful teams does not happen automatically but has to be developed. They also stress that with increasing globalization, culturally diverse teams will be a growing feature of organizations: With today’s workforce demographics, the existence of culturally diverse teams is inevitable; and with today’s competitive environment, firms cannot afford to forego their value (Distefano & Maznevski 2000, p.45).

In regard to group work in tertiary settings, a project on ‘Managing Student Teams’ undertaken at The University of Western Australia (Caspersz, Skene & Wu 2002a, 2004 & 2005; Caspersz, Wu & Skene 2002b) was of particular relevance, since it examined student teams in a Western Australian tertiary context. This project, which is still ongoing, has examined such issues as student willingness to participate in team projects and issues of intra-group trust, as well as gender and country-of-origin effects on team performance. Preliminary findings indicate that individual team member performance can be affected by gender and country-of-origin factors. Studies in the UK by De Vita (2002a & 2002b) show that students had similar concerns to those found by Caspersz et al (2002a): for example a belief that multicultural teams might negatively impact on assessment results.

Volet and Ang (1998) examined similar issues in an Australian setting with particular emphasis on culturally mixed groups. They were keen to probe the reasons why there is a lack of mixing between
Australian and international students in Australian universities (see also Hawthorne 1997; Nesdale and Todd 1997; Briguglio 1998) and to explore the experiences of students in culturally mixed groups for the completion of assignments. Volet and Ang found a variety of reasons why students initially preferred to work in culturally/nationally homogenous groups, not least the sense of belonging, bonding and familiarity provided by a peer group comprising the same or a similar culture. Importantly, they found that where students had been forced by circumstances to form culturally diverse groups, both Australian and international students had found the experience to be reasonably positive. Unfortunately such an experience was not enough to encourage students to seek further involvement in culturally diverse teams, leading the authors to conclude that “unless cultural contact is engineered as part of formal study, social cohesion will not happen and all students will miss out on critical learning opportunities” (Volet & Ang 1998, p.9). In the US, Schullery and Gibson (2001) found reluctance on the part of students towards working in assignment groups. Various studies have therefore concluded that student group work, particularly in multicultural/multinational teams, needs to be well-structured (Smart, Volet & Ang 2002; Cheney 2001) and well-managed (Schullery & Gibson 2001; Casperz et al. 2004 & 2005) and that students need to be given the necessary skills (Crosling and Martin 2005) in order to achieve good learning outcomes.

3. METHOD

The case study was designed so that a workshop dealing with language and culture issues in multinational teams would be administered to one half of the class (the sample group) in order to ascertain whether it positively influenced student attitudes and relationships within the group. The other half of the class (the control group) would participate in a workshop dealing with ‘working in groups’ issues, but not specifically with language and culture issues. It was hypothesized that if the sample group reported better team interactions, then the structured intervention could be deemed to have been effective.

Data gathering for this part of the case study included:

- Two different student workshops;
- Team progress reports;
- Student post-questionnaire; and
- Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with around one third of the students involved.

This paper reports particularly on the implementation of the two different workshops and the results of the student interviews upon completion of their unit.

3.1 Process for Determining Composition of Groups

Students would normally have been asked to form groups of their choice, which often means that they team up with other students from similar nationalities or cultural backgrounds. In this case, the requirement was that students had to form ‘mixed’ teams. Students were simply allocated a letter from A to H by their lecturer and then asked to join those with a similar letter to form a team. This resulted in a very good mixture of nationalities as described in Table 1, below.

3.2 Preparatory Workshops

All students had been told that they would take part in a brief workshop about working in teams and that this would be held during normal class time, with one half of the class one week and the other half the following week. In fact, it had been agreed with the lecturer that the sample group (groups A, B, C and D) would receive a more structured workshop with significant emphasis on cultural and linguistic issues, as well as issues related to working in teams, whereas the control group (groups E, F, G and H) would receive a workshop that dealt only with ‘working in teams’ issues. Students were not informed about these differences, as it was considered that this would bias the results of the project.

3.2.1 Workshop with the Sample Group

The workshop with groups A, B, C and D (the sample group) entitled ‘Working in multinational teams’ was facilitated by the researcher in
the second week of lectures in Semester 1, 2004. From the start, the emphasis of the workshop was on cultural issues and intercultural communication (indeed a warm up activity had students match a list of statements in 12 languages with the right language). Since students were going to be engaged largely in group activities, they were asked to sit with their pre-assigned team members in groups A, B, C and D. However, there was also open discussion during which all class members joined in.

The first activity assigned to students in their groups was to come up with a one or two sentence definition of ‘culture’ (What is culture? What culture is not?). Each group’s definition of culture was then discussed by the whole class. This discussion was very useful and allowed students to think beyond stereotypical and surface elements of culture. Because the group itself was so culturally mixed, students were encouraged to provide examples from their own culture and this allowed for the emergence of different perspectives.

The next stage involved presenting to students some information and statistics about English as a global language and emphasising the fact that the future world in which they would be working and interacting with others would, more likely than not, involve many interactions between first language (L1) and second language (L2) speakers of English and L2 and L2 speakers of English. Well-established varieties of English were discussed (with some of the students present giving examples of the use of such varieties) as well as the need for all students to have intercultural communication skills in this sort of future scenario. It was stressed that because people from different cultures were communicating in the same language (English), this did not mean that misunderstandings would not occur. The responsibility of all intercultural communication in this was interpretability as well as intelligibility (Canellis 1982) was also stressed, as was the complex nature of intercultural communication.

To assist students in unravelling some of these difficulties, they were asked to write for themselves the three things that are considered most important in their culture. The responses were then written on a whiteboard and students discussed similarities and differences. A related activity asked students to first write themselves, and then to share with their team members and the class, three things that are considered very polite and three that are considered very rude in their culture. This again led to rich discussion around linguistic and cultural issues.

The next step involved students thinking about the ‘multinational’ team task they were about to undertake. Firstly, to make students aware that everyone brings different knowledge and skills to the team task, students were asked to discuss important developments in their own country/region. This makes everyone an ‘expert’ about their own region. Then students were asked to consider the unwritten ‘rules’ about working in teams/groups in their culture. This again illustrated some very interesting differences. It was emphasized that all team members needed to be absolutely clear about expectations and that they all needed to ensure their own understanding of requirements; for example in
regard to meeting times (real time or flexible time?), in regard to their own contribution to the group task, and so on. The researcher then presented what we know about working in teams and concluded with what research has told us about successful multinational teams.

Examples that student gave throughout the workshop to illustrate their opinions did much to shed light on differences and different cultural perspectives. The point was made to students that these different cultural perspectives needed to be kept in mind and respected, and that their group interaction would be influenced by such perspectives. Student evaluations completed at the end of the workshop indicate that they found this workshop to be very useful and enjoyable (see analysis of evaluations in Table 2). Comments in response to the first open-ended question on the evaluation sheet indicate that students appreciated and found most useful the discussion of cultural aspects. The comments below reflect the general tenor of responses:

What was the best/most useful aspect of this workshop for you?
- Learning about other cultures.

| Table 2 Evaluation of two workshops (multinational teams and working in groups) |
|---------------------------------------------|----------|------|----------------|
| Multinational teams (sample group), Number of responses (15) | Group | Mean | N | Number who agree or strongly agree |
| Working in groups (control group), Number of responses (15) | 1. I found this workshop very useful | Multinational teams | 3.13 | 15 | 15 |
| | Working in groups | 3.23 | 15 | 12 |
| | 2. I think what I learned from this workshop will improve my communication | Multinational teams | 3.07 | 15 | 15 |
| | Working in groups | 3.23 | 15 | 13 |
| | 3. The workshop was well-presented | Multinational teams | 3.53 | 15 | 15 |
| | Working in groups | 3.33 | 15 | 13 |
| | 4. The materials/handouts used were useful | Multinational teams | 3.00 | 15 | 15 |
| | Working in groups | 3.08 | 15 | 11 |
| | 5. The activities we did helped us to apply what we learned | Multinational teams | 3.27 | 15 | 14 |
| | Working in groups | 3.23 | 15 | 13 |
| | 6. I would recommend this seminar to other CBS students | Multinational teams | 3.27 | 15 | 15 |
| | Working in groups | 3.09 | 13 | 13 |

NB: Four point Likert scale, 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 agree, 4 strongly agree.

- Get to know members of my group more closely. It was an opportunity for me to see the diverseness (sic) within the class and hear interesting facts of the other students' backgrounds and customs.
- Discussing cultural characteristics of other students and other cultures/nationalities.
- More knowledge of multinational teams, multi-cultures etc.
- Learning about other customs and cultures and getting to share your opinions and ideas.
- Different values and opinions between students.
- Discussing the differences between cultures and people's perceptions of them.

One student's comment reflects the fact that cultural and diversity issues are not often discussed in class and that students might appreciate the opportunity to do so:

I would personally recommend this workshop to be compulsory for all CBS students and something similar to this should be conducted in the first year of study.

3.2.2 Workshop with the Control Group

The workshop carried out with the other half of the class or the 'control group', that is groups E, F, G and H, was entitled 'Working on group assignments'. This workshop was run in week 3 of Semester 1, 2004. On this occasion, however, cultural differences and issues were not discussed (except incidentally) and the emphasis was on group roles and group responsibilities.

Students were first asked to discuss previous experiences of working in groups and to name three things which help groups and three things which hinder them. Groups then reported back and the whole class discussed things which help and hinder group work. Some possible roles for team members were discussed as a way of sharing the load in team assignments. The researcher also presented a summary of issues that are known to assist and those that are known to hinder group work.

Students were then asked in their allotted teams to develop a plan for a simulated group assignment where they would work out the
requirements of the assignment, the steps they would need to take and allocation of tasks to various team members. The topic given for the workshop was: "What does it take to be a successful international manager? Has the ideal profile changed over time?" Students had about forty minutes to work on this and to place their plan on an Overhead Transparency, which one person from each team presented to the whole class. Students seemed to particularly enjoy this aspect of the workshop, which provided them with the opportunity to become better acquainted with their team members. However, as can be seen, there was no discussion around language and culture issues and about how these elements might influence the future group task, as there was with the sample group.

Again, the evaluation of this workshop indicates that students found the workshop to be very useful (see summary of evaluations in Table 6.2) but the responses to the open-ended question reflect the narrower emphasis. Below is a sample of typical responses.

What was the best/most useful aspect of this workshop for you?

- Tips on how to work more effectively and productive (sic) in groups.
- Preparing our group assignment and purpose/plan – knowing where we are heading.
- Know more about project and group members.
- Discussing the pros and cons of groups.
- Establishing group goals and roles.
- Being able to plan assignment with group members was beneficial.

Again one student recommended this workshop more widely:

Great! A must for every student.

3.2.3 Student Evaluation of both Workshops

Twenty-eight (28) evaluations were returned anonymously, fifteen from the sample group and thirteen from the control group. The evaluation instrument contained a four point Likert scale with 1 for 'strongly disagree', 2 for 'disagree', 3 for 'agree' and 4 for 'strongly agree'. Table 2, below, shows the mean for each of the six items listed for both groups, 'multinational teams', indicating the sample group and 'working in groups', the control group.

Thus, the evaluation for both workshops was very positive, with the rates of agreement for each of the items as indicated above. Students were not informed that the workshops for the two halves of the class were different, and because many of them do not interact very much outside the classroom, there has been no indication that they were at any stage aware of this fact. Since both workshops dealt with team issues, it is thought that students assumed they received the same workshop.

3.3 Student Interviews

At the start of the project, students had been told that a number of them (at least one from each sub-group) would be contacted for interviews at the end of the project. It was thought that individual interviews would provide much richer data than was possible through the post-questionnaire or brief progress reports; this in fact proved to be the case. Some twenty students were contacted by telephone and email after the examination period and during the inter-semester break. In all, twelve students agreed to be interviewed. The semi-structured, face-to-face interviews took place in the office of the researcher, and involved discussion around the following questions:

Student interview questions

1. How did you find the experience of working in multinational teams for the unit International Management 373?
2. Did you experience any problems that you think were due to different cultures/backgrounds in the group?
3. Did you experience any problems that you think were due to different language backgrounds in the group?
4. What did you learn about working with people from different cultural backgrounds?
5. Did you find this a positive experience? Why? Why not?
6. What do you think are the skills you require to work successfully in multi-national teams?
7. Do you think the experience you had is fairly close to what would happen in a real world work context?
8. Are you satisfied with the group mark you got for your project? If not, why not?
9. If you had to advise someone about working in multinational teams, what would you say to them?
10. Any other comments?

Data from interviews was analyzed using the usual processes of sorting and sifting qualitative data to draw major themes.

3.3.1 Analysis of Student Interviews

Twelve face-to-face interviews were undertaken with students, six from each half of the class. Students were contacted by telephone and by email. No student displayed any reluctance to speak; in fact a couple spoke rather forcefully about how negative they felt the group experience had been.

An analysis of the interviews shows quite clearly that those students in the sample group enjoyed their group experience much more. Their comments often relate to culture and language benefits, whereas comments from those in the control group are on the whole, less positive about the whole experience. The feelings reported may not be even across each sub-group. However, the analysis shows that groups A, B and C were very positive about their experience, while students in group D were quite satisfied. However, students in group F and G expressed strong feelings of dissatisfaction and annoyance about their experience during the interview. Those in group H were not as critical, but again the feeling was not positive. So feelings of dissatisfaction were much more strongly expressed by those in the control group during the interviews than during the progress reports. This is probably understandable, because the progress report, coming halfway through the process, still left room for the possibility of improvement, whereas the interview was at the end of the course. Comments from another student: 

the same in-class experience of the unit International Management, this difference can probably be attributed to the ‘Working in multinational groups’ workshop held at the start of the unit.

Comments about how they had found the group experience of working in multinational teams for this task show some strong contrast between the two halves of the class. The following are some examples of the responses from those in the sample group:

It was a good experience [...]. Compared to other groups in the past, this one went smoothly and everyone did their share. Everyone in the group really got on together (Group A).

It was an interesting experience because half of the group was from China [...]. Overall it was a positive experience (Group B).

It was good group experience [...]. The group got on really well [...]. Everyone felt comfortable to express ideas and everyone was included (Group C).

The experience of being in this group was average [...]. The group was quite OK [...]. It was not a very social group because everyone was too busy. It was a task-oriented group (Group D).

These comments contrast fairly sharply with those of the control group:

The experience in this group was awful. It was a very negative experience (Group F).

This was not a good group experience [...]. There was tension in the group. It’s one of the worst experiences I have had, because nobody really cared (Group G).

This was a good experience [...]. However, in this case we did not bond too much (Group H).

This group had the usual problems [...]. It was worse than normal [...]. In the end the experience wasn’t too bad and the presentation was quite good (Group H).
In response to questions about cultural and linguistic issues, it was interesting that those in the sample group on the whole made very positive comments, which show they had indeed learned something positive from this experience and that they had also acquired some cultural sensitivity.

The Chinese girl couldn’t speak up [...] she had some good ideas but didn’t say them immediately. She had to be encouraged to speak all the time (Group A).

Working with people from different cultural backgrounds I learnt that you have to be patient [...] I used to dislike it when people spoke other languages in front of me, but I understood that for the Chinese girl it was much easier for her to explain to the other Chinese student in their first language [...]. I felt I learned a lot, including about China (Group B).

I learned that people from other cultures might be a bit shy, so you have to keep asking them and trying to involve them [...] you have to make them feel comfortable (Group C).

On the whole I found this to be a positive experience because I met new people and learnt about their cultural backgrounds (Group D).

Those in the control group also displayed some sensitivity to culture and language issues, but this seems to be accompanied by less tolerance and more impatience:

The problem was not one of culture, but because of English language and report writing [...] One good thing about the multinational team was there was a broader amount of information about what was happening in other countries, because of the different nationalities in the group, but that’s about it (Group F).

Sometimes there were cultural differences, for example the Indonesians and Chinese do not express their thoughts straight away [...]. The German and Aussies were more confident in speaking [...] There are differences in the way they treat people; they sometimes get frustrated at the way Asians do things (Group G).

The two Asians were very quiet [...] it was hard to drag anything out of them. I learned that you can’t assume people [from other cultures] mean the same things as you. Their intonation and the way they spoke just weren’t understandable to others (Group G).

There was not really any language problem because they all could speak English fluently [...]. There may have been some cultural problems – they wanted different things, how to schedule meetings, or how to handle the assignment [...] For example, the Indonesian guy wanted a simpler assignment with less research (Group H).

The problems with international students were really language problems [...]. One international student in particular had his own expectations of what to do (Group H).

When asked about what they thought were the skills needed to work in multinational teams, the answers of the two halves again reflected some differences, although almost everyone seemed to agree that the greatest need was for ‘patience’. Among the comments from the sample group were the following:

For success in multinational teams you have to be more tolerant of cultural differences and not alienate them, for example by talking about football. You also have to understand that others might have language difficulties [...]. You have to accept that their understanding of English may not be as good (Group A).

The skills you need are language skills [...] you probably need to be aware of differences. You need to be patient with others and tap into people’s sense of humor, even if it’s a bit different, so that you get along when doing your work (Group B).

You need to have listening skills (that’s most important) and patience and understanding. The skills we learned here are really useful. This experience is like a small portion of the real world. This is like a small introduction (Group C).

The skills you need for multinational teams are listening and understanding. And you need to question to see if they [international students] understand what you are talking about (Group D).
For the best outcome you need to communicate well [...] it’s an efficiency advantage as well. You need to find out something about the other person’s culture in order to communicate well, cooperate and get the best outcome (Group D).

The control group’s responses to the same questions seemed to lack this sort of empathy and understanding, and again some impatience was evident:

The qualities you need to work in multinational teams are patience, time management and communication skills - that is interpersonal skills and standards of English [of team members]. You also need leadership abilities. You need to have systems set up that you can follow: practices, policies and procedures like a group contract [...] and consequences should be in place if people don’t deliver (Group F).

You need people skills, communication skills [...] flexibility and no stereotyping (Group G).

In multinational teams you need patience and don’t assume that everything is as straightforward as you think (Group G).

You need patience - this is needed because some people work more flexibly and some faster and they want the job done. You need a positive state of mind [...] you need to be open-minded (Group H).

If I had to advise someone [about working in multinational teams] I would say that you need to be sensitive to different expectations, to be tolerant [...] be willing to come to some sort of compromise and be patient in achieving that (Group H).

Finally, all students interviewed, except the student from group C (the group with the lowest overall mark) and group F, indicated that they were either satisfied or quite satisfied with their final mark for the group assignment.

4. DISCUSSION

This case study was undertaken to ascertain whether a deliberate intervention to help students acquire cultural understanding and intercultural communication skills would have a positive effect on their interaction in multinational teams. By half way through the semester, when a progress report was completed by over a third of the participants in the case study, it was becoming evident that the deliberate workshop intervention to assist students to operate in multinational teams was having some positive effect on the sample group, whereas the control group was showing signs of tension. This trend became firmer by the end of semester so that three of the four sub-groups in the control group did not function very well in terms of interpersonal relationships, collaboration and intercultural communication. The sub-groups in the sample group, on the other hand, displayed more positive team interaction and greater intercultural sensitivity. For example, one student in the sample group reported now understanding 'the way people do the work in their styles'. Another student in the sample group reported having gained 'appreciation of cultural and gender differences.' These more positive attitudes are likely to be attributable to the effects of the sample group workshop on multinational teams, which sought to make students aware of cultural and linguistic differences and how these might affect the group task, for as Distefano and Maznevski (2000, p. 46) state:

Team members from different cultures come to the group settings with very different predefined notions about how a group should proceed. Furthermore cultural values and norms are deeply held, and almost always implicit and taken for granted [...]. Cultural differences [can] hinder smooth interaction.

Research evidence also indicates that if culturally diverse teams are well managed, positive achievements are likely to be the result in both work and study contexts (Adler 1997; Cox & Blake 1999; Caspersz et al 2004 & 2005; Crosling & Martin 2005). In the instance of this case study, it could be argued that one half of the cohort, the sample group, was reasonably well prepared for the group task in multinational teams, whereas the other (the control group) was not.

The interviews left no doubt that interaction in the sample group had been much more successful than in the control group. As one student in sub-group F said, “The experience in this group was awful. It was a
negative experience”. Another said, “It’s one of the worst experiences I have had, because nobody really cared”. While students from the sample group did not say that working in multinational teams was easy (“you have to have listening skills and patience and understanding”) their comments revealed an attitude that was more understanding and open to other cultures. “I learned that people from other cultures might be a bit shy, so you have to make them feel comfortable.”

On the other hand, some students in the control group, which could be said were not well-prepared and ‘managed’, expressed disappointment and indeed some anger about the group process. This was not always evident to all members of ‘unhappy’ groups. For example, one control group interviewee thought everything had gone well, whereas another from the same group thought the process had not worked well (Group H). Caspersz et al. (2002a) found that some of the major obstacles facing student teams have more to do with interpersonal skills such as communication, negotiation and conflict resolution and not with students’ pre-disposition to working in team projects. Students in the sample group could be said to have received better preparation in interpersonal skills for this exercise. They were given the opportunity to explore cultural and linguistic differences and different expectations and interpretations of group work, to examine how these might influence their team interactions, and to explore misunderstandings that could arise. As Crosling and Martin (2005, p.6) state:

The role of culture and how it influences learning styles and interaction needs to be emphasized to the students, so that they more fully appreciate the advantages of collaborative activities [...] At the same time, students also need to be made aware of some of the problems inherent to interactions with people of different backgrounds.

Students from the sample group, then, were in a better position to have a successful group experience, and this, in fact, proved to be the case. Those interviewed from the sample group gave a very different picture from control group students, and although one was disappointed with the lower than expected group mark, all seemed very happy with the group experience. As one student said, “This [experience] is like a small portion of the real world [...] like a small introduction”.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, then, it appears that the deliberate intervention to raise student awareness of language and cultural issues assisted a group of students to interact more successfully in multinational teams than another group of students who did not receive the same support. It would seem that when we combine students in multinational teams in order for them to learn from each other, we need to structure the learning experience so that they derive the greatest benefit possible from it. We know from previous research (Hawthorne 1997; Nesdale & Todd 1997; Volet & Ang 1998; Smart Volet & Ang 2000; Briguglio 2000; Caspersz et al. 2005) that just being ‘thrown together’ is not enough and can, indeed, be counter-productive.

It would also seem that students require greater understanding of and more training in intercultural communication. Several students in the successful sample group stressed honing listening skills “and patience and understanding”. These are skills that are not often taught deliberately in class. Students are not taught about inductive skills for informal social and work-related communication which, according to Crosling and Ward (2001), are essential for the workplace. These authors argue that where students are taught the skills to work in culturally mixed team projects, these offer an ideal forum to develop a critical approach to informal communication. They also advise that assisting students to acquire such skills should be undertaken developmentally, over the duration of a course.

Since the major intervention in this case study was a single two and a half hour workshop focusing on language and culture issues in multinational teams, it is felt that much more could be achieved if the intervention were more sustained and over a longer period of time. A more sustained effort could be in the form of a semester unit with a similar focus and/or activities involving intercultural interaction in the course of a business degree. In particular, it should be emphasized that the process of sensitizing students involves more than just imparting cultural knowledge, which of itself may have very little effect, since all students displayed a reasonable level of cultural awareness at the beginning of the unit. However, as Edwards et al. (2003) point out, ‘international awareness’ is the first step in a three-tiered typology that
would gradually lead to ‘international competence’ and eventually to ‘international expertise’. For this to occur, it is the process of leading students to question, probe, discuss and analyze language and cultural issues (which is what the workshop aimed to do) that is likely to be more beneficial and effective. If this is so, then such an approach could be incorporated much more into the teaching and learning curriculum in business education to develop students who will have greater cultural and linguistic sensitivity. There is much support in the literature (Volet & Ang 1998; Smart, Volet & Ang 2000; De Vita 2001; Caspersz et al. 2005; Croslings & Martin 2005) for the use of culturally diverse student teams to achieve student development in these areas, although it is recognized that there are challenges in managing such teams. However, as Smart et al. (2000, p. 9) state:

If our central mission is to prepare international students for a global workforce, then it is crucial that they better understand each other's culture, learn to communicate, socialize and work together and to network.

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Understanding the Two Instructional Style Prototypes

Pathways to success in internationally diverse classrooms

Cornelius N. Grove

You are a researcher observing a secondary school class. From your seat on one side, you watch the teacher assign a term project. She says, "I want each of you to select your own topic for this project, and then bring it to me for approval. Then I want each of you to do your own discovery and writing. I'll be available for consultation, but I hope you'll work as independently as you possibly can." You observe that some students remain calm. Other students appear deeply if silently dismayed. You wonder why.

This paper will answer that question and other similar questions asked often by frustrated classroom instructors who are trying to have a positive impact in a classroom where the learners are from national cultures different from the instructor's. This paper will address many "Why?" questions. It will go on to address a few of the "How can I do this better?" questions that instructors ask. All answers offered in this paper will come from research on 'instructional styles', not from research on 'learning styles'.

Educators, psychologists, anthropologists, journalists, and social reformers have been studying classrooms in schools, universities, and