SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EVALUATION OF AN AUSTRALIAN TRANSNATIONAL
EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Abstract

The multicultural classroom is a phenomenon now found in most countries. As a result of globalisation and the burgeoning transnational education market, university classrooms that span national borders are now commonplace. Within these classrooms the cultures of both the delivering and receiving countries converge, resulting in the creation of a new and complex cultural territory that is often unfamiliar to educators and students alike. Australia has been a key provider of transnational education in the South East Asian region, however little research has investigated the interplay of culture and pedagogy within Australian transnational programs, despite the cultural distance which exists between Australia and its Asian neighbours. This is surprising given the importance of transnational provision to both the Australian economy and the internationalisation agenda of Australian universities. The unfamiliar cultural territory found within these transnational programs places high demands on educators and students, yet the impact of exposure to cultural difference and culture learning seems rarely considered in the development and delivery of such programs. This thesis examines one transnational program that was delivered in Singapore by an Australian university. An ethnographic methodology is employed, applying a ‘cultural lens’ to an analysis of the program. The author provides background information on the Australian and Singaporean education systems and reviews a range of previous research which focuses on culture and pedagogy in the region. Interviews and classroom observations reveal educator and student experiences of the program. The author concludes that cultural phenomena have a profound impact on participants’ experiences of transnational education programs and that this is substantially unrecognised by key actors in the process. Recommendations are made for changes in practice that could be incorporated in transnational programs in order to ameliorate negative impacts of cultural difference.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used

(iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Lynnel Hoare
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'Significantly, if we travel far enough West, we find ourselves in the East' (Bond, 1994)

The author would like to express her indebtedness to a large cohort of research subjects, university staff, friends, and family. The Singaporean respondents became my ‘kaki’s’ (friends, confidants) and gave with extraordinary generosity of their limited time for ‘makan’ and ‘kong sar kong si’ (eating and chatting). The university lecturers were similarly generous and also brave: brave enough to allow a hitherto unknown person to come into their classrooms and observe, with the potential to make judgement on their pedagogy, at a time when they were under significant pressure. This they did willingly, openly and within a genuine community of practice.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEI  Australian Education International
ASEAN  Association of South East Asian Nations
AUQA  Australian Universities Quality Agency
AVCC  Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee
BET  Bachelor of Education and Training
HRD  Human Resource Development
IDP  IDP is an Australian company that is a broker of Australian transnational education and is owned by Australian universities. The three-letter-acronym ‘IDP’ was originally a shortened form of ‘International Development Program’.
NIE  National Institute of Education, Singapore.
NTU  Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
NUS  National University of Singapore
OECD  Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHT  Overhead Transparency
SIM  Singapore Institute of Management
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

GLOSSARY

‘The Centre’  ‘The Centre’ is the de-identified title given to the centre within the study site university in order to preserve anonymity.
‘The University’  ‘The University’ is the de-identified title given to the Australian university which is the main site of this research.

All proper names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.
The masculine pronoun is used throughout this thesis in an attempt to preserve anonymity within a relatively small respondent field.
Chapter One: Introduction

An introduction to the research context

Education is a means to an end. The question is not should education be instrumental. It is instrumental, and always has been...because it inevitably reflects the consensus view about society...It is principally an agent of conservation. It strengthens the civilization it serves, and nurtures the dominant culture of which it is part. (Hulmes, 1989:18)

The context for Hulmes’ citation (above) was education in multicultural Britain. His observations about the role of education in sustaining culture, and his proposal that education has an instrumental purpose, are particularly relevant to this thesis, which considers these issues within the global multicultural classroom.

The multicultural classroom about which Hulmes writes is now a phenomenon that could be found in almost every country in the world. However another type of multicultural classroom has since emerged: that in which the learners are located in a country that is different from the one in which the teachers and awarding institution are based (see McBurnie and Zigarus, 2001:86). These classrooms, by their very nature, do not ‘belong’ to any one nation; they are a cultural amalgam. Australia is currently a major provider of this type of transnational education in the Asian region. If we take Hulmes’ conclusions (above) at face value and apply them to transnational education, our consideration will beg questions such as: which civilisation does an educational program serve; which culture is dominant; what are the impacts of the answers to those questions; and what do people from different cultural backgrounds actually seek when they enrol in an education program provided by another country? All too often it seems that the answers to these questions are assumed or not even considered at all.

Perhaps these questions have been considered and there are veiled agendas in transnational provision, or perhaps the main agenda is less covert; merely overtly economic. Certainly transnational education is not new; however the situation wherein the selling of education across borders becomes a major source of a country’s income and a significant factor in the viability of public universities is relatively recent. Whilst there is a growing evidence of critique and analysis of the motivations behind the provision of this ‘service’, research that considers the outcomes remains relatively scant; in particular research pertaining to the impact of culture on transnational provision. This study aims to partially redress this oversight: to consider one transnational program from a cross-cultural perspective. It aims, to paraphrase Merriam and Mohamad (2000), to apply a
‘cultural lens’ to evaluation of a transnational education program, in the hope that the nature of adult learning in a cross-cultural environment might be described in greater depth, as well as to shed light on the crucial issue of effective and culturally sensitive delivery of transnational programs.

Research aims and questions

This study was commenced assuming that the cultural values of both the country providing a transnational program and those of the receiving country would affect the program’s delivery and outcomes. If this were true, it seemed likely that the outcome of such cross cultural amalgamations would constitute a greatly different cultural space from that of the receiving or provider countries. This new ‘common ground’ could be expected to be culturally unfamiliar to those charged with the design and delivery of the education program, as well as to its recipients. Thus it seemed to the author to be important to ask to what extent was culture considered in the establishment, delivery, and evaluation of transnational programs?

It was assumed that cultural phenomena would have a profound impact on participants’ experiences of transnational education programs and that this factor would be substantially unrecognised by key actors in the process. This thesis therefore sets out to confirm or disabuse the author of that belief and, presuming that the hypothesis were proven to be even partially correct, to consider the following core questions:

- How might cross-cultural dynamics affect teaching and learning in an international/offshore program?
- What features should be incorporated within an international program in order to ameliorate any negative impacts of cultural difference?

Significance of the study

Transnational education programs can be controversial. The Vice-Chancellor of Britain’s Open University declared ‘…where a university teaches and franchises…in other countries…this is inherently a problematic and disreputable activity that regularly tarnishes and brings into disrepute every other form of international university activity’ (Daniel, 1999b: n.p.). Moreover, some would suggest that culture defines the nature of learning (e.g. Hofstede, 1986; Merriam and Mohamad, 2000) and also that ‘a university's greatest asset is its reputation’ (Clark and Clark, 2000:3). In light of these considerations it seems clear that Australia, and the study sites for this research (see page 4 in this
chapter for more detail), are reliant upon quality delivery of transnational education and that it would be negligent to ignore the cultural dimension when considering the design and delivery of transnational programs.

A relatively small number of published research articles and reports related to Australian transnational provision do identify cross-cultural sensitivity as a potential area for improvement, usually under the heading ‘quality control’ (Hampson, 1996; Mangan, 1997; Clark and Clark, 2000). However other research papers refer to the need for quality control within transnational programs but do not mention cross-cultural difference as a potential area for improvement, or they misconstrue or ‘gloss over’ cultural impacts, frequently conceptualising English language difficulties as the only culture-based issues that are deserving of attention (Clark and Clark, 2000).

Whilst the multi-disciplinary literature framing the central questions of this thesis is vast, research pertaining specifically to the interplay of culture and pedagogy in transnational education, is quite scarce. There are countless analyses of ‘Western’ educators teaching in ‘Western’ classrooms, and an increasing number that report the actions and responses to ‘Asian’ educators teaching in ‘Asian’ classrooms (e.g. Biggs and Watkins, 2001a; Biggs and Watkins, 2001b). Yet there are few reports or analyses of the practices of ‘Western’ educators teaching in transnational programs in ‘Asian’ classrooms, and very few which involve adult students. In addition, the author has not identified any studies of a transnational program that involved the presence of an ‘outside’ observer who employed ethnographic methodologies with the intent of providing insight and recommendations for program development.

This study’s significance, therefore, resides in its ability to provide a unique part of the mosaic that describes and analyses contemporary transnational education, in which students and teachers are exposed to what are potentially conflicting cultural influences. In doing so it aims to contribute to the fields of transnational education policy; transnational and multicultural pedagogy; and intercultural relations. Specifically the study has the capacity to provide grounded recommendations for the adaptation of policy, curriculum, and pedagogy in the Australian/Singaporean transnational classroom and possibly in similar transnational programs. It may also have some methodological significance for those seeking to undertake ethnographic research in Singapore; in relation to possible recommendations on culturally sensitive practice.
Introduction to the research sites

An ethnographic study that employed elements of evaluation was undertaken in Melbourne and Singapore (the rationale behind selection of ethnographic evaluation and the research sites is discussed in greater detail in the methodology chapter). The Melbourne research site was a faculty of a respected, older, research-based ‘sandstone’ university (which throughout this research will be referred to as ‘The University’), which was commencing its first forays into transnational education. One department (entitled ‘The Centre’ throughout this study) within the Education Faculty of ‘The University’ was the main focus for the Melbourne-based components of this research. Lecturers in the program who were respondents to this study were current employees of The University. Details pertaining to the history and culture of ‘The Centre’ are found in chapters two, four and six.

The University had entered into a twinning arrangement (explained further in chapter three) with the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), Singapore; also a highly respected organisation but – at that stage – not a university in its own right. The contract between The University and SIM provided for the provision of an undergraduate degree program, which was accredited as the Bachelor of Education and Training (BET). The BET was marketed as offering advanced Human Resource Development (HRD) knowledge for those interested in greater supervisory and management responsibilities’ (S.I.M. website, March 2002), and the development of ‘advanced skills and knowledge in training/learning, supervision and management of HRD’ (‘The University’s’ orientation overhead transparencies, 2001). The program was offered to students on a part-time basis over a two and a half year period and comprised sixteen subjects (for a full list of subjects please see attachment H) that were to be provided in face-to-face intensive workshops at SIM. Melbourne staff delivered most subjects of the program although Singaporean lecturers taught two subjects. The delivery by Melbourne-based lecturers was perceived as a key market advantage in comparison with the only similar program offered in Singapore, which was accredited by an Australian university but taught online using Singaporean and a small number of Australian lecturers. Student entry requirements were a Singaporean Tertiary Diploma plus at least one year of HRD work experience. All student research participants were mature-age Singaporeans who were current or aspirational HRD practitioners working in a broad range of organisations. Information pertaining to education in Singapore is found in chapter three and student data from those interviews is provided in chapters seven and eight. The researcher’s observations of classroom interactions are also reported in chapter eight.
The researcher’s perspective

Lazar (1998:19) attributes to Weber the contention that all ‘research is driven by passion’. Stanley and Wise (1993) further propose that a researcher should not mistrust experience. This study actualises a combination of those contentions: it reflects the authors’ interest in culture-based dynamics and her twenty-year career experience in Human Resource Development. The author’s Masters Thesis combined these areas of interest by investigating the reactions of Confucian-heritage participants to ‘Western’-designed experiential pedagogies (Hoare, 1999, 2004). In brief, that research found that there were substantial differences in perceptions of Confucian-heritage learning between educators and workplace training participants.

This study therefore builds on the findings of the author’s earlier research through the investigation of cross-cultural paradigms within a significantly more complex education and learning environment. The methodology chapter provides further detail about the author’s perspective, however, perhaps it is important to stress from the outset that the author is not an ‘insider’ in academia – or at least she was not at the time this research was carried out. She was not an academic at the time of the research. Therefore she came to this study without the preconceived notions that someone who works in a university might have. Coming as she did from a lengthy career in the pseudo-collectivist bureaucracy of Government, she sometimes found the individualist culture of the university lecturer to be more foreign than the culture of the students in Singapore. In fact, the choice of an undergraduate degree as a research site was something of a ‘fallback’ position: the author’s first choice was pure HRD; an Australian management development program being provided in Hong Kong. However that was not to be as the program failed financially before research could even commence. Shortly thereafter, the opportunity to investigate a university-based transnational program presented itself, and the author accepted. The rationale for this decision is also discussed further in the methodology chapter. Unexpectedly, the author accepted a position as an academic in a university, delivering transnational education, during the very late stages of the writing-up of this research. This experience has allowed her the opportunity to reflect on the research and findings of this thesis from a different perspective; and to attempt to ensure that her pedagogical practices are culturally appropriate and in line with this study’s recommendations…but that is another story and is not included in this study in any way.
Overview of the thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters, not counting this brief introduction, which can be grouped into five components. The first component, found in the following two chapters, provides background information about the study. These chapters describe the Australian educational context (chapter two) and relevant aspects of the Singaporean education system and culture (chapter three).

The second component describes the selection and implementation of a methodology (chapter four) and includes reflections on dilemmas considered and addressed during the research. The methodology chapter may be notable for its obviously ‘first person’ grammatical form. This writing style seemed to be desirable as much of this chapter relates the experiences of the author in the field. It is hoped that this first person recounting of methodological experiences has added to the reader’s ability to build a picture of the study through ‘hearing the author’s voice’.

The third component reviews the literature pertaining to culture and pedagogy, particularly in an ‘Asian’ context (chapter five). Chapter five (culture and pedagogy) provides a review of relevant literature. Therein, key theories, constructs and knowledge underpinning analysis of the data are addressed, and support the later development of theoretically grounded recommendations. The information in chapter five builds on the background information from chapters two and three, providing the context necessary for an understanding of the normative experiences of the actor/respondents – including the unseen and silent participants who have an impact on the study; such as governments, policy makers, and the community at large.

The fourth component of the thesis is related to data collection and includes chapters six, seven and eight. Chapters six and seven discuss the data collected from lecturers and students involved in the program. Data from observations of classes in-situ along with consideration of preliminary findings based on the juxtaposition of the data from observations and interviews are provided in chapter eight. The final component of the thesis reflects on the findings of the data collection component in light of the background information. Findings that support the hypothesis, answer the research questions, and provide recommendations for future study are presented in chapter nine.
Chapter Two: Australian transnational education on the global stage

Introduction

This chapter will begin an analysis of the situation of transnational education from the Australian perspective and review the relevant literature. The first part of the chapter considers the impacts of globalisation and internationalisation on transnational education. An account of the evolution of transnational education within the Australian higher education system is then provided, followed by identification of emerging issues facing the sector.

Globalisation, internationalisation and education

As Jones (1998:6) found; ‘those interested in studying education in an international perspective will find a more complex world order than ever before’. The content and context of this research are influenced by that complexity. Contemporary literature pertaining to Australian transnational education shows that education, as an internationally traded service, is at the nexus of the discourse on globalisation and internationalisation. Education is simultaneously one of the principal driving forces in globalisation (Marginson, 1998; Pratt and Poole, 1999a) and one of the most fundamental responses thereto (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1996). Accordingly, Australian higher education policy continues to identify globalisation as a fundamentally important driver of reform (Pratt and Poole, 1999b:539). Therefore, discussion of the interaction between the core considerations of this research (intercultural relations and education), and the concepts of globalisation and internationalisation, is required in order to provide a foundation for further analysis.

An exploration of contemporary discourse

The term ‘globalisation’ was rarely used until the late twentieth century. Recently it has ‘come from nowhere to be almost everywhere’ (Giddens, 1999:7), yet it is imprecisely defined. Indeed the sensitive nature of the type of issues at the heart of what is said to define ‘globalisation’ (e.g. communication, international trade, migration and diplomacy) lead to the meaning and impact of the term being zealously debated (Stewart, 1996:327). Whilst theories underpinning the notion of globalisation draw on the fields of economics, politics, and sociology, the actual term ‘globalisation’ is widely agreed to have come from
the business world (Little, 1996; Comeliau, 1997; Jones, 1998). In business and economics, use of the term implies economic integration through the free movement of labour, stateless financial markets, minimal regulation, and the flexible responsiveness of organisations to global markets. However:

[whilst] it is clear that globalisation is mainly driven by economic aims,...its impact extends well beyond the economy...it transforms people, States, societies, cultures and civilizations. (Comeliau, 1997:30)

Like Comeliau, Little’s conceptualisation of patterns of globalisation identifies effects on three core domains, of which economy is one; politics and culture being the others (Little, :428, adapted from Waters 1995). Little (1996:428) proposes that the cultural outcomes of globalisation are; ‘a religious and cosmopolitan mosaic’ (elsewhere the term ‘hybridity’ is frequently used), with ‘widespread consumption of simulations coupled with global distribution of images and information’. At the political level, it is claimed that the pattern implies a weakening of nation states and a multiplicity of power bases. This global shift is said to be facilitated by the revolution in world communication, and the corresponding increased mobility of persons, services and goods (Stewart, 1996:328; Jones, 1998:2; Giddens, 1999). In fact, Petras (1999) highlights that this international flow of goods and services is not a new concept, having been in and out of favour on the world stage for centuries. However, he agrees with the majority of authors who consider that globalisation is henceforth irreversible (although possibly cyclical) (Petras, 1999:12).

**One people, one culture, one global world?**

Any contemplation of the voluminous and diverse body of literature related to globalisation reveals conflicted opinions on the capacity of globalisation to ultimately transform the world into a culturally uniform landmass. As an outcome of the ‘neo-liberal’ doctrine of globalisation, some forecast that a single culture will eventually transcend national boundaries (Little, 1996). The erosion of governments, nation states, and economic sovereignty, being brought about by external systems, is said to exacerbate the likelihood of this outcome (Marginson, 1998). This viewpoint is confirmed when people discover that similar problems, and attempts to solve them, are found in geographically and/or culturally different societies (Sweeting, 1996). Advocates of this viewpoint cite the essential worldwide commonalities such as comparable business objectives; education endeavours; individualist motivations and even ‘modern’ city architectural landscapes. Such similarities are put forward in support of the ‘one world’ denial of cultural difference, particularly as foretold for the globalised future.
This research will later consider the work of authors specialising in cross-cultural theories (chapter five) and more will be heard of the seminal research by Milton Bennett. However in relation to the ‘one-globalised-world-culture’ view, in particular, it seems likely that such denial of cultural difference would be categorised by Bennett as an immature, ‘minimisation’ strategy in intercultural development. According to Bennett’s developmental model, minimisation is ‘a last attempt to preserve the centrality of one’s own worldview…bury[ing] difference under the weight of cultural similarity’ (Bennett, 1993b:44-45). Bennett shows that, whilst some of the assertions of such universalism may be accurate, in relation to intercultural communication they are trivial, leading the holders of such opinions to assume that their worldview is the same as everyone else’s. Marginson and Mollis (1999:55) report a similar mindset in relation to ‘comparative/hegemonic education’: ‘the underlying assumption is that all education systems are the same and if they are not, they should be’. Such views are frequently derived from ‘aggressive conversion activities’ according to Bennett, and it seems evident that this description could be applied to the neo-liberal view of globalisation. However Bennett concludes that these attitudes constitute a potentially naïve and ethnocentric worldview, which like aspects of globalisation, is considered offensive by many; particularly those minority groups and poorer nations who find themselves at the ‘receiving end’ of uninvited changes to their political, economic, and cultural systems.

Idealistic adherents to globalisation rhetoric argue for the interdependence of nations and the shared benefits of their exchanges; however this appears to be far from reality in the opinions of many. A rapidly emerging ‘global-gap’ is seen as cause for concern, as powerful nations and multinational organisations exploit the less rich and powerful (Ganderton, 1996; Petras, 1999). Moreover, globalisation’s erstwhile benign ‘one-world/melting-pot’ rhetoric is seen by some as a re-emergence of imperialism or another form of colonialism in which ‘American consumer values reign supreme’ (Rizvi and Lingard, 2000). Hence, it seems possible that; ‘colonialism is not “over” in the sense of an epochal shift, but…its modalities and effects are being transformed as a consequence of globalisation’ (Tikly, 1999). It is clear, however, that in education specifically, an attitude of cultural imperialism is recognised as a sure way to fail in the international arena (Cummins and Smith, 1999).

In opposition to the ‘one world’ view, others advocate that ‘new forms of parochialism and ethnic and religious divisions counter globalist tendencies and may eventually defeat them’ (Stewart, 1996). Supporters of this hypothesis reject the homogenising ‘one-world’ prophesy and reason that there are still crucial issues of a basically cultural nature which
structure and shape most international relations. Indeed it is observed that ‘even economic matters are subject to cultural contingencies and coding’ (Jones, 1998:2). Further, difference is not seen to be impenetrable, nor does reshaping due to global forces necessarily destroy what is specific and particular to any given culture. According to this hypothesis, to prophesise a global ‘homogenised’ culture is misleading (Jones, 1998:4, citing the work of Hall 1991). Moreover, any emergent ‘global culture’ is seen as likely to be ‘extremely abstract, expressing tolerance for diversity and individual choice but tending towards high levels of differentiation and chaos’ (Little, 1996:427, citing Waters, 1995:3; Jones, 1998:2).

**Globalised/internationalised education**

In education specifically, some observers perceive that elements of colonial attitudes reappear when foreign and unadapted educational models are used in other countries (Ganderton, 1996; Marginson, 1999). When this occurs, as it often does, academics are cast as either innocent bystanders caught in the web of escalating university entrepreneurialism, or conversely, as those with ‘control over the manufacture and profligation of concepts justifying and prescribing globalist program strategies and tactics’ (Petras, 1999). Whether or not academics consciously harbour intellectual imperialist attitudes, their role is implicitly affected by the fact that global education systems are predominantly grounded in ‘Western’ and English-language social models (Marginson and Mollis, 1999).

Given the debate surrounding globalisation, it is interesting that ‘internationalisation’ is the word of choice when higher education institutions in Australia want to describe their transnational activities. Whilst the terms ‘internationalisation’ and ‘globalisation’ are sometimes used interchangeably, in the literature they are ascribed distinctly different meanings. Internationalisation is seen as ‘the idealist, pro-democratic, promotion of global peace and well being through the development and application of international structures’ (Jones, 1998:1-2, 143). Like imperialism, the concept of internationalisation is notionally in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of globalisation: it emphasises the maintenance of the nation state and focuses on democracy as universally desirable. This may or may not be as benign as its advocates may want us to believe, being as the voices discussing internationalisation are largely Western, and we are exhorted to consider the possibility and extent to which the international framework is an expression of ‘intellectual-financial’ hegemony exercised on behalf of Western capitalism (Jones, 1998; Tikly, 1999, citing Samoff, 1992; Altbach, 2000). Jones (1998:4) recommends that we analyse the
discourse and ‘consider which elements are aligned with internationalist ideals…and which can only be seen as vanguards of globalisation’.

The majority (37 out of 38) of Australian universities include a policy of internationalisation in their corporate plans (Rizvi and Walsh, 1998). Internationalisation in Australian education is idealised as the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service of institutions as a result of an adopted policy of opening themselves to the world (Back et al., 1996; Lazenby et al., 1999). Sometimes it can also mean efforts to study the history and culture of another country or a region (Rizvi and Walsh, 1998); and for Cope and Kalantzis (1997) the key is the recognition and valuing of diversity. In short, internationalisation aims to prepare students to live and work in a globalised world – an outcome which would be difficult to construe negatively. However part of the problem with the current rhetoric – which this research will go on to examine - is that exactly how internationalisation is translated into practice is often unclear (Rizvi and Walsh, 1998).

A proposition on interpretation

Considering the ongoing debate then, are the terms ‘globalisation’ and ‘internationalisation’ even useful for understanding the impact of the current world order on education and intercultural interactions? As both terms pervade the transnational education literature, it seems crucial in the first instance to realise that understandings of these terms reflect philosophical stances that are not always overt – in other words informed discourse analysis helps to bring to the surface pre-existing theoretical preferences and assumptions. As Jones asserts, we are in ‘an extremely complex moment in history’ (Jones, 1998:4). Clearly this domain is sufficiently complex to fuel spirited debate and generate countless hypotheses outside the scope and intent of this research. The purpose here is not to provide an exhaustive account of the field but rather to position the ensuing discussion of Australian transnational education.

Nevertheless, as with the selection of methodology, the standpoint of the researcher on these issues will of course effect the interpretation of the data, so perhaps it is better identified at this point. The preceding discussion has lead me to consider that perhaps two of the opposing viewpoints (global cultural diversity versus emerging cultural homogeneity) are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is possible to find common ground in the notion of an emerging global hybridity – wherein reality insists that the complex global changes brought about by ‘globalisation’ and ‘internationalisation’ will have an impact on both the providers and receivers of transnational education. Neither a
‘universalist’ approach that imposes a uniform cultural model in every case, nor an ‘ultra-relativist’ approach that treats each case as completely different, is realistic in the face of globalised forces (Marginson and Mollis, 1999:54, 56). Despite this realisation, however, this research will take the stance that hybrids retain a component of their identity (e.g. all hybrids are not the same) and while some cultural differences tend to vanish, others become more pronounced (Oyen, 1990). From this perspective, cultural diversity should continue to be a key consideration in transnational education. Whilst Marginson and Mollis (1999:57) postulate that; ‘it would not be hard to mount the claim that homogenising aspects are presently uppermost in education’, they are also encouraging about the long term potential for plurality. Thus, ultimately, this discussion supports Milton-Smith’s (2001:5) perspective that:

*a balanced philosophy of internationalisation, which encompasses multiple objectives, especially those relating to overseas experience, cross-cultural learning, international networks and global citizenship, is the most likely formula for success.*

**The evolution of transnational education provision in Australia**

**History**

Australian Universities have a complex history that commenced in the 1850’s when the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney, the “sandstones”, were established (Harman and Selby Smith, 1972). There have been overseas students enrolled in Australian institutions since 1904 (Williams, 1989), however significant numbers did not become evident until the advent of the Colombo Plan in 1959, which marked the formal entry of the Australian Government into direct sponsorship of overseas students for study in Australian Institutions (Davis et al., 2000a). The Plan was intended to promote cooperative development; specifically in South and South East Asia (Davis et al., 2000a). However whilst it overtly promoted intercultural understanding, Australia’s emerging educational aid program was also expected, somewhat paradoxically, to ‘encourage the adoption of Western liberal-democratic values’ (Oakman, 2002:89 – 90, citing Richard Casey, then Australian Minister for External Affairs). Between 1951 and 1964 Australia hosted nearly 5,500 students of whom at least twenty-five percent were under the Colombo Plan, whilst a small number were private fee-paying and even they were subsidised by as much as eighty percent (Oakman, 2002). This era was significant because Australia’s success in developing its transnational markets has been built in part
on relationships developed during the Colombo Plan days (Fell, 1999; Davis et al., 2000a).

The departure point in the move from 'aid to trade' can be traced back to 1962; specifically to a discussion between the then Indonesian Minister for Higher Education and the Australian Ambassador, which led Australia to volunteer the teaching of Agricultural Science in Indonesia (Lazenby et al., 1999). In 1969 the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) became involved in this program, an act that culminated in the establishment of the Australian-Asian Universities' Cooperation Scheme (AAUCS). This minimally-funded aid program concentrated on postgraduate-staff development and fostered the independence of the overseas universities, whilst at the same time providing new learning opportunities for Australian lecturers and specialists. During this period over two hundred Australian specialists made some five hundred visits to Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. As a direct outcome of this work, the program diversified and paid consultancies began to be contracted (Lazenby et al., 1999).

**Growing tensions**

Meanwhile, by the 1970s tensions were developing in the conceptualisation, management and funding of Australia’s higher education system. Up until this time, higher education had been essentially government provided, financed and controlled. From 1964 to 1974 public outlays on higher education had grown by two hundred and sixty one percent (Australian Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1993). However there was a growing reluctance on the part of governments worldwide to fund the increasing demand for higher education (Olsen, 2001). Increasingly, universities were required to become significantly self-funded. By the late nineties government-funded sector revenue had dropped to fifty percent of aggregate university revenue and plummeted to thirty-two percent (including research but excluding HEC Receipts) by 2001 (Karmel, 2000; Manne, 2002; Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 2003d).

The genesis of these changes had not passed without comment. The developing system was considered by some to have been subjected to ‘too little intelligent discussion and debate’ (Harman and Selby Smith, 1972:xii). Commentators at the time were concerned about the lack of strategic focus; for example Harman and Selby-Smith (1972:xvii) considered that there was a ‘distressing lack of clarity about the purposes and goals of higher education in general’. Zelman Cowan (1972:15), then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland, felt a ‘chill response in his heart’, concerned as he was about the ‘struggle to manage and keep afloat’.
Whilst these tensions were building, the literature of the time also reveals an emerging ultimatum for universities to develop a business focus and to adopt service-based principles and rhetoric. The then Federal Minister for Education’s White Paper (Dawkins, 1987, 1988) included provision for institutions to be ‘more entrepreneurial, for example by charging fees to foreign students and at least partial fees for some postgraduate courses’ (Dawkins, 1988; Australian Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 1993). The Dawkin’s Green Paper and subsequent White Paper reforms opened the debate on the need for fundamental changes to the higher education system and argued that this need arose from international trends. As Pratt and Poole (1999a:17) highlighted; ‘the ensuing system reforms were made with the express aim of accommodating a sector with the potential to become internationally oriented’. The reforms also reinforced the move towards business-based rhetoric and practices. If universities did not make these changes voluntarily, the need to embrace the business ethos was externally imposed. For example, from that time, universities were required to describe their profiles in order to provide information to those gauging resource allocation. This required identification of the role and mission of the institution in broad terms, including fields of study, areas of research, enrolment mix and the university’s planned strengths for the future (Australian Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 1993). This has become even more obvious in the increasingly common use of business-oriented terms, such as clients, risk, demand, and delivery, in many university strategic plans (McBurnie and Pollock, 2000).

Quality control has further been identified as a key issue, particularly in light of the constantly expanding numbers of potential students (Partridge, 1972).

**Education becomes a service export**

During the 1980s, competition for university places had intensified, and by 1986 as many as fourteen thousand eligible Australian applicants for higher education were unable to gain a place at an Australian university (Australian Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 1993). Furthermore, it was quite evident that Australian education was becoming an ever more attractive option for paying overseas students. Indeed, by the early 1980’s there were ten thousand private overseas students in higher education in Australia, and a further three thousand five hundred sponsored students (Partridge, 1972; I.D.P. Education Australia, 1995:12).

Contemporaneously, it was realised that Australia’s prosperity was overly dependent on the export of mining and agricultural commodities, the prices of which had declined significantly (Pratt and Poole, 1999b:2). Options for other export opportunities were being
sought, particularly in the service sector. These combined circumstances added impetus to the call for entrepreneurial solutions to the dual problems facing universities: lack of funds and insufficient places. Accordingly, in 1985 the Australian government recognised education as an export industry and the paradigm shift from government-funded to entrepreneurial universities was nearly complete.

Not surprisingly, this metamorphosis caused some consternation in the higher education sector. Lazenby et al. (1999:78) recall that:

> It came as a surprise when staff [of Australia’s then overseas education brokers, IDP Australia], were assured by senior representatives of Austrade, that there was nothing special about exporting tertiary education; ‘it’s just the same as any other commodity - like cars or breakfast cereal’ [they were told].

Resistance also came from the AVCC, however Dawkins informed the Vice Chancellors that if they did not fall into line then the Government would cut their funding (Lazenby et al., 1999:78). Inexorably, education as a whole was consumed by economic rationalist terminology. Soon Government hegemony, unconcerned by the sensitivity of the sector, categorised education alongside service exports such as tourism and transport (Davis et al., 2000a). Moreover, education as an export dollar earner did not disappoint; in a little over ten years it had become Australia’s eighth largest export industry and third largest service export, earning more than wool and almost as much as wheat (Davis et al., 2000a).

It is difficult to say exactly how much the education export industry is currently worth, as various sources interpret the amount differently. For example, in 2003 the AVCC (2003c) reported that exported education was worth 4.2 billion dollars. That calculation included money spent by students whilst in Australia. In the same year, IDP Australia (2003) placed the value at around 1.846 billion based on student fees alone. The Department of Education, Science and Training (2003b) put the amount at five billion. Seemingly the only consensus is that the amount is significant. Currently international students make up approximately twelve percent of the Australian student population. The majority of those come from China, Hong Kong Singapore and Malaysia (AEI International Education Network, 2003). The number enrolled offshore was estimated to be a further forty-three thousand in 2001 (AEI International Education Network, 2003). In line with the continuing rise in the number of international students, total university income has also risen (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 2003c). The AVCC (2003c) no longer appears to be fighting the change, but instead is a strong advocate for deregulation of the sector. In an economic analysis then, Australian universities could be judged to have adapted
well to the challenge to become more entrepreneurial and responsive to market forces (Kelly and Ha, 1998).

One aspect of education that has not changed since the 1970s is that commentators continue to advocate that Australia’s higher education system is in urgent need of reform (Mann, 2000:3; Manne, 2003; Marginson, 2003b). Much the same as in the 1970s, respected academics cite a litany of ills afflicting the system, often centreing around the now familiar ‘a-university-is-not-a-business’ argument, and also asserting that the ‘ever increasing emphasis on measurable outcomes and quantitative performance indicators are necessarily short term and misleading, and are at the expense of content’ (Karmel, 2000:3).

The higher education system in Australia

A brief snapshot of the Australian higher education system is useful at this stage as it underpins the discussion of transnational education provision that follows.

At the time of writing, Australia has thirty-eight universities (Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2003a). Since the abolition of the former binary system which distinguished between universities and institutes of technical and further education, teachers’ colleges etc., there has been no distinction between types of higher education institutions. Institutions that provide qualifications lower than degree/professional level are not counted as ‘higher education’ and usually fall into the vocational education and training sector, whereas universities are responsible for higher education and are the only institutions that can award degrees. Both those capacities, and the title ‘university’, are protected by law (Ziguras, 2001b). Furthermore, universities are legally empowered as self-accrediting institutions and are responsible for the quality of their own educational programs (Hacket and Nowak, 1999). Most degrees offered in Australia are of three to four year’s duration (however this has evolved to apply exclusively to on-shore degrees, as we will see later). Australia has a strong tradition of part-time study and distance education, and adult students are commonplace. These aspects of the Australian higher education system, as well as English language instruction, render it attractive to overseas students (a more detailed analysis of aspects that attract Singaporean students in particular is found in the following chapter). The exchange rate of the Australian dollar is also highly favourable for export when compared against the United States Dollar, the British Pound or the Euro. Australia’s experience of working with demographically and geographically diverse and disparate student bodies should maximise our sensitivity to
working with diversity. The growth of the sector is therefore not surprising; all the preceding factors combine to favourably position the export of Australian education.

**Australia’s provision of transnational education**

The use of descriptive terminology in transnational educational appears somewhat capricious. Both internationally and intranationally, providers and regulators use different terms and categorisations to describe similar phenomena. For example, what Australians generally call distance education (learning that does not situate the teacher and the learner in the same location, e.g. on-line learning) is not what Singaporeans frequently understand the term to mean (e.g. any form of education that is not taken through a Singaporean university). Where IDP Education Australia categorise students as ‘on or off campus’, DEST categorise them as ‘internal or external’. These latter categorisations are not as interchangeable as one might assume; clearly importing students is not the same as exporting education and one can only wonder at the motives behind such a worrisome lack of differentiation which renders meaningful comparison difficult. Therefore, this research will attempt to ensure that meanings are clarified in terms of the national or organisational contexts in which they are cited.

When describing exported education, ‘transnational education’ seems to be the current Australian term of preference, although ‘offshore education’, and ‘overseas programs’ are often used interchangeably. Terminology employed by global organisations that regularly deal in transnational education (e.g. by the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education, and the Global Alliance of Transnational Education (GATE) [an accrediting organisation set up to foster and certify quality in transnational education enterprises]) tends to reflect terms and models employed by the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) General Agreements on Trade in Services (GATS). This research will use the term ‘transnational education’ as is also employed by UNESCO and other recent Australian authors in the field (e.g. McBurnie and Pollock, 2000; Olsen, 2001; Ziguras, 2001a; Altbach, 2002).

**General agreements on trade in services**

GATS is the first set of multilateral rules covering international trade in services (and is therefore differentiated from GATT’s: General Agreements on Tariffs and Trades). Education is one of the twelve sectors covered by GATS, which is a framework in which governments commit to liberalising trade in services in a particular industry in the global
The GATS model of supply is readily adapted to education, and is categorised as follows (Olsen, 2001; Knight, 2002)

- Consumption abroad (e.g. the student travels);
- Commercial presence (e.g. the provider establishes a campus, or partnership, franchised, or licensed arrangements in another country);
- Presence of natural persons (e.g. the educator travels); and/or
- Cross border supply (e.g. neither the organisation nor the student travels – internet provision, on-line learning).

The GATS model affects much more than the terminology applied to transnational education however, and is an integral component of the globalisation debate. Like much to do with globalisation, GATS are contentious because GATS agreements regulate the level of access that countries have to another country’s education system. As Knight (2002:19) highlights; ‘education is a fundamental vehicle for acculturation’ thus ‘concern about the homogenisation of culture through cross border supply of higher education is expressed by critics of GATS’. Interestingly, Australia was one of only three countries (the others being the USA and New Zealand) with higher education commitments under GATS to have submitted negotiation proposals at the time of writing (Knight, 2002). Australia had flagged its intention to achieve access to overseas education markets while refusing to make further education commitments itself (AEI International Education Network, 2002:12), and rationalised liberalisation of trade in educational services as ‘a means of providing individuals in all countries with access to a wide range of education options’ with the benefits of ‘competitive stimulus and internationalisation and flow of students’ (Knight, 2002:11). Unlike New Zealand, Australia did not overtly acknowledge that ‘revenue generation and academic exchange’ were also important benefits (Knight, 2002:11).

Whilst each of the GATS models of supply in the preceding dot point list is a potential opportunity, it is also the potential subject of barriers to trade. For example; ‘consumption abroad’ can be blocked by visa requirements, ‘presence of natural persons’ (e.g. teachers) can be complicated by restrictions on use or import of educational materials, and ‘cross border supply’ can be made too complex to pursue due to a lack of opportunities to grant degrees or the requirement to use local partners. Singapore, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, had GATS education commitments to market access and national treatment (AEI International Education
Network, 2002:13) but also had in place some significant barriers to would-be exporters, such as exclusion of recognition of qualifications.

Thus, whilst GATS agreements are not the only factors regulating cross border trade in education, they are an emerging force that form an important component of the background to models of transnational practice.

**Models of transnational practice**

As required in GATS agreements, most Australian universities involved with the provision of transnational education are engaged in a variety of ‘twinning’ agreements, articulation programs, franchises and other partnering arrangements (Clark and Clark, 2000). The twinning arrangement typified Australia’s early involvement in transnational education. Twinning programs are generally fully taught programs, following the same syllabus and timetable as the home campus program. Academic staff can be recruited host country nationals or Australian citizens who travel from the provider university. Lecturers can be recruited solely by the Australian university, or by the partner institution subject, to approval of the Australian university. Frequently, a combination of these staffing methods can be found within the one program. Further iterations are found in program delivery. Sometimes part of the course is carried out in the host country and part in the provider country. Increasingly, however, programs are totally run in the host country, particularly in Malaysia and Singapore (Davis et al., 2000b). Advantages of transnational education provided ‘at home’ for overseas students - such as access to family and friends and lower living costs – are highlighted in marketing documents (Altbach, 2000; I.D.P. Education Australia, 2000). Other, less altruistic, benefits include the negative reaction of overseas students to totally on-line learning (as discussed later in this section) and the expected recruitment of international students to Australian campuses through their exposure to Australian courses. The mutual mobility of Australian students is also frequently mentioned as a benefit of internationalised education (Fell, 1999). This would be cause for celebration if it were justifiable in terms of numbers. Sadly though, only 2641 Australian students ventured overseas on exchange in 2001, although there is currently a target of twenty percent of Australian students incorporating international study (Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2003c).

Twinning models differ from ‘articulation programs’ and ‘moderated programs’ in which a local institution teaches locally developed programs with quality assurance from an Australian university. In these models, the Australian university is then likely to offer advanced standing on completion of the overseas program (Davis et al., 2000b, citing
Adams, 1998:8-12). ‘Licensed’ or ‘franchised’ programs are another iteration, in which an overseas institution teaches an Australian university’s program, again with quality assurance by the Australian university. It remains, however, that the most common offshore model is where Australian academics travel overseas to teach; especially postgraduate course-work programs (Clark and Clark, 2000).

The partner institutions in the above models can be private or public, but are usually education institutions of some type (Davis et al., 2000b). The typical transnational arrangement is conducted in accordance with a formal agreement between the Australian university and the overseas institution (Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 1996). There is rarely any formal process between Australia and Singapore (e.g. such as a tender process) in the establishment of transnational programs. Proposals to establish programs frequently come from the academic community and established academic networks (McBurnie and Pollock, 2000:60-64; O’Loughlin et al., 2002), as was the case with the program that is the focus of this research. In most transnational partnerships, the Australian university develops the program and has responsibility for teaching assessment and overseeing academic standards, whereas the partner institution is responsible for provision of the study location, marketing, promotion and financial administration (Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 1996) (Davis et al., 2000b).

**Trends in delivery modes**

Almost all Australian universities are now providers of transnational education, and there is substantial evidence that the level of interest is increasing (Davis et al., 2000b). Indeed, Australia is now the world’s most competitive exporter of educational services (when the nation’s share of exports is taken as a percentage of total services exports) (Olsen, 2001:22). The main subject areas currently offered are business, administration, and economics, followed by health, science, and then education. Programs are typically postgraduate, full time, with a mean enrolment of forty students and the most common period of study being two years (Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 1996; Davis et al., 2000b:3,15).

In 2000 IDP Education Australia found that eighty percent of programs were classified (according to Australian terminology) as face-to-face delivery or supported distance education. A trend toward on-line learning and partner responsibility (in some cases including the partner institution conducting assessment) has been noted however, quite possibly because these modes reduce the pressure on the Australian university (Davis et al., 2000b:4). The extent to which this trend continues will depend on a range of factors,
including university policies and host country preferences. Previous research (e.g. Lawley et al., 1999:78; Daniel, 2000:7) has shown that that overseas students prefer face-to-face contact with lecturers and peers; consequently student reactions to the internet as a mode of delivery have been generally negative. It seems therefore, that the market will reinforce the currently predominant mode of travelling teachers for the foreseeable future.

**Student choice and market positioning**

In the complex and sensitive transnational education market, student choice and perception are cultivated and responded to in an environment of competitive pricing and very small profit margins (Hacket and Nowak, 1999:13). Australian transnational education providers and Australia as a nation are keenly observed in South East Asia. In Singapore, the pages of the main broadsheet newspaper, *The Straits Times*, along with billboards and signage on public transport are inundated with advertisements for overseas university programs. My personal experience of scanning the papers in Singapore was that overseas ‘university scandals’ were a point of focus in the local press. Milton-Smith also found that:

> *the Singaporean media does not project or reinforce an image of [Australia as a country] with a first-class university sector and a rich and diverse cultural life. Indeed focus-group discussions quickly revert to the widely reported natural disasters, Pauline Hanson, horrible crimes, racism, boat people, visa problems…. (Milton-Smith, 2001)*

The level of interest in Australia and what some might consider to be petty university scandals is intense, and decisions in relation to choice of university are inevitably changed by these negative signals (Davis et al., 2000b; McBurnie and Pollock, 2000:65). Not surprisingly, students seek quality and reputation in all their forms when choosing a university and study program. Whilst Singaporean teenage students might consider themselves key decision makers (Gray et al., 2003) the majority of those making the decisions are adults; either in the role of paying parents or as members of the increasingly important ‘earner learner’ market (Olsen, 2001:23). Olsen proposes that the overwhelming focus of that working adult market is; ‘a demand for practical, relevant qualifications delivered in a manner which takes account of the competing time and energy demands’ (Olsen, 2001:23).

In this acutely observed, selective and dynamic market - susceptible to the opinions of friends and family - Australian universities clearly need to be protective of their market niche and reputation. Mazzorol (1998) found that success in overseas markets was positively associated with ‘image and resources’ (market profile, recognition, financial
resources, reputation for quality, size and influence of alumni and range of courses) and ‘coalition and forward integration’ (international strategic alliances and offshore teaching programs). In the short term however, an avoidance of individualism and the development of a strategy with greater emphasis on branding at a national level has been called for in order to protect the market for all (Davis et al., 2000b:29; Milton-Smith, 2001). Misleading and culturally inappropriate publicity has been a problem in the past (Daniel, 1999a; Tan and Olsen, 1999), leading the AVCC ‘Code of Conduct Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Education to International Students by Australian Universities’ to require its members to; ‘promote and market [programs] accurately and honestly in terms of quality, standing and availability’ (Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2002).

**Quality assurance**

Despite - or possibly because of - the proliferation of transnational programs, a pattern of current concerns emerges from the literature. As already discussed, the changing status of the student to that of consumer is contemporaneous with an unstable, developing market of competing providers. Some academic commentators may remain loath to recognise universities as businesses, however it is now indisputable that universities are providing services in exchange for money. It is therefore reasonable to expect that they should be prepared to exercise quality control and provide customer service such as is expected of service providers globally. Increasingly, and quite reasonably, student purchasers are demanding appropriateness of purpose and value for money from their costly, full-fee paying courses.

Since 1993, the broad issue of quality assurance has been widely recognised as *the* lynchpin to the ongoing success of transnational education in what is a largely unregulated market (Australian Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 1993; Altbach, 2000; Davis et al., 2000b; Altbach, 2002). This is agreed both on the global stage (e.g. Little, 1996; UNESCO, 1996; Altbach, 2000) and within Australia (Fell, 1999; Hacket and Nowak, 1999; Davis et al., 2000b; I.D.P. Education Australia, 2000; McBurnie and Zigarus, 2001). Along with accreditation, quality has also been raised as a ‘matter requiring urgent attention…that should not be left solely at the hands of the market’ as a part of the GATS process (Knight, 2002:18). Unfortunately there has to date been little agreement on which points under the somewhat amorphous heading ‘Quality’ should be addressed as a priority, nor the manner or framework under which they should be addressed.
In terms of quality assurance frameworks, the accrediting organisation ‘Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) (with which some high profile Australian universities such as Monash are affiliated), has been attacked as being run for private profit and therefore a suspect arbiter of program quality (Altbach, 2000). Further, whilst some universities (e.g. Curtin) have aligned themselves with the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) ‘ISO 9000+’ accreditation system, others see it as being designed for the manufacture of products and therefore inappropriate for higher education (Hacket and Nowak, 1999). The AVCC has designed its own, previously mentioned, code of ethical practice to which member universities are supposed to assent. Other quality control mechanisms have included government and private provider and course accreditation, performance reporting and external audit processes.

In 1999 the then Minister for Education, David Kemp, stated (correctly) that; ‘our major competitors have external quality assurance mechanisms, and countries in our largest markets look to government verification of quality standards’ (Kemp, 1999a). Accordingly, the Australian Federal Government endorsed the introduction of a new quality assurance process in relation to all higher education institutions, to be managed by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) which commenced operation 2001. AUQA is now commissioned to conduct audits of overseas higher education provision by Australian providers, and at the time of writing, was about to be strengthened to undertake regular audits of all Australian higher education providers operating in a given country (Australian Department of Education Science and Training, 2003a; Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2003b:6). AUQA was developed to provide independent assurances that the standards of an award offered by an Australian university operating overseas were the equivalent of the standards for the same award offered in Australia (Kemp, 1999b). However, perhaps:

*Ultimately the emergence of ‘lifelong learning’ may give the impetus to a new concept of quality. People want the assurance that what they learn will be up to date and will give them competencies that employers value. Whilst most universities are still focused on inputs, citizens are interested in the output of higher education for themselves. (Daniel, 2000:4)*

In summary, as stated by Martin Carroll (2003: n.p.) - then Audit Director of AUQA - in relation to Australian transnational provision; ‘we are not bad but we could be better’. The concluding chapter to this research provides suggestions for quality improvement that interpolate the findings from this research with previous studies.
Truncated programs

The typical offshore program has a duration of four semesters, taught as two or three semesters per year. An Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee report of 1996 provides information about a range of offshore programs being offered at the time. Details include; ‘time to complete offshore’, and ‘time to complete in Australia’. Evidently there was no standard length of time required to complete an Australian undergraduate degree offshore. Significant differences existed between different provider universities and there was a major disparity between programs provided in Australia versus offshore. How could it be, for example, that a Bachelor of Engineering degree takes one year in Malaysia, and three years in Australia (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 1996)? This inversion of what is considered an academically valid period of study onshore in Australia, is exacerbated by the certainty that the Singaporean market would not purchase extended courses. Indeed courses advertised in the Singaporean press use brevity as a key selling point. It seems that this issue has also been noticed by AUQA, as one of the teaching issues on which their international audits will focus is whether; ‘the schedule provide[s] adequate time for student reflection’ (Caroll, 2003). The Manager of IDP Singapore and a senior manager of S.I.M., in response to this research, identified the continuing truncation of courses as an emerging problem. Furthermore, several student respondents had come to the conclusion that the BET program provided insufficient time for reflection, which had a negative impact on their learning. The effects of this paradoxical situation on students and teachers will be further discussed in chapters six to nine, however ‘truncated’ courses are surely a matter of concern if academic rigour, quality of learning, and the value of a qualification, are to have any meaning in the long term.

The changing university

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, current trends in globalisation and internationalisation mean that universities must make decisions in a complex multinational environment. In the past, universities have changed rather slowly (Daniel, 2000). However – whether welcomed or imposed – the forces of globalisation now put them under essentially the same pressures as multinational corporations. In this world-systems approach, transnational education can be viewed as ‘an exercise in investment, production, distribution and marketing...with decisions involving the calculation of opportunity cost’ (Sweeting, 1996:380).

As a direct result of these changes, the way people in universities work is also diverging. Old management and collegial styles are no longer economically appropriate. For
example, decision-making styles have had to change: lengthy democratic discussion-making processes are giving way to new corporate styles where small groups need to be empowered to make decisions to meet a deadline (McBurnie and Pollock, 2000:66). Also, whilst the idea of work teams is currently an anathema to the individual pursuits of the research academic, transnational projects benefit from project management expertise including current rarities such as team teaching; sharing of materials; peer critique; and clear lines of authority (Daniel, 2000:4).

The integral business relationship between universities and overseas partners needs to be managed with tact and sensitivity. Roles and responsibilities of both parties should be clear, explicit and documented (Hacket and Nowak, 1999:69). Negotiations between the Australian university and host country partner generally hinge on economic viability, but this can be a short term or longer term consideration. Both parties need to decide whether they are prepared to accept short-term losses because of the potential long-term benefits (Daniel, 2000). These decisions are risky because the financial benefits of offshore programs are likely to be modest. Unlike onshore courses, offshore programs are not covered by government stipulation of minimum course fees, but are set in an increasingly competitive market. Consequently, profits in excess of ten percent are rarely generated and a number of Australian faculties have suffered significant losses from transnational operations (Back et al., 1996:18; Fell, 1999:6, 11-12; Karmel, 2000).

So is transnational delivery from Australian universities an ‘overblown rhetoric of promise’ (Altbach, 2000)? Certainly institutions should be clear as to their primary motivation (Bates, 2001:5). Some would say that the decision to move into transnational provision is justifiable only on the grounds that it advances one of the university's core functions: education, research or community service (Davis et al., 2000b; McBurnie and Pollock, 2000:57). However, both the contemporary literature and pragmatic observation require that other reasons are the primary motivators:

**The Economic rationale**


The literature leaves the analyst in little doubt: undisguisably, the main motive behind the move to the provision of transnational education by Australian universities is the generation of funds, followed by the presumption of enhancement of the university’s reputation (Altbach, 2000; I.D.P. Education Australia, 2000; Altbach, 2002).
Reputation

[transnational education] regularly tarnishes and brings into disrepute every other form of international university activity. (Daniel, 1999b)

Only time will tell whether or not individual university reputations and the reputation of Australian education in general are enhanced or undermined by the provision of transnational education. Fell (1999) however, proposes that there is in fact an inverse relationship between the quality index of an Australian university and its number of offshore students. He advanced the hypothesis in 1999 that; ‘high quality institutions will opt for onshore delivery as it provides the best financial returns and offers Australian students the opportunity for cultural enrichment’ (Fell, 1999:5). He also noted that none of the top ranked institutions in Australia in 1999 engaged in extensive offshore operations (Fell, 1999). In terms of overall reputation, the then ALP spokesperson on education, Senator Kim Carr warned the Australian Senate that ‘we ought to also be discussing the defence of this country's international reputation in regard to its higher education’ (Ziguras, 2001a:8). Clearly observers and purchasers are not naive to the reality that the export dollar is the prime motivation behind transnational provision. It would seem at the time of writing, therefore, that immediate care is needed.

Capacity building and meeting market demands – a global community service?

They say to themselves it’s as if they are providing a service to these Singaporean students who can’t afford to go to their own universities or to study in Australia…and of course we should provide this sort of service to people…and make money out of it! (80:1:202-206)

Capacity building of overseas countries is still cited as a rationale for transnational education (I.D.P. Education Australia, 2000). However, as the above quote from a Singaporean respondent to this research amply demonstrates; assertions that transnational education is provided for altruistic reasons in current times are treated with cynicism by informed citizens of receiving countries. Notions of capacity building are also somewhat short-sighted from a business perspective because some of Australia’s major customers - Singapore in particular - are successfully establishing themselves as education hubs in the region, in direct competition with Australia (e.g. Ziguras, 2001b; Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 2003c; Marginson, 2003a). This paragraph does not in any way intend to discount the previous calls for mutuality of opportunity, however it does propose that profit-making motives should not be thinly veiled by altruistic rhetoric. Such approaches only serve to underscore a paternalistic and potentially
colonialist mindset. As Altbach contends, ‘we need to serve the interests of students and teachers and not simply become a vehicle for profit-making corporations (Altbach, 2000).

Chapter conclusion

Much of the published literature on transnational education uses words such as; ‘blurring’, ‘borders’, ‘frontiers’ and ‘tensions’. It seems that transnational education is on the edge of something that we do not yet fully understand. This chapter has analysed trends in Australian transnational education in an attempt to build understanding, commencing from the ‘macro’ perspective of globalisation and internationalisation. The genesis of the current transnational system has been discussed and, at the micro level, emerging issues have been identified and an analysis commenced. It has been shown that there is much work to be done at both institutional and governmental levels if Australia is to continue to be a significant and respected player in transnational education. Ultimately, this chapter has suggested that strategic planning and the potential long-term benefits of mutual exchange are being sacrificed to short-term financial gain. This is occurring in a culturally myopic environment where the diverse needs of teachers and students are traded off against economic imperatives.

The following chapter analyses aspects of the Singaporean context as relevant to this research. In 1998 Dudley observed that Singapore was arguably one of the few examples in the world of a capitalist society that was not democratic. Dudley (1998:28) proposed that; ‘globalisation privileges economic rationality and capitalism over democratic and social principles’ and that, for the economic benefits of globalisation to be maximised, a ‘high priority is placed on education…[which has as its purpose] the production of skilled workers to meet the demand of a flexible workforce’ (1998:31). Dudley’s work proposes that Singapore might be a model country, ideally placed to reap the benefits of a globalised economy. The following chapter addresses Singaporean contextual issues that are relevant to this thesis; finds that Dudley’s proposals are largely supported; and considers the future potential of transnational education in Singapore.

Chapter Three: The Singaporean context

Introduction

This chapter reports and analyses Singapore’s socio-cultural environment and thereby provides context to the lifestyles of the student respondents, and to Singapore’s status as a major purchaser of transnational education. In doing so this chapter identifies some of
the many puzzles and paradoxes that, as Haas (1999b: 1) proposes ‘are obvious to many commentators [on Singapore] but [for which] explanations are elusive’. The first segments of the chapter follow headings as outlined in a model of influences on Singaporean culture devised by Haley and Low (1998) (Low is a Singaporean academic). An understanding of those influences provides a foundation to the ensuing discussion of the Singaporean education system.

Influences on Singapore’s culture

Arriving at the incredibly efficient Changi airport, being whisked past the contemporary skyscraper skyline to the five star hotel in an air conditioned taxi driven by a courteous and well spoken English-speaking driver…may convince the unwary that there is very little that is Asian about Singapore. (Meriwether Craig, 2001:92)

Singapore’s culture is sometimes indistinct, always evolving, and multifaceted. As the above quote from Meriwether Craig demonstrates, aspects of Singapore feel familiar to ‘Westerners’. Indeed many Australians think of Singapore as a ‘Western’ type of country that is geographically located in the ‘East’; a ‘safe haven’ or an ‘introduction to the exotic’ for the uninitiated traveller to Asia. In fact several people asked me why I chose Singapore as an ‘Asian’ study site because they considered it so ‘Westernised’ that it was not to any great degree culturally different from Australia. Superficially at least, Singapore can be all those things, and at times its cultural differences can be ‘so subtle that one hardly notices that they are there. However at other times they are glaring’ (Meriwether Craig, 2001:92). In fact, as the founding father of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, says; ‘The Western habits, songs, dances…dress styles or fast foods, that’s just a veneer’ (Lee Kuan Yew, as cited by Kwang et al., 1998:189). Senior Minister Lee may have his own reasons for wishing that veneer to be thinner than it actually is, but the observer who is able to substantially experience Singapore’s evolving and heterogeneous cultures will, I believe, agree that despite global and internal influences they are singularly differentiated from ‘the West’.

Haley and Low’s (1998) model below, concisely illustrates the effects of both innate characteristics and deliberate policy-based influences on the evolving Singaporean culture. The model is well suited as a basis for the ensuing analysis of Singapore as one of the world’s most prolific purchasers (and intending future providers) of transnational education. The ensuing chapter borrows both Haley and Low’s headings, and also the notion that no component part of the model exists in isolation. As each component of the
model influences the others, so does Singaporean culture (like all cultures) reveal its complexity and dynamism.

![Diagram of influences on Singaporean culture]

Figure 1: The web of unique influences of Singaporean culture (Haley and Low, 1998:536).

**Peoples’ Action Party (PAP) Government**

**Political history**

Singapore was first leased by its Malay rulers to the British East India Company in 1819 until the Sultan of Johor ceded it to the British, who assumed sovereignty in 1824. In 1867 the Straits Settlements including Singapore, Malacca and Penang became a British Crown Colony. During the early years of the colony Singapore’s racial demographic rapidly evolved from a Malay to a Chinese majority. The Chinese served as middlemen for the entrepot trade and were categorised by the British into two groups: the minority who could speak English and were given favoured treatment, and the non-English speaking who were further subdivided according to their dialect groups. Because Malays preferred to continue traditional agricultural occupations, labourers were also imported from India (Tamney, 1996). From 1942-1945, British rule was interrupted when the Japanese imperial army invaded Singapore (Haas, 1999a). On returning to power after World War Two, the British loosened control over Singapore and the civil service was
gradually taken over by local people, although Britain kept control of the defence forces and foreign policy (Tamney, 1996).

In 1959 the Peoples’ Action Party (PAP) won the first general election on a platform that included free compulsory education, workers’ rights and immediate independence (Haas, 1999a). Lee Kuan Yew (holder of a law degree with highest honours from Cambridge) became Singapore’s first Prime Minister (Tamney, 1996). The PAP was originally an alliance between nationalists, who were English educated professionals, and leftists, some of whom were union leaders. However, when factions challenged Lee for control in 1963, more than one hundred opposition party members were detained, which led to riots that in turn served as a pretext to arrest more dissidents, thus crushing the factions. Since then, no opposition party has developed a mass base (Haas, 1999a:19).

In 1965 Singapore was expelled from the Federation of Malaya and reluctantly became a sovereign nation. Racially based fears and prejudices were significant in the events leading up to and surrounding the expulsion: whilst Singapore had a Chinese majority and was chauvinist towards its Chinese heritage, Malaya had a Malay majority and similar preferences for the Malay people (Bumiputra). The events contributing to the expulsion have been cited as defining moments in the birth of modern, independent Singapore (Kwang et al., 1998; Ganesan, 2002); indeed Singapore has been called a ‘virtual capital of the overseas Chinese’ (Low, 2002:14). Lee Kuan Yew has since reflected that the break with Malaya came about because of ‘diametrically different approaches to the problems facing our societies’ (Lee Kuan Yew, as reported in The Straits Times Interactive, 2000) and brought home the enormity of the ‘twin challenges’ of building a nation out of ‘a disparate collection of immigrants’ with an insufficient economy (Lee, 2000:3). Nevertheless Lee and the PAP ‘started out with great trepidation on a journey…to an unknown destination’ (Lee, 2000:9). That journey has been remarkably rewarding.

Lee governed until 1990 when he relinquished the prime ministership to Goh Chok Tong. Even today, Lee remains in the cabinet as ‘Minister Mentor’ to the new Prime Minister, his son Lee Hsien Loong. Goh was prime minister during this research and was perceived by the Singaporean press as presenting a slightly ‘softer’ approach than Lee. Goh considered that ‘to be fully developed, Singapore must look beyond economic success…[he did not want Singaporeans to be known]…just for economic efficiency – cold, disciplined, efficient, with a high standard of living, but everybody looks like a robot’ (Asiaweek Magazine, 1996, n.p.). Goh’s comments reflect Clammer’s (1993) contention
that Singapore is becoming a mature economy, but remains an immature society. The emergence of a white-collar middle class society ‘plugged into consumption as a way of life’ (Clammer, 1993:35) and which is more keen to participate in the public sphere, presents challenges to the government. In the short term however, ‘the average citizen is generally unconvinced that he or she has a substantive impact on public policies’ (Ganesan, 2002:60), and ‘the fundamental question in the power equation – PAP hegemony – [remains] non negotiable’ (Clammer, 1993:35).

**The economic imperative**

Singaporeans are continually reminded that economic development is the first national priority. The government’s promotion of macroeconomic stability and incentive schemes in order to attract foreign investment, (e.g. abolition of capital flow restrictions, capital gains taxes, inheritance taxes and wealth taxes only for foreign investors (Haas, 1999a)), frequently means that public policy takes second place to economic imperatives (Bercuson et al., 1995; Tamney, 1996). As a result of this preparedness to manipulate society to further the production, development and management of material wealth, Singapore has been outstandingly successful in economic terms. It has rapidly evolved from being a ‘somnolent, swampy fishing village to the world’s most technologically modern city’ (Neher, 1999:39) with First World status: ‘a feat that even Senior Minister Lee once thought impossible’ (Haas, 1999a:3).

At the start of the twenty-first century, Singapore is a modern, post-industrial nation with multinational and global interests. It is in the same OECD ranking bracket as Australia and enjoys an economic situation that would be the envy of most countries. At present Singapore has a First World per capita income, and although its wage share is lower than many OECD countries, it is significantly higher than nearby developing countries (e.g. Thailand) (Wong and Ong, 2001). Indeed, its economic growth has been more rapid than that of any other Asian country with the exception of Korea (Bercuson et al., 1995). The country boasts an annual average per capita income of around S$37,000 (Wong and Ong, 2001), and average household income of S$59,000 (Statistics Singapore, 2002) (both of these figures were based on Singapore’s last census, which at the time of writing was taken in 2000). Singapore also has one of the world’s highest savings rates (Gopinathan, 1997b) and, despite suffering a major economic downturn and record unemployment during the period of this research, maintained a Gross Domestic Product annual growth of 2.2 percent (Statistics Singapore, 2003). By comparison, Australia’s GDP was 2.0 percent during the same period (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003).
In support of this rapid development, Singapore has had to be nimble and flexible and its success can be partially ascribed to its ‘vigilance for opportunities in the global marketplace’ (Sanderson, 2002:88). Under government direction, the small country has made rapid ‘U-turns’ in order to stay ahead, and over time the economy has evolved from that of a ‘semi closed, low-wage producer of mainly labour-intensive goods, to a very open, high-wage producer of high-technology, capital intensive products’ (Bercuson et al., 1995). During times of large-scale unemployment, government policy restrained wages and promoted rapid industrialisation. Later, with high levels of employment, the emphasis shifted to fostering the implementation of technological value-added activities. Subsequently, labour cost increases were encouraged and vocational training first emerged as a government priority in order to support the more complex skill sets required (Bercuson et al., 1995).

**Labour market policies**

One reason the country can be so nimble in its adaptations to economic fluctuations is that Labour unions in Singapore have generally cooperated with the government and employer groups and have been ready to support restraint when needed (Bercuson et al., 1995). This tripartite cooperation had its genesis in the country’s political history (for example Lee Kuan Yew’s first job in Singapore was as legal adviser to several unions (Kwang et al., 1998). When the PAP split along anti/pro-communist lines, the non-communist National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) emerged as the leading union body. Strong ties and role rotation between the PAP and NTUC leaders continue and the resulting non-militant union movement is one where ‘social responsibility is the bedrock on which all decisions are made’ (Ashton et al., 1999:29). In case of any fallout, this system is reinforced by legislation that bans strikes and lockouts for essential services, and an Employment Act that enshrines the principle that wage negotiations should be based on economic growth and efficiency, rather than on ‘abstract notions of justice’ (Bercuson et al., 1995:33).

The Singaporean government’s interventionist approach encompasses not only broad issues of labour market policy but also human resource management and development functions (which are obviously highly relevant to this thesis as the core subject of the BET degree). For example, the government has always emphasised the importance of manpower development (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 1999a, b, c) and has focused heavily on productivity improvement, including the development of incentive pay and performance appraisal systems (Shaw et al., 1995). Until 1999, national human resource
planning efforts were largely undertaken by various government economic agencies. However, now a Ministerial level National Manpower Council oversees workforce planning, development and talent attraction (Ashton et al., 1999; Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 1999c).

The government management of human resources (human resource development in particular) at the national level is much more interventionist than usually exists in Australia and as such is worthy of note. Employers are not given the exclusive right to identify training needs (Yaw et al., 2000). This issue is strikingly relevant to the BET program, where much of the subject content is based on models that were developed in countries where HRD practices occur in a less regulated environment.

**Politics and propaganda**

Certainly there can be little disagreement with Gopinathan’s (1997b:32) statement that ‘Singapore’s policy makers are not uncomfortable with power’. The unicameral nature of Singapore’s government has allowed direct intervention and the paternalistic, authoritarian, ‘government-knows-best attitude’ that pervades Singaporean lives; even in areas such as marriage and childbearing (Haley and Low, 1998; Ashton et al., 1999; Sanderson, 2002). In response to accusations of interference at every level in the private lives of citizens, the following statement from Lee Kuan Yew is revealing:

> **We would not have made progress if we had not intervened on very personal matters such as who your neighbour is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit (or where you spit) or what language you use…** (Lee Kuan Yew, The Straits Times, 20 April, 1987, as cited by Kwang et al., 1998)

Evidently the government unapologetically justifies its micromanagement and ubiquitousness as necessary for political stability and economic growth (Clammer, 1993; Shaw et al., 1995; Haley and Low, 1998; Neher, 1999). Aside from personal intrusiveness, the government is also omnipresent in most aspects of the business, social and cultural life of the country. It dominates all internal and external links and has a direct impact on Singapore’s culture through policy measures, regulation, planning, propaganda, information and domination of production and infrastructure (Haley and Low, 1998). It is the country’s largest employer, regulates the ‘working class barracks’ (Haley and Low, 1998) of public housing in which most people live, and controls Singapore’s compulsory savings scheme (the Central Provident Fund) (Tamney, 1996).
Crisis, what crisis?

During Singapore's earliest formative years there were inevitable social disturbances, including riots; many of them racially based. Lee has been unapologetic in relation to the governments' interventions and, somewhat paradoxically, frequently reminds Singaporeans of the threat of the past 'riots and troubles' (AsiaWeek Magazine, 2000) whilst at the same time eulogising multiculturalism. The government continues to ban any activities that could be perceived as likely to incite racial or religious anger. Accordingly, race and ethnicity-based issues are perceived as constant threats fermenting in the background of Singapore's superficial harmony.

Brown (1993) proposes three main reasons for this ongoing centrality of ethnicity to Singaporean politics. Firstly, he contends that the political consciousness of the Chinese majority in Singapore is dominated by their self-perception as a minority within a predominantly Malay region. Furthermore, he highlights the fact that the racial division of labour, which occurred during British rule, still exists to some extent (e.g. Malays in the public sector and lower paid jobs; Chinese in business and the professions; Indians at both ends of the spectrum - the professions and labourers (Pang, 1975)). Finally, Brown (1993) highlights the link between Chinese chauvinism and pro-communist agitation in the 1950s, which, he argues, predisposed the PAP moderates towards a view of the disruptive potential of ethnic loyalties.

Like many other issues in Singapore, the government’s concern over racial conflict has both positive and negative implications. On the positive side of the equation, multiracialism and equal opportunity/‘meritocracy’ are enshrined in legislation (although whether they exist in practice is open to debate, as discussed later in this chapter). Countervailing that however is the fact that, employing what Haas calls ‘melodrama out of all proportion to the perceived threat’ (Haas, 1999b:5), national security has become a justification for suppressing public discussion (Tamney, 1996). Moreover, based on the melded threats of ethnic conflict and economic downturn, the government is able to perpetuate a crisis mentality thereby ‘driving Singaporeans harder, and resulting in ever-more interventionist and paternalistic policies’ (Haley and Low, 1998:542).

Stifling debate

The pervading atmosphere of censorship in Singapore is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the dearth of critical academic appraisal of government policy, particularly anything emanating from Singapore itself. Indeed a respected Singaporean academic
said to me that, in regards to publications, the reader was expected to ‘have the intelligence to read between the lines’. A rather unfortunate outcome of this self-censorship is the fact that a great majority of the academically critical literature about Singapore is written by ‘Western’ authors, many of whom have had quite negative experiences of the country. As Haas observes, ‘sometimes those painful experiences motivate acerbic comments’ (Haas, 1999b:8). Indeed in compiling and editing ‘The Singapore Puzzle’, Haas found that ‘most Singaporeans were reluctant [to contribute]’. This reluctance is no doubt largely explained by the experiences of those academics who have previously gone on record with what have been deemed to be inflammatory comments whilst in Singapore. Of particular relevance to this research is one of the most notable cases of ‘defamation’ in Singapore: that concerning [then] resident American academic Dr Christopher Lingle. In October 1994, Lingle published an article in the International Herald Tribune (IHT) entitled: ‘The smoke over parts of Asia obscures some profound concerns’. His article was a rejoinder to an opinion piece written by Kishore Mahbubani, then Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Singapore. Mahbubani’s piece analysed the flaws of European foreign policy and concluded that East Asia had enjoyed sound strategic decisions (The Straits Times, 1994b). Lingle’s rejoinder referred to unnamed ‘intolerant regimes in the region’ and made critical comments about the ‘compliance’ of judiciaries in ‘some Asian countries’; however no country was specified. The Singapore High Court found that the article did suggest that the judiciary in Singapore was compliant and consequently four editors from the IHT and Lingle were charged with contempt of court, and Lee Kuan Yew successfully sued Lingle for libel (The Straits Times, 1994c; Fernandez, 1995b, c, a). Whilst the Lingle case is probably the best known, it is not the only instance of foreign academics being sued by members of the Singaporean government (see also Sandilands (The Straits Times, 1994a)).

The fact that the government will sue (and frequently bankrupt) dissenters and critics has become an expected matter of course in Singapore, indeed Lee Kuan Yew has ‘the distinction of being the most successful libel litigant in history’ (Haas, 1999b). He is reported as having told university students that they must ‘be on guard against being unduly influenced by their foreign teachers’, and has directly told foreign teachers that anyone who criticised basic government policy would be on the first plane out of the country (Tamney, 1996:28). Visiting professors at the National University of Singapore claim to have learned that their lectures were attended by informers, who were assigned the responsibility of monitoring lecturers, as well as students (Haas, 1999b). As is
doubtless self evident; this stifling of public comment has wide reaching implications for transnational education in Singapore.

**External dependency**

Singapore’s rapid growth and economic success is all the more remarkable because of its tiny size and almost non-existent natural resources. These fundamental characteristics result in dependencies and vulnerabilities; for example Singapore is dependent on Malaysia for over fifty percent of its water needs (Savage, 2001). Land is another vulnerability and reclamation is an additional source of conflict with Malaysia.

A further vulnerability, repeated by the government like a mantra, is the fact that for Singapore; ‘our people are our only resource’ (Brown, 1993; Tamney, 1996; Tesoro and Oorjitham, 1996; Gopinathan, 1997b; Gopinathan and Ho, 2000b; Chiang, 2002; Teo, 2002). This mindset is good news for those interested in human resource development, is no doubt entirely accurate, and has been cited as one of the foundations of Singapore’s success (Sanderson, 2002). For more than a decade the government has been wooing ‘foreign talent’ to augment the workforce in areas where necessary expertise is in short supply. Singaporean MP Raymond Lim suggests that the term ‘global talent’ is better suited to this policy which aims to; ‘attract the best from anywhere in the world to work in Singapore, and, just as importantly, to retain, nurture and develop local talent to world class standard’ (Lim, 2002). Without doubt, the recognition that human resources are a potential limiting factor in Singapore’s growth has maximised the already high value that Singapore places on education - particularly vocational education. This stress on the development of human resources will be discussed later in this chapter, in the context of its centrality to the education system.

**Environmental cross fertilisation**

By virtue of history and trade, Singapore enjoys very close relations with the members of the Association of Asian Nations (ASEAN) in which it plays a central role. In 1993 Singapore began to purposefully leverage on those relations as it initiated an economically based ‘regionalisation drive’ (Ashton et al., 1999). Regionalisation is usually a process driven by political forces seeking to reduce or eliminate barriers to the movement of goods, capital, and people within a region: in opposition to the forces of globalisation, or as a move towards it (Low, 2002). Singaporean regionalisation aims to utilise cheaper production and labour costs whilst tapping the growing markets in the region. As a result, the number of Singaporean companies established in the region has
risen significantly and Singapore is one of the largest investors in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam and China (Singapore Government Online, 1998).

Within Singapore, the cultivation of foreign investment has provided the country with a very significant number of resident multi-national corporations. As a consequence of these factors, and the influx of ‘foreign talent’ outlined in the previous section, Singapore is more cosmopolitan than many of its neighbours (Haley and Low, 1998). As an outcome of this cosmopolitanism, whilst Chinese heritage is a common denominator in the region, Singapore’s culture is quite different to others in ASEAN. All these factors place Singapore in good stead to establish its own transnational education provider status.

**Global competition**

Singapore is inextricably entwined in the phenomenon of globalisation (Gopinathan, 1997b), and its status as a major financial, transportation, and communication hub is dependent on its preparedness to play by the rules. The requisite flexibility brings economic benefits but also cultural changes, some of which are decidedly unwelcomed – at least by the government. There is a pronounced tension between the government’s preparedness to embrace global values when they enhance Singapore’s economic competitiveness and its resistance to external values which it classifies as alien and charges with being corruptive of Singaporean lifestyles and values (Clammer, 1993). These ‘alien values’ are stereotypically portrayed as ‘Western’. Singaporeans are also exhorted to ‘manage the external influences which the country is exposed to so that they absorb the good and filter out the undesirable’ (Prime Minister Goh Chock Tong as cited by Birch, 1999:22). Meanwhile the government itself has embraced capitalism and adopted certain ‘Western’ values and practices, but it reserves the right to interpret these to fit its own purposes (Clammer, 1993:44). For example, whilst rule of law exists, trial by jury was abolished in 1969 (Haas, 1999a). Singapore’s leaders emphasise that the Westminster model of democracy is not appropriate for all, (e.g. that it is combative in nature and ill-geared towards achieving consensus), and that nations must be allowed to develop their own forms of human rights that take the cultural context into account (Gopinathan, 1997b; Ganesan, 2002; Mahbubani, 2002). The efforts of Singapore’s leaders to neutralise the tensions in this seeming contradiction constitute another of the fascinating but baffling paradoxes of modern Singapore.
Benchmarking, borrowing and sifting

‘If we succeed, we can then aim for the summit, joining countries like the US, Japan and Switzerland’ (Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong’s National Day Rally Speech, as per Ministry of Information and the Arts Singapore, 2001:1)

Clearly being a Singaporean involves blurring the boundaries of ‘East’ and ‘West’ (Tamney, 1996; Rizvi, 1997). Lee Kuan Yew has observed that a disadvantage of Singapore’s adoption of English, is its exposure to American values through the internet, as opposed to the experience of other Asian countries where language has acted as a proxy censor (The Straits Times Interactive, 2000).

For the Singaporean government, the ‘values’ portrayed as ‘Western’ or ‘American’ are those that are counter to the paramount economic focus and the requirement for a flexible and passive work force. The government’s response has been to laud the values of Singapore’s ethnic sub-cultures and to underscore the ‘undesirable’ elements and features of ‘Western’ society (Gopinathan, 1997b:24). Sometimes ‘the West’ is cast in the role of imperialist, seeking to govern Singapore and make it a ‘client state of the US’ (Henson, 1994). The ascription of behaviours to the government’s ‘decadent-Westernism’ list or, conversely, to the ‘acceptable-costs-of-modernisation’ list appears arbitrary at times. It is all the more interesting because Singapore has comprehensively relied on adapting foreign models to reach the point where it is now being touted as an international model in its own right.

As evidenced in PM Goh’s statement at the start of this section, Singapore’s leaders are ‘fond of making international comparisons as a way of benchmarking achievements’ (Gopinathan, 1997b:23). During the 1960s, the Cambridge-educated Lee Kuan Yew ‘never missed an occasion to express his admiration, tinted with some nostalgia, of the 1940s British universities and Britain itself’ (Margolin, 1993:89). However Lee began to lose his nostalgic reverence as new freedoms in Britain overwhelmed the Victorian norms he had been used to (Margolin, 1993; Backman, 2000) and subsequently, from the 1970s onward the models the PAP selected were always economically successful countries and attention was turned to Japan and the Asian region (Margolin, 1993).

The government’s adoption and adaptation of foreign models is also evident in HRD. In post-independence Singapore, vocational/technical educational ideas were borrowed from Swiss and German experiences (Margolin, 1993; Gopinathan, 1997b). The Economic Development Board invited multinational companies to establish technical training institutions in Singapore. Meanwhile the Ministry of Education sent teams of
principals to the United Kingdom, USA, and Taiwan to study and eventually transpose desirable aspects of their education systems into Singapore (Gopinathan, 1997b; Tan, 2003). Currently ‘all three components of the education and training system: basic education, initial training and continuing education and training, contain selective elements of other countries’ practices’ (Ashton et al., 1999). However culture is a determining factor in the success or otherwise of human interactions and Singapore’s borrowings in the field of HRD and vocational education and training have not always been entirely successful. For example the introduction of ‘On the Job Training (OJT)’, as copied from Japan, encountered problems because many Singaporean managers were reluctant to share information with subordinates (Ashton et al., 1999:46). This is not surprising, as it is difficult to extract HR policies and practices from their wider societal conditions and produce the same effects in a different environment. Nevertheless one of Singapore’s strengths seems to be its ability to adopt and adapt, and clearly it has demonstrated that much can be learned from the study of systems other than our own. It will be interesting to see the approach Singapore takes as it exhausts its opportunities for further growth from this pattern.

**Migrant stock**

**Management of ethnicity in contemporary Singapore**

*Let’s break up the ghettos and rebuild. We did not allow them to chose their neighbours, which means when their children went to school they are mixed. When they do national service they are mixed. (Lee Kuan Yew, as cited by The Straits Times Interactive, 2000)*

*It’s not because we want to divide the races, if we want to reach people at the bottom we need people from the same community. A Chinese can’t reach out to a Malay family and advise them how to bring up children. That would be an insult to them. They need a Malay leader, recognised by the Malay community, who is genuinely interested in helping these families do better. (Goh Chok Tong as cited in Asiaweek Magazine, 1996)*

Today Singapore has a total resident population of 4,185,200 (Statistics Singapore, 2003). The population is a multi-racial and multi-lingual, with a Chinese majority (seventy-seven percent), followed by Malays (fifteen percent), Indians (six percent), Eurasians and others (two percent)(Chiang, 2002). In the country’s early history there is no doubt that multi-racialism brought with it problems that had to be managed. Evidently the task has been undertaken quite successfully; certainly racially-based riots are now an affliction of the past. At the same time as moving to ensure ‘harmony’, the government has attempted to engineer ethnicity in order to maximise the economic (and
penultimately, the social) benefits of its diversity. But here emerges another of the puzzles of Singapore. The observant outsider notices a tension between the propaganda of ‘one nation, one people, one Singapore’ (the chorus of a ‘National Song’ that makes frequent appearances on television and at National Day rallies) and the impact of the racial categorisation, elitism, and gender inequalities that are evident in Singapore.

One aspect of the aforesaid engineering is evident in the government-sponsored hegemony of the English language in Singapore (James, 1998). English is the language of business and education. Indeed the fact that Singapore ‘did not indulge in the linguistic nationalism of many postcolonial societies’ (Gopinathan, 1997b:31), has been cited as another reason for the country’s economic success. English is considered as a means of providing a link to the world economy and to provide for inter-racial ‘bonding’ within Singapore (Chiang, 2002). Whilst schools also teach a compulsory mother-tongue (Mandarin, Malay or Tamil) the use of English in the home is rising: forty percent of homes, particularly those with younger people, use English as the main language (Chiang, 2002). This is likely to bring about long-term cultural changes because, for example, any change in language usage also has an impact on culture and value systems. Chinese language is the most important factor in establishing and transmitting Chinese identity for the Chinese-educated, whereas for the English-educated, descent, surname, Chinese customs, and beliefs are more important (Beardsmore, 1998).

Interestingly (and again, puzzlingly for a country that espouses multiculturalism and ethnic harmony), at most junctures Singaporean society remains artificially divided along primarily racial lines; even in the realms of economic, political and social issues which do not relate directly to linguistic, religious or racial matters (Brown, 1993). By way of a personal example: I was surprised to find that when I applied for a student exchange visa, all the documentation that I needed to complete asked for my race as well as my nationality – this was a question I had never been asked before. Clammer (1993:41) observes that these old official modes of ‘racial’ classification are often absurdities and my experiences supported that opinion. Nothing is really that clear-cut in Singapore and I found that race-based assumptions about people’s culture and religious affiliation were a misleading simplification made on dubious grounds. For example, inter-racial marriages have been common in Singapore (Haley and Low, 1998) and, possibly through living in such close proximity to each other, Singaporeans have adopted components of the religious and cultural traditions of the other ethnic groups. Even in Singapore’s early days, racial descriptors could not have been reliable cultural indicators: the Chinese were divided into two descendent groups – the Babas or Straits Chinese whose culture
reflected the Malay influence, and the Sinkeks, the name given to newcomers from China by the Straits-born Chinese (Khoo, 1996). Contemporary Singapore is dominated by people of Baba heritage who had access to English education; an influential case in point being Lee Kuan Yew (Backman, 2000). Singapore’s Chinese heritage citizens still speak a range of dialects (Tamney, 1996; Backman, 2000) despite the government’s push for all Chinese heritage Singaporeans to speak Mandarin (Gopinathan, 1998), and the different dialect groups retain differing cultural traditions.

However, in Singapore sub-group loyalties (e.g. to ethnic or language groups) are deemed antithetical to the required loyalty to the nation state. ‘High culture’ (such as the performing arts) has been celebrated and depoliticised whilst ‘undesirable elements’ (such as liberal religion) have been eradicated (Brown, 1993; Clammer, 1993). The various groups within society are officially recognised as having ‘values which differ from each other but which are mutually compatible, so that they form the building-blocks for the "umbrella" national cultural values and identity’ (Brown, 1993:17).

Despite the questions raised about the compatibility with officially espoused multi-racial ideals, the state manages sub-group loyalties by allowing state-sponsored racially-based groups, membership of which is often the only means for Singaporeans to ‘safely’ participate in any form of government (Tan, 2003). At the same time, the groups provide the government with a means of political control (Brown, 1993). The Mendaki (Council for the Education of Muslim Children) is an interesting example of one of these state-sponsored interest groups. Whilst during the 1970s Singaporeans had been warned that issues relating to race, religion, and language were too sensitive for discussion, during the latter half of the 1980s the government took a ‘risky gamble in the political context that had few parallels elsewhere’ (Gopinathan, 1997a:33). Prime Minister Lee singled out the Malay community and began to explicitly discuss the fact that the Malays were entering into a cycle of lack of educational success and relative deprivation (Brown, 1993). Consequently the 1982 formation of the Mendaki was justified to ‘reform Malay attitudes and values’, particularly concerning education (Brown, 1993:29). After the successful formation of the Mendaki, the government moved (ostensibly to tackle the grievances of other groups in society) to create more ethnic interest associations including; a Sikh Advisory Board, the Singapore Indian Development Association, the Eurasian Association, and a Hindu Advisory Board (which has constraints against involvement in Punjabi and Tamil/Sri Lankan politics). In order to appear balanced, it had to offer the Chinese their own ‘Mendaki’ and so the Chinese Development Assistance Council was
established in 1991, despite the fact that ethnic Chinese were heavily over-represented in local tertiary education (Tan, 2003).

In summary, Singapore’s ‘harmony’ is closely managed and some consider it to be an illusion based on the suppression of dissent (Brown, 1993; Tamney, 1996). Certainly in my experience, there are strong feelings of inequality within the minority groups, and Singaporeans are well aware of this. Singapore is not the ‘one happy melded nation’ that the propaganda songs promise: the usual racial prejudices that exist around the world are alive and well in Singapore. Unfortunately this fact revitalises the previously discussed crisis mentality. Meanwhile, with the stated intent of supporting interracial harmony, the government continues to push forward with the promulgation of a national values ideology.

**National values, Asian values, whose values?**

*The argument about Asian values: we didn’t want to pick a quarrel with the West. But we have certain basic beliefs which have held this community together, and if we lose those values, we are done for. (Lee Kuan Yew, as reported by The Straits Times Interactive, 2000)*

*It is vital for Western minds to understand that efforts by Asians to rediscover Asian values are not only a search for political values...[but represent] a complex set of motives and aspirations in Asian minds...to renew the connection to the past...bring up their young...conscious of the cultures of their ancestors...define their own personal, social and national identities...[and] enhance their self esteem. (Mahbubani - Singapore’s Western-educated ambassador to the United Nations, 2002:33)*

As previously discussed, Singapore has habitually adopted ‘Western’ models whilst rejecting the value sets that arguably underpin them. To counteract the adoption of these supposedly decadent ‘Western’ values, the government has to promoted ‘Asian’ values and traditions. The intention to promulgate of ‘Asian Values’ seems to be a combination of *description*, or lauding of appropriate values and traditions that can be shown to still exist, and *prescription* and inculcation where the ‘values’ had been forgotten or possibly never existed in the first place (Clammer, 1993; Tan, 1997). As early as the 1970s Lee was espousing the need to ‘remain ourselves’ (Lee Kuan Yew as cited by Gopinathan, 1997b:24). However he believed that culture could be ‘tinkered with’ and consequently set about enacting his intention to engineer a populace who would ‘emulate or adopt certain habits and practices which will make Singapore a success’ (Lee Kuan Yew as cited by Kwang et al., 1998:17).
As the effects of globalisation intensified, the government moved to enshrine ‘Asian values’ as a national ideology. During the late 1980s the following were adapted as national values that were intended to unite all Singaporeans:

- Nation before community and society before self;
- Family as the basic unit of society;
- Community support and respect for the individual;
- Consensus, not conflict; and
- Racial and religious harmony.

As Clammer (1993:35) observes; ‘at face value this move would appear to simply encapsulate values that already exist and are widely shared in Singapore’. However there has been much debate about the values pertaining to issues such as; whether they are truly representative of Singaporean values or simply another propaganda mechanism; whether it is possible to meld values emerging from such varied ‘Asian’ ethnic backgrounds; whose values they actually represent; and the agenda/s behind the development of the values in the first place.

Certainly it is quite likely that most ‘Asian’ people would accept that they do have different values to those from ‘the West’. For example, in a poll of Asian executives published by the Far Eastern Economic Review in March 1996, eighty percent considered that ‘Asian’ values were different from those of ‘the West’, and sixty-three percent considered that they made a significant difference to Asia’s economic development (Birch, 1999:26). Furthermore Neher (1999) reported that the majority of ‘Asians’ consistently ranked social stability as more important than personal liberty. However despite such reports, two major problems with Singapore’s ‘National Shared Values’ are obvious in light of the research reviewed in this thesis. One is the questionable assumption that all Asian cultures share common values (Brown, 1993; Tan, 1997). Another is highlighted in the ‘ecological’ research from the field of psychology which identifies national cultural dimensions (discussed in detail in chapter five), and argues that: ‘we speak of individuals holding values, not countries…’ (Bond, 1996a:211). Both of these points make something of a nonsense of extrinsically assigning ‘National Values’ to a multi-ethnic country like Singapore. Indeed, as Clammer (1993:49) suggests: ‘the gulf between a Hakka peasant from South China and a Hindu Brahmin from Tamil Nadu is about as big as you can get’.
In light of such considerations, it is not surprising that both Singaporeans and external observers immediately expressed suspicion that the National Ideology would promote Chinese Confucianist values at the expense of the non-Chinese (indeed the value set has been labelled neo-Confucian) (Gopinathan, 1997b). Certainly the five values are highly representative of Confucian-heritage nations (Hofstede, 1980; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). Perhaps the values are specifically directed at Singapore’s Chinese, who were seen to be most at risk of ‘Westernisation’ (e.g. through conversion to Christianity and enthusiastic consumerism) (Brown, 1993). Paradoxically, it seems likely that promotion of the ‘National Values’ could actually undermine the government’s efforts to promote racial harmony, as it is hardly surprising that non-Confucian Singaporeans would be cynical about the espoused ideology of their nation. As Clammer notes; ‘apparently the Indians, Malays, Eurasians, Arabs and others who make up Singapore’s population do not have any values worth enshrining…[or if they do] they are of the dangerous religious variety (Clammer, 1993:42,25)

Several commentators have also observed that the values bear a striking resemblance to a deindividualised version of Weber’s Protestant work ethic (Tamney, 1996; Haley and Low, 1998). If the values appear traditional and somewhat old fashioned that is probably not an accident. For Singapore’s leaders, who are committed to discipline and wary of relaxation (Tamney, 1996), the new attitudes of Singapore’s burgeoning middle and upper classes (quality of life, rather than economic survival) are dangerous – but this is yet another paradox as these middle classes are a direct result of Singapore’s economic success. Moreover, Singapore’s National Values, supposedly uniquely ‘Asian’, may actually be universal: based more on the Victorian era reflected in the education of many of the government’s Ministers, and thus the ‘Western’ comparisons may be completely spurious (Clammer, 1993; Margolin, 1993; Backman, 2000). Nevertheless the government continues to attempt to programme them into the national psyche, with further paradoxical outcomes, as discussed below.

**Reinventing and reinforcing values**

*No child should leave school after nine years without having the software of his culture programmed into his subconscious.* (Lee Kuan Yew, as cited by Tamney, 1996:26)

*Whether [our young] love Singapore and are prepared to give their lives in her defence [is] shaped by the education they receive during their formative years.* (Rear Admiral Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence as cited by Ministry of Information Communications and The Arts Singapore, 2002)
In Singapore the national education system and compulsory national service for males are inextricable components of nation-building and the evolution of a Singaporean identity: in other words they are ‘tools for the citizen’s submission’ (Haley and Low, 1998:533).

Schools have been managed at the national level and ‘are mandated to implement educational policies formulated to achieve national political, cultural and economic goals and priorities’ (Chew, 1997:75). Examples of such educational policies have included the provision of compulsory subjects such as ‘moral education’, and, in a surprise policy move in late 1982, ‘religious knowledge’. The implementation of ‘religious knowledge’ is an interesting case as it was a government policy intended to inculcate desirable values, but the subject was scrapped in 1993 and replaced with ‘civics and moral education’. Again the rationale for the change was to combat ‘decadent Western influences’ (Tan, 1997). However critical reflection has pointed to the likelihood that the ‘religious knowledge’ subject was actually abandoned because it added to a heightened consciousness of religious differences. Subsequently the Religious Harmony Act was enacted: thus, whilst the ‘National Values’ are notionally intended to encourage religious harmony, the Act enforces it (Clammer, 1993). ‘Under the Act, ‘harmony’ has two meanings: not to attempt the conversion of those of a different persuasion; and not to mix religion and politics’ (Clammer, 1993:41).

In addition to passing through the filters of education and national service, undesirable values and foreign cultural messages are managed through government control of the media including the exclusion and restriction of the circulation of a range of foreign publications, and the banning of TV satellite dishes. Internet usage is also highly regulated, even advertisements are vetted to ensure that ‘Asian’ values are not undermined: the Ministry of Information and the Arts considers that ‘[Singapore] should discourage advertisements which show Singaporean men, women and children behaving as if they were ‘Westerners’” (Birch, 1999:20).

‘Meritocracy’ and equality

We the citizens of Singapore pledge ourselves as one united people, regardless of race, language, or religion, to build a democratic society based on justice and equality so as to achieve happiness, prosperity, and progress for our nation. [Singapore school pledge recited at weekly flag-raising ceremony]

I’ve said it openly that if we were 100 percent Chinese, we would do better. But we are not and never will be, so we live with what we have. (Lee Kuan Yew as cited by Kwang et al., 1998:181)
As has been discussed, the National Value that refers to ‘racial and religious harmony’ has not come easily or voluntarily in Singapore. The approach that the government takes to maximising the benefits of diversity (economic or social) is difficult to categorise, at least according to ‘Western’ sociological models. Like so much in Singapore, the government adopts aspects of the access and equity models used in ‘the West’, but only those it deems to meet its requirements. Maximising the benefits of diversity does not necessarily imply ensuring equality. An example that surprises the newcomer to Singapore is a public sector that uses a language of exclusion that many ‘Westerners’ would consider overtly discriminatory through the constant use of the masculine pronoun in government titles, public documents and newspapers (e.g. The Ministry of Manpower, ‘Workmen’s Compensation’ etc.).

At face value, Singapore is founded on the freedom of religious association and acknowledgment of difference. Lee Kuan Yew, and therefore the Singaporean Government, has said that he does not subscribe to the cultural assimilationist ‘melting pot’ ideology, nor a denial of difference (Kwang et al., 1998). Lee acknowledged in 1998 (as cited in Kwang et al., 1998:440): ‘we cannot obliterate the cultural and religious distinctions between the racial groups’. However, as already discussed, some of those distinctions have been systematically diluted and/or suppressed at the highest level. Therefore it would seem that Lee’s rhetoric does not match Singapore’s reality: as interculturalist Bennett (1993b) proposes, the model for the ‘successful melting pot’ usually looks a lot like the dominant group. Statements such as the following made by Lee as Prime Minister would indicate to a Malay or Indian that adopting a Chinese behaviour set and value system is the yardstick of success:

[in describing a person of Malay descent] …and he is acting just like a Chinese…I am not saying that all of them have to be like that…but here is one who has made his life a success. (Lee Kuan Yew as cited by Kwang et al., 1998:184).

Non-Chinese are not the only Singaporeans who may be marginalised. The status of women has long been unequal, where ‘social pressure and traditional attitudes about sex-roles required that females play a subordinate and submissive role’ and ‘educational opportunities were first offered to male children as the future economic providers’ (Low, 1997). Women graduates in Singapore earned less than men, and were less likely to reach senior management positions or be ‘sent’ for training (Lee and Pow, 1999). However, during the period 1991 to 1999 the skills/education profile of women improved and has come to almost match that of men (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2000).
Nevertheless, female representation in corporate management type positions is building from quite a low baseline and there is some way to go yet (Lee and Pow, 1999).

The issues of race and class-based income disparity have long been topical in Singapore (Pang, 1975; Mukhopadhaya, 2000). Unfortunately, Malays and Indians are disproportionately out of work because, as has always been the case, relatively more Chinese run companies (Henson, 2002). Whilst in Singapore I viewed a documentary in which an Indian woman talked about telephoning for a job interview only to be told the job had already been allocated. However when she phoned back and pretended to be Chinese she was given an interview. This disparity is denied by Prime Minister Goh, who has stated that, (in a country with an 77% Chinese majority), ‘no non-Chinese is disadvantaged unless the company does business with China or Taiwan, or is a traditional Chinese owned company’ (as cited by Tan, 2002:167). In Singapore there is a minimal social safety net and consequently unemployment (running at a ten year high of 4.7% (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2003), and income disparity, are very sensitive issues. The state’s justification for a lack of social security is that it provides an education system in which the use of English creates a level playing field across races, leaving them to succeed on their own merit (e.g. (Goh Chok Tong cited in Pang, 1975; Asiaweek Magazine, 1996; Tan, 2002). This ‘equal opportunity for all’ is somewhat debatable, given that children of graduate parents in Singapore were sixteen times more likely to make it to the top ten percent of their cohort and the majority of graduates are Chinese (Mukhopadhaya, 2000; Tan, 2003).

Somewhat inexplicably for a government that is not shy to legislate, Singapore has no enforceable equity legislation. A government publication in 2000 acknowledged that:

Employers realizing that women are more likely than men to leave the labour market...due to family responsibilities...could be less inclined to hire them for occupations where experience and on the job training are important. (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2000)

In 2002 tripartite guidelines were put in place regarding non-discriminatory job advertisements for employers (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2002). However the guidelines are not mandatory and it is common to see advertisements for ‘Mandarin speaking’ workers, which would presumably exclude most non-Chinese applicants.

This tension between the government’s espoused ‘meritocracy’ and the elitism evident in Singaporean society is yet another paradox. This brief consideration of diversity in Singapore is important to this research on several levels: including that managing
diversity is central to Human Resource Development and is one of the subjects taught in the BET program. Furthermore, and possibly of most importance to this thesis, concepts of diversity and equality influence educational opportunities in Singapore.

**The Singaporean education system**

*An educated and enlightened population is our guarantee for a prosperous future.* (Minister for Education Ong Pang Boon, 1996, as cited by Low, 1997)

The Singaporean government has a history of generous spending on education, and has long boasted the highest expenditure by percentage of GNP in Asia (Low, 1997; Chapman, 1998; Haley and Low, 1998). As a result the country has a ninety-three percent literacy rate for those aged fifteen years or over (Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2002); 'regularly blitzes the world's cross-national test scores in student achievement in mathematics (TIMMS)' (Chapman, 1998:644); and is acknowledged as producing students who regularly out-perform those produced by 'Western' education systems (Townsend and Cheng, 2000).

As Linda Low (2001:305) (then from the National University of Singapore) confirmed; '[in Singapore] higher education is a consuming preoccupation at both the national and individual levels'. That preoccupation is driven by Singapore’s now familiar primary economic objectives. Human capital is fundamental in the nation-building process and Singaporeans are walking investments in the country’s economic future (Bercuson et al., 1995; Ashton et al., 1999; Gopinathan and Ho, 2000b; Tan, 2002). Each year the Council for Professional and Technical Education (CPTE) under the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) anticipates the skills the economy will require in response to the next phase of globalisation and recommends tertiary intake by discipline area in an attempt to tailor the education system to economic requirements (Yaw et al., 2000; Low, 2001; Tan, 2003).

Whilst high levels of expenditure from a government that is supportive of vocational education may initially appear ideal from an HRD perspective, in reality, when 'education is seen more as a national need than a citizen’s right' (Low, 1997:352), discretionary selection of one’s educational institution, discipline area and subsequent career path becomes an unrealisable dream. This frequently inequitable situation is founded on, and sustained by, an education system that is described as ‘conspicuously elitist’ (James, 1998:101).
History and evolution of education in Singapore

Singapore’s early educational development was subject to a range of influences including those of its British colonial masters; the ideas, teachers and ideology of China; and the ideologies and pedagogies of the nation’s various religious and ethnic sub groups (Gopinathan, 1997b, a). During the colonial period the British had employed an ‘ad-hoc policy of benign neglect’ resulting in deep educational segregation along ethnic and linguistic lines (Gopinathan, 1997a:25). Chinese schools reflected political changes in China and Islamic Madrasahs continued traditional models from the Middle East (Gopinathan, 1997b:24). The outcomes of this divisive system engendered resentment on behalf of those who had not been able to access an English education (Gopinathan, 1997a:25; Ashton et al., 1999; Davie, 2003b). It was in response to this resentment that the PAP adopted Singapore’s bilingual education policy.

Streaming and stresses

In Singapore's contemporary education system a child spends at least six years in primary school where the focus is on English, mathematics and the mother tongue. Due to high failure rates in English and the mother tongue, ability-based streaming was implemented; consequently at the end of four years in primary school, pupils are placed into one of three language streams according to their abilities (Ministry of Information Communications and the Arts Singapore, 2002). Streaming at such an early age seems likely to be the commencement point for the reported elitist and competitive nature of the Singaporean schooling system. Those students placed into the lower ability streams tend to be categorised as low achievers. The stigmatisation of these students is the cause of much concern amongst Singaporeans; indeed the second highest grossing movie in Singapore box office history (Jack Neo’s ‘I not stupid’) tells the story of three young boys struggling in primary school and their stressed parents ‘all feeling the pressure of a society that demands a narrow type of success at all costs’ (Neo, 2002).

Following the successful completion of the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) at the end of year six, pupils are again streamed into one of three curricular emphases. At this stage they are either preparing for the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education ‘Ordinary’ (GCE ‘O’) level examination via a three year ‘express course’ or the four year Normal (academic) or (technical) course, both of which lead to CGE ‘Normal’ (GCE ‘N’) level examinations. Those who do well in ‘N’ levels may continue for a fifth year and sit for ‘O’ levels. Pupils may then enter an Institute of Technical Education, a Polytechnic to pursue a diploma course, or a junior college to prepare for the ‘Advanced’
‘A’ level examination, the results of which determine their eligibility for tertiary education (Ministry of Information Communications and the Arts Singapore, 2002).

The Singaporean system has been called ‘rigid…where people are indicted for life because of their poor GCE results’ (The Straits Times, 1999). It certainly has a ‘survival of the fittest’ feel and, with no safety net for those who do not exactly fit the mould, it is not surprising that anything to do with education stirs intense public feeling. Competition between schools as well as individuals is intense: all secondary schools are ranked annually and the results are published in the newspapers. As discussed further in chapter five, in Confucian-heritage societies status and face are derived from knowledge, career choice, and formal qualifications; thus certificates, diplomas and the trappings of higher education have high symbolic value (Hofstede, 1980; Jeans, 1995; Pratt, 1999; Chua, 2000; Koh, 2001). Whilst the government presents the education system as a level playing field that enables all Singaporeans to make the most of their opportunities, it is obvious that some schools and individuals are simply unable to compete effectively (Tan, 2003).

**Singapore’s higher education system**

At the time of this research, Singapore had three Universities; the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the Singapore Management University (SMU). Until recently, NUS has been the most comprehensive university offering a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs whilst NTU has specialised in engineering and business disciplines. Recent university reforms have meant that NTU will be expanded, to offer programmes in physical sciences, humanities, design, and media (Davie, 2003a, c; Nirmala, 2003). SMU was opened in 2000 to meet the needs of the business and service sectors of the local economy, and its auspices are considered likely to be a benchmark for future collaborative educational ventures (Sanderson, 2002; Lee, 2003).

In addition to the three ‘official’ universities Singapore also has other local onshore providers of tertiary education, including the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) (the site of this research). The National Institute of Education (NIE) that was formed in July 1991 at a cost of S$400 million as a campus of NTU (Ministry of Information Communications and The Arts Singapore, 2002). With the establishment of NIE has come formal upgrading of teacher education to university level (Gopinathan and Ho, 2000a; Gopinathan et al., 2001).
Apart from the above tertiary options, many Singaporeans either go overseas to pursue university qualifications, or undertake degrees provided by overseas universities in Singapore or online. They make this decision either as a preferred choice or, more frequently, because they are unable to gain entry to local universities (Low, 2001). At the time of writing the annual university intake rate per cohort is twenty-one percent, although the government aims to raise that to twenty-five percent by 2010 (Lee and Gopinathan, 2003).

The prestige of a university degree has the corollary that polytechnic graduates are frequently stigmatised as being less academically able and therefore less employable (e.g. see (Chua, 2000)). As a consequence, thirty percent upgrade to a degree within five years of being awarded their diploma and up to a further twenty percent do the same in later years (Fong, 2000; Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2001). The bulk of these have to seek their education overseas (Fong, 2000). When diploma up-graders, including those who study in Singapore or externally, are added to the annual cohort who study at NUS, NTU and SMU, Singapore’s percentage of higher education enrolment improves from a base that is at least fifteen percent below the OECD average of forty percent, to a very healthy fifty percent (Olsen, 2001).

Many Singaporeans believe that NUS and NTU should become more cross disciplinary, and that admission criteria should become more transparent and flexible in order to allow more polytechnic graduates the opportunity to access a degree at home. However the government has been concerned by the ‘seduction of business and management courses’ (Low, 2001:310) and maintains that at least half the university graduates every year should come from science and technology courses as these skills are; ‘…our competitive advantage’ (Minister of State for Education, Dr Ng En Hen as cited by Lee, 2003). Despite the fact that the many Singaporeans who enrol in external courses are beyond the manpower projections of the CPTE, the government seems to deem the eventual graduates as ‘icing on the cake’ of the country’s manpower requirements (Low, 2001).

In support of the push for internationalisation, Singaporean Universities are being restructured into three tiers with the aim of developing global institutions (Sanderson, 2002). The first elite tier will focus on postgraduate education, world-class research and development, and the transferral of knowledge to the industrial sector. One of the foundations of this program is the ‘World Class University’ program launched by the Economic Development Board (which aims to make Singapore the ‘Harvard’/’Boston’ of
the East (Low, 2001)). Ten of the world's top universities were invited to set up centres of excellence and research in Singapore, thereby offering greater diversity and choice for local and international students. The institutions that so far have a permanent local presence in Singapore under this programme include:

- Chicago Graduate School of Business (USA);
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA);
- John Hopkins University (USA);
- INSEAD (France);
- Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania (USA);
- Georgia Institute of Technology (USA);
- Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China);
- Stanford University (USA);
- Technische Universiteit Eindhoven (Germany); and
- Technische Universitat Munchen (Germany). (Singapore Education, 2004)
- The University of New South Wales (Australia) will also establish a permanent presence commencing 2006.

The second tier of universities will consist of NUS, NTU, and SMU which will be the mainstay of the university system, again conducting research and development whilst catering for Singapore’s manpower needs and education as a public good (Lee, 2003). The intention is that second tier universities will work with the first tier, which should ensure skills transfer and, no doubt, add prestige to the second tier institutions. To support flexible growth of this sector both NUS and NTU both have received substantial increases to their endowment funds (Lee, 2003).

The third tier will consist of additional private universities focusing on teaching and applied research, and will include SIM and Australian universities providing transnational programmes in Singapore (Lee, 2003). Third tier universities operating in Singapore in the future are expected to be of ‘at least the same global ranking as NUS/NTU’ (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2001). These universities will also be expected to take up the ‘potential base load of Singaporean students who currently go overseas to study, and working adults undertaking continuing education’ (Ministry of Trade and Industry
They will also be expected to increase their enrolment through the intake of foreign students (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2001).

Vocational education

Singapore’s Vocational Education and Training system is intensively focused on meeting the MTI’s projections for human resource requirements (Alto, 2000; Low, 2001). Again, the system is tiered; the first level meets higher management needs, the second provides engineers, technicians and middle managers, and the third caters to skilled manpower needs.

Entry to the first tier polytechnics which provide ‘para-professional training’, is via the GCE ‘O’ or ‘A’ levels and, despite its perceived inferior status is also extremely competitive with only forty percent of annual applicants gaining a place (Sanderson, 2002:91). Polytechnic students are awarded a diploma after two years of full time study or advanced or postgraduate diplomas that usually require one-year full time study.

The second tier Institute of Technical Education (ITE) provides full time and continuing vocational training and apprenticeship programs (Alto, 2000). ITE entry requirements include GCE ‘O’ and ‘N’ levels, and offer courses that include industrial technician certificates, business studies and office skills. The ITE also accredits training providers through the Approved Training Centre (ATC) scheme which enables an organisation to train its workers to national standards and subsequently to access financial support through the Skills Development Fund (Alto, 2000; Ministry of Information Communications and the Arts Singapore, 2002).

Other providers in the third tier include the Singapore Hotel and Tourism Education Centre (SHATEC), the National Maritime Academy, corporate training centres, and the Productivity and Standards Board which is responsible for nurturing small business and offers in-house consultancy and short courses (for example, through the national training initiative focusing on Critical Enabling Skills) (Tesoro and Oorjitham, 1996; Singapore Productivity and Standards Board, 2001). Training needs and assessment processes are indicative of the German ‘meister’ and the Australian ITAB systems. Training needs are identified through industry surveys and assessors are pedagogically qualified trainers who are often trained by the ITE (Alto, 2000).

Government training policy has focussed on improving the use of the workplace as a source of learning (Ashton et al., 1999). The government’s Manpower 21 Plan has as its
centrepiece the idea of a ‘School of Lifelong Learning’. Financial support for training through the ‘Manpower Development Assistance Scheme’ works on the principal of co-funding between the individual, the company, the unions, and the Government (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2001b). In support of the government’s focus on the workplace as a source of learning, Singaporean employers are encouraged to commit to a globally benchmarked expenditure of four percent of payroll on training and development. Thirty percent of residents in the labour force participated in some form of structured training during 2000 and an impressive eighty-one percent of those received some level of financial support (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2001a).

**Pedagogy: from dominance to dynamism?**

In both higher and vocational education, Singapore’s pedagogical styles have until very recently been strongly teacher-dominated in a system replete with rote learning and rigid syllabuses and assessment practices. Chapter five will analyse the dominant cultural paradigms and pedagogies that have been a significant part of the socialisation experiences of the adult participants in this research. However at this juncture it is worth noting that pedagogy in Singapore is slowly changing. During the 1990’s the entire education system was reviewed, and for the first time academics and educational personnel were involved in this process (Gopinathan, 1997b). Despite excellent academic results, syllabuses began to look inadequate when measured against the requirements of government reforms promoting creative, critical, and independent thinking (Kwang et al., 1998; Gopinathan et al., 2001; Low, 2001). Launched by Goh Chok Tong in June 1997, the currently pervasive policy initiative designed to redress these imbalances is entitled ‘Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’. The ‘thinking schools’ component is intended to meet future challenges while ‘learning nation’ promotes a culture of continual learning beyond the school environment (Gopinathan, 1997b).

Pedagogically, ‘Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’ places a greater emphasis on process than outcome, which may not yet be reflected in actual day-to-day practices in the schools and universities (Tan, 2003). This is an attempt to replicate pedagogical reforms introduced in other Asia Pacific countries (e.g. Hong Kong), which encourage the use of experiential processes, reflective teaching, and a focus on course and project work (Cheng et al., 2001; Singapore Productivity and Standards Board, 2001; Sanderson, 2002; The Straits Times, 2003). Whether the government rhetoric will eventually match reality is an one question that is yet to be answered, and the cross-cultural efficacy of such hitherto ‘Western’ pedagogies is another (the latter will be addressed in chapter
five), although it seems reasonable to suspect that after decades of traditional teaching styles in an education system that remains so competitive, change will come slowly and be resisted by many. For example, John Tan (2003) (an academic and educator at NIE) reports (as evidence of the slow pace of change) that an acclaimed secondary school department head very recently attributed her students’ examination success to months of repeated mock examination practice per subject. Moreover, he reports that teachers still ‘tend to resort to “over teaching” and “over drilling” to help students anticipate exam questions’ (Tan, 2003). Seemingly the strategies of intensive and repetitive coaching and practice that have worked in the past are still viewed favourably by teachers and parents, and are likely to be difficult to displace given the fact (especially for the majority in the non-elite schools) that common national exams and school comparison still restrict systemic innovation (Tan, 2003).

**Why would a Singaporean chose to go to a foreign university?**

At the commencement of this research, I was convinced that for Singaporeans the completion of an overseas qualification would be an opportunity to gain prestige. Consequently, I believed that ‘Western’ universities had a major and sustainable marketing advantage. Now I am convinced that was a naïve, possibly ethnocentric, perception. The notion of a sustainable advantage is becoming more tenuous as, whilst degrees from prestigious foreign universities remain a passport to the upper ranks of the civil service and business (Tan, 1996; Gray et al., 2003), these qualifications are now becoming easier to obtain onshore. The notion of prestige is even more spurious, as clearly the best and the brightest Singaporean undergraduates are able to access the likes of NUS; an institution that is ranked higher amongst world-class multi-disciplinary universities in Asia than any Australian institution (the highest are Japanese) (Bacani, 2000).

However, whilst entrance to local elite universities may be highly desirable, it is unachievable for many Singaporeans. The NUS and NTU admission systems, whilst not entirely transparent, definitely place a high emphasis on GCE levels. Many mature-aged students in Singapore consider that the current system disregards the notion of multiple intelligences and, as a disgruntled letter to the editor of *The Straits Times* complained, is ‘an unforgiving and penalising system’ that excludes late-developers and assumes that a person’s educational development remains relatively static (Davie, 1999; The Straits Times, 1999). As a consequence, mature-age students and polytechnic graduates must reluctantly pursue tertiary study either overseas or through a twinning arrangement.
onshore. If they are working, particularly within the public sector, those studying in Singapore may be able to access at least partial fee reimbursement. The unemployed can also sometimes gain financial support from the ethnic support councils such as the Mendaki. If not, those who do pursue overseas study are denied the subsidies that students at NUS and NTU enjoy and therefore cost the government nothing (Davie, 1999; Chua, 2000). At the time of writing, in contrast to students studying onshore at local universities, part-time students, post-graduate students, and those studying overseas, are not permitted to use their CPF savings to pay for their education (Davie, 1999; Central Provident Fund Board Singapore, 2004). This seems to contradict the ‘Learning Nation’ rhetoric.

**Student and employer choice patterns: onshore versus offshore**

In making their choice of degree and university, Singaporeans really need to do their research (The Straits Times, 2001e). They must make a difficult and potentially life-altering decision that is potentially ‘one of the most significant and expensive initiatives they will have ever undertaken’ (Mazzarol, 1998:4) in a hitherto unregulated market. To illustrate what is definitely a case of *caveat emptor*, the press regularly publishes articles bemoaning the fate of Singaporeans who attend overseas universities only to be told on return to Singapore that the university they have attended is not recognised by major employers such as the civil service (Davie, 1999; Quek, 2001a, b). The ‘phantom’ approved-universities list adds further stress to what is already a difficult decision. Whether or not a ‘civil service list of preferred universities for employment purposes’ actually exists, this ‘phantom’ has become part of Singaporean ‘urban myth’. Most Singaporeans I came to know are certain that such a list exists. One person said that prior to enrolling in the BET program he was told that ‘The University’ was on the ‘approved’ list by a friend who was a senior Human Resources officer in the civil service, but most agree that nobody outside the upper echelons of the public sector actually got to see the list. Therefore decisions about choice of university are made in something of a vacuum.

As described in the discussion on GATS in the previous chapter, Singapore has in place ‘barriers to trade by mode of supply’ (Knight, 2002). Under GATS, Singapore has not committed to recognise qualifications, thus it can ‘pick and choose which providers and programs it recognises’ (AEI International Education Network, 2002:13). At present the twinning partners of overseas universities wanting to provide a degree onshore in Singapore must obtain the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) permission on a course-by-
course basis. The MOE assesses the appropriateness of curriculum, teachers, facilities, management, and premises, however the approval criteria are not known by anyone outside the MOE (Ziguras, 2001a). Professional bodies such as SIM are not required to go through the same process but consult with the MOE in a less formal manner (as found by Ziguras (2001a), and as supported by my interview with a senior SIM manager). In all cases the Singaporean twinning partner is viewed by the MOE as a provider of infrastructure and the overseas university is ultimately responsible for program outcomes (Ziguras, 2001a; Ministry of Education: Singapore, 2004a). Institutions that provide cross-border delivery through online distance education, and that have no local presence in Singapore, are not subject to any form of approval or regulation. A list of the registered onshore programs is available to the public through the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) website (Ministry of Education: Singapore, 2004b). However registration does not imply accreditation and the Ministry currently states that:

*The Ministry of Education does not have a list of accredited overseas universities. There is no central authority in Singapore that assesses or grants recognition for degrees obtained from overseas universities.* (Ministry of Education: Singapore, 2004a)

Prospective students of offshore and external programmes are advised by the MOE to contact embassies and high commissions in order to ensure that the overseas university is ‘a bona fide establishment’. They are also encouraged to ensure that the conferred degree will be recognised by the respective Singaporean professional bodies (e.g. for engineering, accountancy, medicine), which are statutory organisations gazetted under relevant acts of parliament. Thus the government is able to selectively recognise foreign programs in order to regulate the supply of graduates in particular fields (Ziguras, 2001b; AEI International Education Network, 2002).

As a result of the profusion of external degrees available in Singapore, private employers are also starting to distinguish between delivery modes. Local programmes are highly regarded, as they are believed to have high academic standards and to be contextually appropriate (Davie, 2003c). In the case of offshore programmes brokered in Singapore, completing the final year overseas is considered superior to an all-at-home programme (The Straits Times, 2001e). Full time external degrees are preferred, as are unsurprisingly, those from a conferring institution that is well known. A low level of preparedness by Singaporeans to enrol in totally online programs is ascribed to both traditional teacher-centred pedagogical preferences and the negative attitudes of employers toward such programmes (Lee, 2002; Munro-Smith, 2002; Chung and Ellis,
2003). Also of concern to those considering overseas study are the doubts that have been raised in the press about the admission and examination standards of distance and external programs. This perception is reinforced by recurrent newspaper reporting of the problems besetting overseas universities (e.g. internet scams selling fake degrees, ‘marks for fees’ charges, cheating etc. (The Straits Times, 2001d, c, b, a, f, 2002). Essentially, as the profusion of external degree options grows, so does the level of stigmatisation associated with them.

Evidently there is an immediate need for regulation of the third tier tertiary sector in Singapore. In the past, calls for regulation have been met with relatively weak arguments about the difficulty of regulating so many providers and the suggestion that the employer should be allowed to make the final appraisal of qualifications. This response seems somewhat unfair given that the public service is such a large employer and yet does not make its university/qualification-appraisal list (if it exists) publicly available. However, given that the graduates of overseas and external programs have been considered incidental to Singapore’s planned human capital needs, it is perhaps unsurprising that this uncharacteristically laissez-faire attitude has been perpetuated. Whilst the government has seemingly been unmotivated by the possibility of overseas universities cheating Singaporeans, since it has set its sights on developing a transnational education industry, it has finally accepted the need to put in place strengthened quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that third tier universities (which have a total enrolment of more than one hundred thousand local and overseas students) are of appropriate quality (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2001; Lee and Gopinathan, 2003; Standards Productivity and Innovation Board, 2003a). In March 2003 the government announced a ‘public trust mark’ accreditation scheme, to be called the ‘Singapore Quality Class for Private Education Organisations’. Whilst the scheme is voluntary, the government hopes that accreditation and the resulting benefits will encourage Singapore-based private education organisations to participate. Assessment standards and processes will be very similar to conventional forms of academic accreditation including a review of teaching effectiveness, transparency of information to students, content delivery, and the recruitment and development of instructors and standards of disclosure for business processes (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2002; Standards Productivity and Innovation Board, 2003b, a). The establishment of this accreditation system fills another gap on the road to Singapore’s establishment as a provider of transnational education.
Singapore as a purchaser and provider of transnational education

During the ten years from 1990 to 2000 the proportion of adult resident Singaporeans with secondary or higher qualifications rose from thirty-seven to fifty-five percent, whilst the percentage of university graduates rose from four percent to twelve percent (Statistics Singapore, 2000; Yeo, 2001). More than twenty-one thousand individuals were enrolled in external (onshore) degree programmes as against thirty-seven and a half thousand in local universities. However enrolment in external programmes, particularly business and information technology subjects, is increasing more rapidly than in local universities (Yeo, 2001). In response to this strong demand, one hundred and thirty-three foreign universities and other organisations offered degree programmes in Singapore at the time of writing.

Whilst some observers are beginning to report that the Singaporean education market is approaching saturation level (e.g. The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2003a, b), others take the view that the market is showing no sign of weakening (Garrett and Verbik, 2003). It can be difficult to get an accurate picture of the extent of the international student program in Singapore due to an apparent lack of record keeping, particularly in relation to students enrolled in offshore programs (Low, 1997; Sanderson, 2002). However the Straits Times has reported that ‘commercial schools running these programs estimate the figure to be between ten and twenty thousand’ (Davie, 1999:64-65).

Singaporeans tend to base their choice of external degrees on a range of factors. A high level of importance is placed on communal values, consequently they are very likely to look for guidance from friends and relatives (Simpson and Fam, 2000; Milton-Smith, 2001; Nirmala, 2002; Gray et al., 2003). This was supported by the Senior Manager of IDP whom I interviewed for this research, who said:

I would say eighty percent of the time [friends influence the decision]...it’s because ‘my friend went over there, is going there or is there already’. So that’s how things happen, there is safety is in numbers and that reflects the Singaporean mentality.... (70:1:369-374)

In 2001 Milton-Smith found that other influencing factors in the South East Asian market, in rank order, included the university’s reputation, level of affordability, closeness to home, perceived safety and employer recognition. By 2003, Gray et al. (2003:7) had found that the internet and print media were the most important additional sources of
information, whilst ‘the primary motivation for students is the prospect that a degree from the chosen university provides better career prospects…and opens the possibility of employment in the West’.

Because of the unregulated market, the resulting ‘buyer beware’ mentality and the constant press reports of negative overseas educational experiences, the reputations of provider nations are an important factor in the selection process. In the case of Australia, Milton-Smith (2001) found that for Singaporeans the image conveyed was mixed and confusing. Australia was seen as providing a ‘sporty, easy-going and excellent quality of life’, however was also perceived to be ‘unrefined, insensitive and complacent’ (2001:5). Milton-Smith demonstrated that the Singaporean media does not project an image of a country with first-class university sector and a rich and diverse cultural life, indeed Singaporean focus group discussions ‘quickly reverted to natural disasters, Pauline Hanson, horrible crimes, racism, boat people and visa problems’ (Milton-Smith, 2001:1). Indeed whist I was in Singapore, a Straits Times article reported that the majority of Asian students interviewed said they thought Australians were ‘uncultured, lazy and anti-Asian’ (Fletcher, 2000). Thus, in relation to Australia as a provider of educational services to Singapore, at the time of this research it was evident that:

- Degree-awarding powers are progressively being given to onshore Singaporean colleges (Wong, 2003);
- Singapore views Australian distance education provided onshore in Singapore as ‘third tier’, which - whilst it may be harnessed to attract international students to Singapore in the medium term - in the long term is likely to be phased out as Singaporean colleges build internal capability;
- ‘Third tier’ universities in Singapore are intended to attract Singaporean students who currently travel overseas to gain a degree;
- Employers in Singapore regard prestigious onshore universities as preferable to ‘distance education’, which is becoming more stigmatised as options increase.
- A fourth University that will directly target Australia’s offshore market (mature-aged, part time, vocational upgrading) was scheduled to open in Singapore. During the later stages of writing up this thesis, it became evident that SIM would be given university status and take on that role.
- The University of New South Wales has accepted an invitation by the Singaporean Government to establish a permanent campus in Singapore, with the
intent of attracting 70% of cohort from around the region, and 30% from Singapore. Also of interest is the fact that Warrick University (UK) turned down a similar offer due to concerns about academic freedom in Singapore in October 2005 (Burton, 2005).

These factors point to the likelihood that in the not too distant future, not only might the hitherto significant numbers of Singaporean enrolments on which many Australian programs have relied continue to fall, but Singapore is likely to emerge as a significant competitor in the transnational education market (Sanderson, 2002). Indeed Singapore has been overtly looking to Australia’s success as an incentive model (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2001; Nirmala, 2002). Garrett and Verbik (2003) propose that this is to be expected when countries that rapidly reach developed status have the funds to support an adequate domestic higher education sector. Therefore it should come as no surprise that, in 2001/2002 the Singaporean Ministry of Trade and Industry issued two policy papers on the topic of developing and facilitating the growth of the education industry (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2001, 2002). The papers outline developments in the global education industry, the potential for its development in Singapore and recommend strategies and processes on how to establish transnational education as a major business for Singapore.

In Singapore, trends in transnational education are emerging that have never played out on the world stage before. As Garrett and Verbik (2003) postulate, this notion of transformation into a regional education hub may form a predictable intermediate step between majority import of transnational education and majority export: raising a country’s profile whilst maintaining foreign associations. From Australia’s perspective it may be that the erosion of its Singaporean market base is less of a concern because China is simultaneously emerging as a seemingly bottomless source of overseas students. However Singapore should not be underestimated as a serious competitor. It has the foundations of a first rate transnational program in place, particularly because it has perfected the art of learning from, and adapting, the experiences of other countries. Singapore’s existing regional links, its cultural similarity in ASEAN, and its bilingual policy should be advantageous in the lucrative Asian education market where China and India in particular have massive higher education capacity shortfalls (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2002).

It was not that long ago that Singapore’s leaders denounced ‘Western’ education (in particular American) models as not being of a universal standard, (e.g. Lee Kuan Yew’s
statement that; ‘...a sense of cultural supremacy is difficult to accept...American principles and theories have not yet proven successful in East Asia’ (Lee Kuan Yew in 'Global Viewpoint' September 1995, as cited by Kwang et al., 1998:206). Singapore is not alone in its anxiety about Western educational imperialism. Therefore, its inherent ability to provide more culturally appropriate programmes could further maximise its ability to challenge ‘Western’ providers. Additionally, its proven ability to inject large sums of money into education infrastructure, its preparedness to attract and maximise the skills of ‘foreign talent’, its policy of collaborative investment and learning from world-class universities and the mutually beneficial arrangements brought about through exchange of staff and skills transfer (e.g. SMU and Wharton) stands in contrast to most of the purely financial arrangements that tend to exist in Australian universities' twinning arrangements.

**Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has discussed a range of influences that have impacts on Singapore as a nation and the participants of this research as individuals. It has revealed a multi-faceted country that, whilst currently relying on foreign providers of higher education, is likely to become a significant competitor to Australia in the next decade. The chapter has revealed a country that makes astute and enterprising decisions in its global interactions, and in doing so provides quite a few puzzles to the external observer. We have seen that, despite seemingly overwhelming odds at Federation, Singaporeans have met global challenges and emerged as the success story of the region. The country's capacity to adopt and adapt knowledge, practices, and values from culturally dissimilar milieus is perhaps nowhere more clearly reflected than in its reputation as a dynamic and successful meeting point of ‘East’ and ‘West’. The chapter has also shown that Singapore is a country that is diverse and unequal in terms of its racial, ethnic and cultural composition and its ever more obvious class structures: a country where individuals are used to being pawns in the state’s pursuit of economic success and to having the majority of their major life decisions strongly influenced by a long term, essentially unopposed, government. In this environment of economic pre-eminence and relative internal stability, one of Singapore’s newest challenges will be to transform itself into the creative innovative society which the government now realises it must be, to face the near future. This could be a significant challenge based on an education system that rejects those who do not fit the predetermined mould at a very early age. Perhaps these ‘educational rejects’ may be exactly the creative types that the government seeks. The individuals who are the subjects of this research are adults who have been socialised in this system and who despite the significant odds against them have defied their
predetermined lot in life and made the sacrifices required to gain an undergraduate degree as mature aged students. For that they are to be greatly admired.
Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

The selection and implementation of a methodology for the research are described in this chapter. First a rationale behind the selection of the methodology is justified. The chapter then addresses some of the key issues that require consideration in analysis of the selected methodology. Discussion of the application of relevant methods then ensues followed by reflections on dilemmas considered and addressed during the research.

Rationale for selection of interpretive methodology

This study set out to describe an international undergraduate program from the perspective of the participants and to extrapolate from those experiences recommendations for further program development and enrichment. A central consideration was the impact of cultural phenomena. My original supposition was that cultural phenomena would have a profound impact on the participants’ experiences of the program, and that the culture-based origin of these interactions would substantially be unrecognised. Consequently, the chosen research methodology had to be capable of describing and interpreting frequently intangible, sometimes sensitive, and always human, agency. This research environment necessitated the selection of an appropriately sensitive and flexible methodology. The proposed research was therefore informed by methodological recommendations from the fields of anthropology, sociology and psychology; the nature of cross-cultural research being multidisciplinary (Evans, 1993; Clarke, 1997).

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973:3)

Geertz’s quotation suggests the application of an interpretive approach to the analysis of cultural phenomena. Central aspects of this study, including the multiple realities found in any multicultural setting, the focus on human interactions and the period of immersion in a foreign culture, were ideally suited to the epistemology of qualitative, specifically ethnographic, approaches (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Cassell and Symon, 1994). In contrast, positivist research methods would have been an inappropriate choice due to their deductive characteristics and inherent foundation on unsurfaced assumptions about relationships. I aimed to enter the field in a state of open-mindedness in order to avoid potentially ethnocentric assumptions about what would transpire. In support of this
approach, Simon (1986:53) recommends that the ethnographic researcher: ‘aspires to a kind of naïveté that prevents imposing frameworks that could limit the data or structure of the findings’. Although such an approach may initially appear theoretically ungrounded, it is supported by exponents of the ethnographic tradition and ethnographic evaluation (see Goldberg, 1984; Fetterman, 1989). Indeed Simon (1986) reports that in an ethnographic study the researcher cannot even assume to know what questions to ask or what sample to define until he or she enters the community. Insights must be allowed to generate new or unsuspected configurations and, in fact, the ethnographer typically generates more hypotheses than concrete findings (Pitman and Dobbert, 1986; Fetterman, 1989). Thus the literature makes it clear that a quantitative and/or positivist approach - potentially based on initial assumptions about what was occurring in the program - would be an inappropriate choice for this study, in which an open-minded, non-judgemental interpretation is methodologically appropriate.

**Elements of ethnography**

As stated above, I believed that cultural phenomena would be having an impact on the BET program, however I wanted to explore and thereby learn more about the role of culture in interactions within the program. Fetterman’s words, as quoted below, indicate that an ethnographic process was in perfect accord with my methodological requirements:

> The typical model for ethnographic research is based on a phenomenologically oriented paradigm, which embraces a multicultural perspective because it accepts multiple realities. (Fetterman, 1989:15)

However at this juncture it is noteworthy that it could be argued that one should not claim to be conducting ethnography unless a range of purist ethnographic research methods is employed (Wolcott, 1984; Pitman and Dobbert, 1986). Whilst I did not set out to be referred to as ‘an ethnographer’, the methods and outcomes of this research nevertheless fulfill a good number of the prescribed conditions for ethnographic research, as described in the following paragraphs:

**Lengthy immersion in a foreign culture**

The foremost requisite for ethnography is for the ethnographer to spend a relatively long period of time in the field in a foreign culture (e.g., Malinowski, as cited by Simon, 1986; Fetterman, 1989). This immersion enables field workers to internalise - rather than superficially observe - patterns of belief, fears, expectations, dominant ideas, values and behaviours of the people under study. Correspondingly, over-internalisation (or ‘going
native’), due to cultural immersion and the resulting acculturation of the researcher, is reported to be one of the potential risk factors leading to bias in ethnography (see page 92 for further discussion of this issue).

This study offered the opportunity for immersion in the two primary cultures that influenced the program; the lecturers and the students. I was familiar with the lecturers because I was a student (and later a sessional lecturer) in the same faculty. Whilst this cultural immersion may be less obvious than my later immersion in Singapore; the individualist and relatively autonomous academic work culture of the lecturer group was quite new and foreign to me.

Probably more typically ethnographic is the six-month fieldwork period during which I lived in Singapore. My status as an exchange student solved a lot of practical problems. For example, it provided access to a student visa, which allowed me to stay for longer than the one-month tourist visa allowed. It also gave me access to a university library and related facilities. More importantly, however, I was provided with a fieldwork supervisor whose support and ability to provide cultural interpretation were invaluable.

For the first few weeks of my fieldwork I lived on campus at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. However the NTU campus was a long distance from the Singapore Institute of Management where the BET program was being taught, and it was difficult to gain access to via public transport after conducting interviews late at night. Therefore my fieldwork supervisor organised for me to move to a flat in a Housing Development Board estate; the type of high-rise accommodation inhabited by at least eighty-six percent of the Singaporean population (Ministry of Information Communications and the Arts Singapore, 2002:148). This arrangement was more practical in terms of commuting to interviews and classes.

This change of accommodation facilitated a rapid increase in my understanding of Singaporean culture. Daily challenges included shopping; sleeping in the noisy, high-density environment; hanging laundry on poles out the kitchen window; learning to enjoy the sharp Singaporean wit; and communicating with my immediate neighbours whose language was a mixture of Hokkien, Cantonese, Mandarin, and the local patois (‘Singlish’). Less frequent but equally educative experiences included waking to the gongs and smoke of Taoist funerals on the flats’ ‘void deck’; working out the purpose of the bells rung by the ‘kurung guni’ man (an itinerant ‘rag and bone’ man) as he went floor to floor; and observing what Chinese ‘loan sharks’ do when somebody on the floor
defaults on their loan (public shame through accusatory graffiti). The preceding is a small illustrative selection of the experiences I had while living in the community and exclude those facilitated by my developing relationships with the student respondents (which are described in chapter seven). As a result of my living arrangements, my cultural assimilation increased and my culture shock reciprocally decreased. Living as a local (rather than in an isolated university or an 'expatriate ghetto') also seemed to provide a greater level of credibility with respondents.

In summary, therefore, throughout my fieldwork I was immersed in two ‘foreign’ cultures: that of the university lecturers and that of the Singaporean students. I continued to develop my understanding of these cultures throughout the study. On reflection I agree with the predominant view that such a period of immersion is invaluable and probably imperative in any attempt to gain an insider’s perspective in a foreign culture.

**The art of description**

The description, interpretation and analysis of the routine daily lives of people in intact cultural scenes is central to ethnographic research. In representing the data to the reader, two important characteristics of the ethnographic method are utilised: ‘thick description’ and verbatim quotations (LeCompte and Goetz, 1984; Simon, 1986; Fetterman, 1989). In employing these characteristics, the study aims for holism: to understand as much as possible about the subcultures within the program under study. Whilst some would argue that ethnography should consider all conceivable influences (Simon, 1986:58), others remind the ethnographer that it is necessary, and probably only possible, to gather enough data to describe the culture and say something significant about it (Fetterman, 1989). Indeed Simon (1986) asserts that ethnography is never complete but forms only one part of a collection. This study therefore describes the cultural implications of one international program (out of the many being conducted at any one time) in the hope of adding to an amalgamation of knowledge, from which generalisations can eventually be built.

**Emic and etic perspectives**

The qualitative research literature concurs with the proposition that ethnography should provide the reader with the emic viewpoint: that is, the perspective of the insider. Emic perspectives are culture-specific, whilst etic perspectives refer to: ‘universal or pan-cultural truths or principles’ (Matsumoto, 2000:35). The terms emic and etic originated in linguistics: etic from the word phonetics (aspects of language and verbal behaviours that
are common across cultures), and emic from phonemics, which are aspects of language that are specific to a particular culture and language (ibid, 2000). The multi-disciplinary nature of cross-cultural studies means that other words are also used to illustrate these concepts; for example ‘universality’ versus ‘cultural relativity’ (ibid, 2000). In this research I have chosen to use the words ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ because they tend to be employed consistently across disciplines (e.g. psychology, anthropology, linguistics) and, as previously stated, cross-cultural research does not reside in any one discipline.

Terminology aside, as Matsumoto (2000) highlights, emic and etic paradigms are important because they have an impact on what we perceive to be true in a given situation. The ethnographic researcher must be mindful of the risks inherent in an ethnocentric assessment of what constitutes a ‘truth’. Truth, like culture, is not absolute and can be relative depending on one’s perspective. This is reflected in the methodological imperative which specifies that perspective is considered instrumental to understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviours (Fetterman, 1984b; LeCompte and Goetz, 1984; Simon, 1986; Fetterman, 1989; Matsumoto, 2000). In adopting a perspective, Matsumoto (2000:37) warns of a tension between emic and etic research that parallels the tension between culture and individual behaviour. He concludes that etics and emics can coexist; and therefore, our understanding of cultures can be improved if we: ‘avoid the tendency to compartmentalize’. Fetterman also proposes the employment of both perspectives when he advises that:

_Most ethnographers start with an emic perspective, then try to make sense of what they have collected in both the emic and their own perspective._

*(Fetterman, 1989:32)*

He concludes that an outsider’s point of view is required to form a complete picture, especially where the emic and the etic are in conflict. Bhawuk and Traindis et al. (1996) concur with Fetterman by proposing that emic descriptions reveal ‘the native’s point of view’ whereas etic research focuses on the cross-cultural researcher’s point of view. They consider that emics are essential for understanding a culture whilst etics are theoretical concepts that allow generalisations about relationships among variables across cultures. This research therefore follows the prevailing recommendations from the field and consequently employs emic research methodologies to provide the reader with the insider’s perspective, followed by the etic application of theories in analysis of the data.

Although this methodological conclusion may appear clear-cut, when attempting to apply it in reality I was constantly aware of the complex plurality at all levels of data collection.
and analysis. Not only is the compartmentalisation of perspectives as emic or etic problematic but, of course, there is always more than one insider group whose perspective is being represented. To illustrate: whilst the lecturer group and the student group were the main units of analysis in this study, a description of the Singapore Institute of Management and ‘The University’ perspectives provided additional insight and, importantly, facilitated analysis of whose values the program supported and whose were neglected (LeCompte and Goetz, 1984, citing Krathwol 1980, and Suchman 1967). Fetterman (1989) holds that this separation of surface perceptions from deeper analysis is crucial to an understanding of why people think and act in different ways.

In representing other people’s perspectives, I needed to remain aware of the underlying structures within the program’s sub-cultures and the desirability of representing and juxtaposing the viewpoints of sub-cultural groups. Of course the members of the subcultures within this study had differing attitudes about the surface level of their systems, but as would be expected, they also shared common beliefs (Fetterman, 1989; Evans, 1993). For instance, subcultures within the student cohort had differing responses to elements of the program (e.g. a particular lecturer’s style), however they found common ground in regard to other aspects (e.g. the value of the program). Fetterman (1989) advises that the participant who later becomes a reader need not agree with the ethnographer’s analysis but should recognise the culture from the description.

Ethnographic evaluation – a contradiction in terms?

Whilst an ethnographic methodology was entirely appropriate for this study, at first I was resistant to the notion of superimposing an evaluative element. I had approached the study with the frequently recommended, but also contested, mindset that an ethnographic description was necessarily non-judgemental. However, once analysis of the emic evolved into etic interpretation, and beyond that, when it came to the point of making recommendations, I recognised that I was unable to maintain a non-judgemental stance. In short, I found that once an etic perspective was brought to bear, the study metamorphosed into the evaluative domain.

I was concerned about the methodological implications of this as: ‘traditionally ethnographers have preferred to defer judgement rather than render it’ (Wolcott, 1984:179). However I considered that whilst it would be ‘safer’ to remain non-judgemental in the relatively political educational environment, I owed a debt of reciprocity to the respondents that could partially be repaid by ensuring this study made useful
recommendations for program enrichment and development. ‘Fence sitting' seemed weak and inappropriate in a thesis that was investigating a program that most participants agreed could be improved. On reflection, I now consider that once an ethnographic study enters the applied realm, especially where recommendations are made, it almost automatically takes on some of the core elements of evaluation. I was comforted therefore, to find that whilst the label ‘ethnographic evaluator’ suggests a contradiction in terms to some scholars, other respected experts consider that a non-judgemental orientation and evaluation are not mutually exclusive (Wolcott, 1984; Fetterman, 1986). Indeed Wolcott (1984) argues that research participants have become rightly sceptical of researchers who claim to be observing but not evaluating them. Throughout the fieldwork for this research I therefore again followed Fetterman’s (1986:37) recommendations and was honest with participants about the dichotomous aspects of my role: ‘part student trying to understand how the system works and part professional evaluator trying to develop recommendations to improve the program'. I also found this bicultural approach to be useful in gaining access to the emic perspective. Accordingly the ethnographic evaluative methodology utilised herein is summarised by Goldberg as:

An approach to evaluation that frankly sees itself as a kind of social history and points to cultural assumptions guiding that history [which] can help trace the course of events growing out of the interaction of these different planes of human endeavour. (Goldberg, 1984:171)

**Crossing cultures and defining a world view: the researcher’s intellectual autobiography**

The view that social behaviour is partly a product of the dominant values and ideologies of a culture has gained increasing acceptance.... (Leung and Bond, 1989:133)

As Leung and Bond highlight above, we behave according to the ideologies and values that dominate our lives, which frequently leads directly to ethnocentrism. The will to avoid ethnocentric behaviour, a fatal error in ethnographic research, is what fuels the previously mentioned non-judgemental aspirations of ethnographic methods. Despite the best intentions however, we are all products of our own socialisation and cultural beliefs. Consequently, competing cultural concepts make it desirable for researchers to identify our perspective because national, cultural, political, and social prejudices are bound to be reflected in our work. Indeed the inspiration for, and conceptualisation of, a piece of research; the definition of the problem; the epistemology of the chosen theoretical and interpretive paradigms; and selection and analysis of data, are all influenced by the researcher’s cultural perspective (Fetterman, 1989). Consequently:
It is prudent, therefore, to discuss my own intellectual autobiography.

Long before this research was conceptualised, I was well acquainted with Singapore. I have travelled repeatedly for lengthy periods in, and have many long-term friends from, South-East ‘Asian’ countries. Whilst I am of Anglo-Celtic heritage myself, my closest friends are Chinese and Indian Malaysians, Singaporeans, a Mauritian and Southern Indians. I live in an ‘Asian’ enclave in Melbourne and feel very comfortable with ‘Asian’ cultures. Perhaps not surprisingly, I am strongly supportive of multiculturalism in Australia. Moreover, I share with BET students a career in Human Resource Development (HRD). Like many of the students, I came to that field of endeavour almost by accident; my career history leading me from supervisory roles to a twenty year career (at the time of writing) in the training and development of adults in the workplace, specifically corporate and organisational development roles in the public and non-government sectors. The job satisfaction I gained from HRD lead me to undertake tertiary study which eventually brought me to this research and to my current role as a sessional lecturer. However despite the preceding sentences, I am also acutely aware that I am a female Australian from a middle-class Anglo-Celtic background and therefore do not share the ethnic background of the student participants in the study, nor the intellectual or cultural autobiographies of any of the participants (lecturers included). As a result, both my similarities to the respondent groups, and my status as an ‘other’ and an ‘outsider’ were repeatedly manifested during the course of the research.

Those similarities and differences constitute my ‘intellectual autobiography’, which, like culture, is dynamic. I continuously found new differences and developed new commonalities. Both informed the research – the ‘trick’ was to remain cognisant of their existence. The differences served to remind me of my nescience and cultural clumsiness. Reflection on them heightened my awareness of my own culture and alerted me to potential bias and negative judgement. The mutual identity not only increased my comfort and confidence, but more importantly, helped me to access the field and foster communication once I was there.
Outsiders versus insiders: finding common ground and negotiating access

Selected authors from the cross-cultural research literature challenge the once-prevailing notion that an ‘insider’ or indigenous researcher is better able to study their own society through open interaction than an ‘outsider’ (for examples see Zinn, 1979; Evans, 1993; Fortier, 1998; Donohoue-Clyne, 2001). For example, Evans (1993) argues that class differences within societies may create important barriers to communication between indigenous scholars and ordinary people, compared with the more socially neutral outsiders. Zinn (1979) pointedly reminds us – possibly counter-intuitively - that researchers who are insiders can still be exploiters. Further, Minichiello (1995) proposes that insider interviewers may take statements for granted and consequently not probe for further details.

This research supported those authors’ contentions in relation to outsider efficacy: after an initial period of establishing trust relationships, I was able to cross sub-cultural boundaries within the group that an ‘insider’ may not have been allowed to cross. As a consequence, opinions were shared with me in an atmosphere of tolerance for my naivety that also appeared to reflect participants’ perceptions of me as a neutral outsider. This illustrates the contention that research participants frequently have attitudes and habits that they take for granted, and underscores the value of an external observer for whom everything is new, clear and distinct (Simon, 1986; Fetterman, 1989). As a newly arrived observer I was able to ask questions that spurred reflective answers about day-to-day occurrences that had become invisible to the group: for example who sat with whom, the group’s allocation of roles to individuals in the class, and response patterns during different interactions. I subsequently refined observation patterns and interview questions based on my growing understanding of the program’s cultures. This refining of techniques over the long term gave me greater insight into how the students made sense of what was going on (Wolcott, 1984; Fetterman, 1989).

Boundaries between the other and the self are important in any attempt to cross cultures and interpret meaning. The nature of potential boundaries is not always obvious. For example, Fortier (1998:49) was led to question the methodological and epistemological implications of simply assuming that issues such as gender and ethnicity were fixed boundaries. Indeed Fortier (1998) and Silverman (1998) agree that such ‘social categories’ or ‘stable institutions’ are contentious, in that they are: ‘lived differently in different contexts’ (Fortier, 1998:49). Fortier suggests that, rather than assuming how
social categories might impact upon research, we should examine how they are negotiated. From such a perspective it would seem that often common ground can be found amongst the various categories of any culture and its sub-cultures that will facilitate the acceptance of the researcher to into the world of the participant. As Donohoue-Clyne (2001) reflected when citing the work of anthropologist Flores-Meiser (1983:53) the finding of common ground constitutes ‘the ways in which mutual respect [are] established…it is on common ground …no matter how narrow, that humanity is bridged’.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, ethnicity and gender need not be the defining constructs of the researcher's and the participants’ identities, nor the sole ground for granting or refusing access to research sites. During this study I also realised that, even when communicating across the most obvious examples of ‘otherness’, the respondent and I were able to find common ground at some level. In the case of the student respondents I shared the identity of ‘mature-age student’ and ‘HRD practitioner’; in the case of the university staff I was also a (sessional) lecturer, and in the case of the Singapore Institute of Management I had been a purchaser of educational programs at an organisational level. I made use of this concept of ‘common ground’ from the beginning of the research; invitation letters and ‘plain language statements' (Attachments ‘A’-'C') outlined my role as it related to the participant group in question (e.g. ‘fellow mature-age student’ or ‘experienced HRD practitioner’). To sum up, in accordance with the advice of Fortier (1998:53), I negotiated ‘belonging’ and met participants on the ‘terrain of our common status’.

Choosing and accessing a research site

Finding a site that that I could access and that matched my interests was a challenge from the outset of this research. I wanted to extend the knowledge I had gained from my Masters research and I was keen to focus on a program taught in a Confucian heritage and/or ‘Asian’ country, by ‘Westerners’. Initially I had access to a management development program being delivered in Hong Kong. However six months into my PhD period this program underwent significant change, with the result that I was left with no study site. Fortunately the then coordinator of ‘The University’ BET program knew about my predicament and suggested the BET program as an alternative. She was keen to have some external input and very welcoming of an evaluative stance. As the Australian transnational education environment is highly competitive, I considered it quite unlikely that I would find another university prepared to allow me access. Indeed, other universities had been contacted to no avail. Initially I was concerned about researching a
program being run by the same faculty – albeit a different department – of the university in which I was enrolled, as I feared that this option would be perceived as purely convenience-based selection. However time was becoming a factor and the BET program was in fact a perfect match for my interests; being based on HRD (my career field) and run in Singapore. In the end I accepted that I would have to be opportunistic, and realistic. As Fetterman (1989:43) concedes; ‘convenience and luck played a part’.

Once I had selected the BET program as my research site, I then had to proceed through a highly formalised process to gain official permission for access to the site. This included written approval from the Dean of the faculty, and approval from several levels of hierarchy at Singapore Institute of Management (S.I.M). Once approval was granted (at that stage it was approval in principal via email from SIM), approval from the ‘The University’ Human Research Ethics Committee was sought. Of course, any of the former could have had the right of veto, but eventually all approvals were obtained. This process was an anxious time for me and it was not until the week that I was ready to board the plane to Singapore that final written approval from SIM was received.

Whilst waiting and hoping for final approval I began the ‘survey period’ of the fieldwork. This included investigating the structure, function, history and culture of the BET program in Melbourne, through discussion with the program coordinator, and reading available ‘hard copy’ and online documentation, advertising material etc. Once I had permission from ‘The University’ to proceed, I was able to commence data collection with the local lecturers, predicated on the hope that SIM would give approval. I was also able to access limited data about the BET students; however it wasn’t until I reached Singapore that I was able to gain access to sufficient demographic detail to commence the process of student participant selection.

**Sampling**

Because both ethnography and case study methods permit the researcher to collect data from many perspectives, a defined unit of analysis (as advocated in the case study approach) usefully limits the boundaries of the research, and later provides the means for generalising the findings to similar cases by focusing on the same type of unit of analysis (Yin, 1993; Pring, 2000). The ‘unit’ can be anything from a person to an institution or even a collection of institutions (Pring, 2000). However, the research focus exists within a ‘bounded system’ (Stake et al., 1978; Cohen et al., 2000). Whilst I was not employing a case study approach, I found the notion of units of analysis within a system a useful
concept to inform the construction and analysis of the study. Accordingly the main bounded system in this study is the transnational program, and the embedded units of analysis are: the regular lecturers, the students, the Singaporean cultural context, and the Australian Education system’s cultural context. These units of analysis provide a framework for chapters of this thesis. The following paragraphs outline the sampling and methodological procedures against the units of analysis.

**Lecturers**

As the numbers were small, all regular lecturers in the BET program were included in the study. Each lecturer was invited to participate and sent an invitation letter and plain language statement (Attachments ‘A’, ‘C’). The recommendations of Glesne and Peshkin (1992) and a template provided by Krueger (1994) were followed in the development of the Plain Language Statements (Attachments ‘A’, ‘B’). Each lecturer who was contacted agreed to participate. Several individual interviews took place with each lecturer: the first in Melbourne at the commencement of the research; where possible a second interview in Singapore (this eventuated in three cases); and a third in Melbourne towards the conclusion of the research.

Lecturers were encouraging, cooperative and enthusiastic. I owe them a significant debt of gratitude for making time for me in their busy schedules, welcoming me into their classrooms, answering my numerous emails and sharing course notes, thoughts and many non-scheduled conversations. Five lecturers were interviewed: three male and two female. All were of Anglo-Celtic heritage and were at least third generation Australian. The lecturers had all taught classes in Australia comprising significant numbers of students from Asian countries, however only two had taught in Asia prior to the BET program. Before teaching in the program, all five had been to Singapore but only two had stayed for longer than a few days. By the time I first interviewed them however, all five had taught at least one intake of the BET program in Singapore.

**Students**

The BET program had three cohorts at the time of the study. The Cohort One group were alumni, having graduated one year prior to commencement of the research. Cohort Two was approximately two-thirds of the way though the degree, and Cohort Three commenced the program while I was in Singapore.
Admittedly, selection of student participants was not a uniform process, but of course sampling is typically opportunistic in this type of research and ‘typically ethnography uses stratified judgmental sampling rather than a truly randomised selection’ (Fetterman, 1989:99). Table 1 (page 82) illustrates gender and ethnicity demographics across the three BET cohort groups. Forty percent of the student population were interviewed individually. As much as was possible, given the eventualities outlined below, participants were selected to ensure representation of the ethnic groups in Singapore. This was purposeful and eventuated in minority groups being represented. Unfortunately, however, women were under-represented across the three cohort groups. Twenty-eight percent of the total female students were interviewed, compared with fifty percent of the total males. Notably, most of the women who were interviewed were unmarried. Whilst all Singaporeans tend to work long hours, perhaps the combined responsibilities of bringing up children, working and studying made time an even less available commodity for the female participants. Certainly research shows that women still maintain primary responsibility for the traditional child-rearing role in Singaporean culture (Lee and Pow, 1999; Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2000). Of the women who were interviewed, those who were mothers sometimes had their children present during the interview, posing difficulties for them and the tape recorder. Those who were unmarried had significant family responsibilities and several had responsibility for the care of aging and infirm relatives. This made me appreciate even more the time that the women respondents were able to give me.

I began the process of student participant recruitment and selection with a two-pronged approach. All BET participants, past and present, were sent a written invitation to participate in the research (Attachment ‘C’); a plain language statement (attachment ‘B’); and a brief questionnaire that I initially hoped would permit maximum variation sampling. The questionnaire was designed to identify demographic details such as gender, ethnicity, work sector and satisfaction with the BET program (Attachment ‘D’).

Student addresses had been provided from university records, however I checked those details with SIM before sending out letters as I suspected, correctly as it eventuated, that some of the name details had been incorrectly recorded in Melbourne. Naming conventions in Singapore are quite different to the West, for example Indian male names usually include the father’s name prefixed by ‘s/o’ (meaning ‘son of’), whilst Muslim women’s names have a similar convention using the word ‘binte’. Also, like many Westerners, I was initially unable to differentiate between some of the Chinese family names and given names. I considered it very important to have local name variants
correct as an indication of my sensitivity to the culture of the group, the ‘first element of every ethnographic protocol’ (Fetterman, 1989:55). After checking the accuracies of the naming conventions with my fieldwork supervisor the letters were posted. The invitation to participate informed recipients as to how they had been identified and referred them to SIM if there were concerns about the research; however no complaints or questions were forthcoming.

**BET cohort one (alumni)**

The recruitment process with the alumni group was the most formal and the least successful, as this was no longer an intact group and there was no opportunity for it to meet. Twenty-three letters were sent to members of this group and a follow-up letter was sent (Attachment ‘E’) two weeks later. Six responses were received and only three interviews eventuated. Perhaps many had psychologically moved on and no longer identified with the BET program as part of their lives.

As previously stated, Singaporeans tend to work very long hours so this discouraging response, whilst disappointing, I later came to realise was not at all surprising. Indeed, the SIM program coordinator was concerned that I might get very limited cooperation because, she said; ‘Singaporeans are not so used to giving time for research and have not responded well to similar requests in the past’. This reflected a cultural enigma generated by Singaporeans themselves that they are a nation of *kiasu* people. *Kiasu* is a Hokkien and now a ‘Singlish’ word and broadly translates to ‘selfish, afraid of losing’ (Tamney, 1996). I became concerned about the effect of ‘*kiasu*-ness’ on the response rate. In contrast to ‘*kiasu*-ness’, I was relieved to read a Singaporean research paper that showed a response rate in excess of 90% (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2001b). However the Singaporean Government had conducted that research and Singaporean citizens generally comply with government requests. My research did not have the same leverage as illustrated by the disappointing response rate for cohort one. However this was ameliorated by the eventual high response rate for the other two groups. Table 2 (page 82) specifies BET Cohort One interview participants.

**BET cohort two**

All Cohort Two students became participants by default because, unlike the first cohort, I was able to attend classes, introduce the research and myself, and seek students’ permission for the observation process. Students were told that they would shortly receive a letter explaining the research and that if they had any questions or comments
they should let SIM or me know. Many were quite curious and took the opportunity to quiz me during the breaks about what I was doing, however nobody vocalised any objections to the classroom observation.

Those first days were exploratory in nature. This was a crucial time for relationship building; relationships that were to prove instrumental in gaining access and cooperation. As reported in other ethnographic studies, they were marked by tremendous excitement (at least on my part) and elements of confusion (on both parts I am sure). As described by Simon (1986), I was ‘learning to become a member of the group’ and the stakes were high. I was aware that that establishing independence would be crucial to avoid eliminating any potential respondents. In short, I was casting the ‘big net approach’ (Fetterman, 1989:42) or ‘shagging around’ as it is unfortunately termed by LeCompte and Goetz (1984:43). The process consisted of mingling during breaks and after class, talking to as many people as possible and looking for formal and informal powerbrokers. I was honest in my responses to student questions and told them everything I could about what I was doing and why I was doing it. The most common responses I got at this early stage, which I later found to be typically Singaporean, were inquiries about how much it was costing me to undertake the study; how I could afford to take time off work, and what having a PhD would do for my career in Australia. It was much later in the study that respondents were asking me deeper questions about what I was interested in and why (see page 90 for further discussion of this ‘reactivity’). In the early stages participants were as curious about me as I was about them. One respondent’s comment illustrates this:

We are also interested in you. You are quite unusual! Usually Singaporean students go to Australia or England or America to get their degrees. We never meet a Westerner coming here to study. We are equally curious about you. People want to be interviewed to meet you and find out what you are about. (14:2:1-6)

The BET Cohort Two students had received their written invitations by the third night of the first subject attended by me. Again, relatively few of the questionnaires were returned (thirty-three percent were returned across the three groups). I later found that this did not necessarily indicate a lack of intention to participate in the study. Returning documents (despite a follow-up letter, the opportunity to give me the document in class and the provision of a stamped return envelope) simply didn’t seem to be effective. Again, this could be related to the need to build relationships in order to facilitate interaction, or could simply be a result of busy schedules.
The first invitation letter had stated that I wanted to conduct a one-to-one interview and possibly a focus group later in the six-month fieldwork period. Before long I discovered how difficult it was to coordinate a timeslot for an interview with even the most enthusiastic respondents and I soon decided that it would be impossible to facilitate getting everyone together for a focus group. Again, as is common in ethnography, I had to be flexible and adapt my research plans to suit the culture and the preparedness of my intended participants to cooperate. Possibly the need to be available at a set time for a focus group discouraged people from participating, or perhaps it was the requirement to share thoughts in front of others. I had hoped that a focus group would give me access to greater numbers of people in an efficient way, and that the focus group dynamic would provide different data to the individual interviews. However this was not to be and I had to settle for a much larger number of individual interviews than I originally planned, which resulted in a great deal of transcription.

Flexibility was also required on my part when it came to being available for the individual interviews. It was not unusual to receive a phone call from someone saying; ‘I am free in two hours time, can you come tonight’? Of course I took every opportunity possible, ceasing whatever I was doing and sometimes travelling across the island for an interview. Participants made a selfless effort, disproving the kiasu theory in this instance, and gave up their precious family and personal time. It was noticeable that I conducted several interviews during public holidays including Hari Raya, Deepavali, Christmas Eve and Boxing Day, which these participants said was the only free time they had.

Despite the workload involved in conducting and transcribing so many interviews, there were benefits in this eventuality. Certainly the ‘law of diminishing returns’ did apply; I reached a point where a lot of what was said in interviews was fairly repetitious. However I believe the extra interviews were worth the time invested. People were prepared to share views that they may not have shared in the group, particularly in relation to their personal histories. I developed deeper relationships as a result and some of these individual interviews became the catalyst for friendships. Apart from the friendships being genuine and enduring, these relationships provided a greatly increased understanding of the participants’ lives and culture. On reflection, it seems quite likely that these views would not have been as forthcoming in a more superficial relationship formed during a group interview.

Notwithstanding the disappointing response to the written invitation, I acquired sufficient participants through personal contact. Previous research predicts that building
relationships over time will be crucial in Confucian and Malay background settings (Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Bailey and Chen, 1997; Watkins, 2000; Abdullah and Lim, 2001) and it was very evident that some of the more resistant potential participants only offered their participation once we had spoken a few times during classes. I was starting ‘wherever I could get a foot in the door’. Fetterman (1989) talks about introduction from a member of the group being ‘the best ticket’, and states that the introductory member should have credibility with the group. As might be predicted in a high power/distance culture such as Singapore (see chapter five), the class had an elected student ‘president’. This person offered to give me a lift home on the first night of the class. He later became a friend and confidant, and I know that my friendship with him and with a woman who was an informal leader, helped me gain access to some members of the group. I also approached some potential respondents who had initially seemed reluctant and sought their participation. I told them, for example, that I had a representative group of willing Chinese-heritage male participants but I wanted the respondent group to represent the demographics of the class and of Singapore. Therefore I personally approached some of the Indian, Malay and Eurasian heritage respondents and several of the women. Some seemed glad that I wanted to ensure that their sub-group was represented in the study. I also invited the previous class president to an interview, as I wanted to access his unique knowledge and experience.

This ‘encouragement’ recruitment process was very successful. Several of these ‘personally invited’ participants made self-deprecating and modest statements like ‘I don’t think you can learn much from me’ or ‘my opinion is not so interesting’; however they usually did agree to participate. Again, the literature emphasises this humility, which is commonly found in ‘Asian’ cultures, as well as the collectivist orientation. Cultural dimensions (discussed further in chapter five) support a conclusion that collectivist research targets may be socialised to not value their own individual opinions and may question the benefit of their involvement in the research. After all, seekers of ‘expert knowledge’ would surely look to the more experienced or high status respondents – not undergraduate students? A further factor, that in retrospect should have alerted me to this possibility, was the ‘Asian’ socialisation process where from an early age people are discouraged from standing out and being opinionated - for example:

We are just supposed to listen and learn and not waste anybody’s time with what we think. (49:1:84-86)
This contention was further supported during interviews, where subsequent analysis of transcripts shows very frequent use of statements such as: ‘it is only my opinion’; or ‘I am not an expert, but…’; or, most commonly, ‘I may be wrong but…’.

If I were to conduct similar research in the future I would do everything possible to ensure that I personally invited participation because the ‘personal touch’ provided me with the opportunity to stress that I wanted to hear from as many viewpoints as possible and that everyone’s input was very valuable to me, even if it did not seem so to them. Eventually, the combination of these recruitment strategies resulted in nineteen (51%) of the Cohort Two students being interviewed, as outlined in Table 2, page 82.

**BET cohort three**

The recruitment procedure for the third cohort was identical to that for BET Two. I was able to be with this group from its inception and attended their orientation programme. The BET Three group was much smaller than the other groups, so the group dynamic was more intimate. However the response rate was almost the same as the BET Cohort Two – 53% of the group (8 interviews).

**SIM and Singapore**

Both the Divisional Manager and the Manager of Bachelor’s Degree Programs at SIM agreed to be interviewed. Two further invaluable interviews took place in Singapore: one with the Assistant Manager of I.D.P. Australia in Singapore (I.D.P. is a not-for-profit education aid/brokerage organisation established by the Australian Government and managed by a standing committee of the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee) and another with Dr Linda Low, Associate Professor at The National University of Singapore and editor/author of a book chapter (Low, 2001) focusing on the overseas education and HRD market in Singapore.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Gender Breakdown</th>
<th>Cultural Breakdown</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Males in cohort</td>
<td>Male Interviews (% of total Males)</td>
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<td>B.E.T.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intake One</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intake Two</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intake Three</td>
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<td>4 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total across all intakes</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Demographic Analysis of B.E.T. Student Interviews
Data collection methods

To quote Bogdan and Taylor (1975:11): ‘truth is an evasive concept…[it] emerges as not one objective view but rather as a composite picture’. A composite picture was constructed in this study through the use of multiple methods, as single-method studies have been interpreted as subjective and untrustworthy (Hurworth, 1998). Two major data collection methods were employed: interview and observation. The interview is said to be the ethnographer’s most important data gathering technique and was the primary method used in this study. However the interviews were supported by observation and and supplemented, to a lesser degree, by document analysis (Fetterman, 1989; Filmer et al., 1998). These sources of information were compared in order to test the validity of information. For example interviews and observations were compared to assess whether participants’ behaviours matched their espoused values. Triangulation of methods was employed in collaboration with contextualisation and a non-judgemental orientation towards culture with the objective of ‘placing a check on the negative influence of bias’ (Borg and Gall, 1989; Fetterman, 1989).

Interviews

Both formal and informal interview structures were used to maximise the possibility of soliciting different types of information. I entered the field with a series of questions that were devised to guide the interviews and to ensure that explicit research goals were met (Fetterman, 1989; Kvale, 1996; Seale, 1998; Pring, 2000). The questions for both student and lecturer respondents focussed on socialisation, career histories and values in relation to education. Students were also asked about the relevance and application of program content, and the interaction of HRD strategies with Singaporean culture (Attachment ‘F’). Lecturers were further asked about their experiences and preconceptions of teaching in Singapore and the culture of their workplace (Attachment ‘G’). The design of work-based questions asked of lecturers was influenced by the following statement from Cheng (2000:3):

the more school members share the same assumptions and values about the aims, process and management of education, the stronger the behavioural norms and effects of the contextual culture on their daily practice and performance.….

The initial predefined interview questions were intended to identify such shared assumptions, values and norms; however they evolved during the fieldwork period. As expected, data saturation occurred in relation to two of the questions (e.g. about training
methodologies employed in Singapore). Another reason for this evaluation was that, as my knowledge of the program grew, I was able to ask more insightful questions. As suggested by Krueger (1998) in relation to focus groups, when responses are predictable it is foolish not to ask different questions if there is more relevant data to be gained. Because I was engaged in constant reflective learning and analysis, it would have felt robotic to ignore my evolving emic perspective and adhere slavishly to the original interview structure. Early student respondents were interviewed more formally, whilst toward the end of the fieldwork I was more skilled at maintaining a conversation that contained embedded questions. This placed the participant more at ease and felt like natural dialogue, with the result that more stories were shared. This is, no doubt, one reason why informal interviews are most common in ethnographic work (Fetterman, 1989).

I encouraged participants to tell their stories: they were always interesting and relevant to my interests. Whilst life histories are common in anthropological ethnography, career histories are recommended in educational research to ‘aid understanding of how participants respond to settings, events and particular innovations’ (LeCompte and Goetz, 1984:45). I found that a combination of early life history and career history told me a lot about participant’s cultural socialisation, attitudes to education, reactions to the BET program and their future ambitions. This information was best elicited during informal conversation: I did not say ‘tell me all about your life’ at any stage as that would have felt intrusive and was really not related to what I had told participants I was researching. However conversation about choices and probing questions that came from genuine interest sometimes initiated quite intimate discussion about people’s lives and their past or current struggles. These conversations enhanced my ability to perceive patterns that were emerging in the data, and significantly increased my emic understanding.

A typical interview process began with a more formal, semi-structured format, and then progressed to informal conversation. Interviews always took place at a venue and time convenient to the participant. In the case of student interviews this was invariably either their home or a food-related venue. Indeed Singaporean hospitality and pride in local food culture meant that there was quite strong pressure to conduct the interviews in this way. I was concerned at first about conducting interviews in such a public place. However, despite this not being ‘text book’ interviewing practice, it was culturally appropriate and also helped in the many cases where I was a single female meeting a male participant – we met in a public place or at home with his family present, and this ameliorated any gender-related discomfort. It was also a typical Asian business practice that has the goal
of building relationships and establishing trust on neutral territory (Cope and Kalantzis, 1997; Hodgetts and Luthans, 2000; Meriwether Craig, 2001; Adler, 2002). In fact, out of thirty student interviews in total, twenty-three included an invitation to eat; be it at a restaurant, a ‘country club’, hawker centre or a home-cooked meal with the student’s family. We would commonly meet at the venue, conduct the interview and then move on to a more informal discussion over the meal.

Interviews typically lasted for between one to one and a half hours, however the informal discussions over meals lasted considerably longer. I tape recorded the formal component of the interview and took field notes about interesting components of the informal discussion as soon as I got home. In the latter cases, I always asked the person if it would be acceptable to include specific issues that had not been part of the formal interview. Sometimes this was agreed and other times I was asked to maintain confidentiality. As people got to know me some conversations began with ‘this is off the record OK?’ I have, of course, respected these limitations in data reporting and analysis.

All formal interviews were audio taped. I found the benefits of the tape recorder to far outweigh its inconveniences. Its use allowed me to engage in long conversations and concentrate on listening and analysing what was being said without having to think about note taking. Some would argue that tape recorders significantly impact upon the behaviour of the informant (e.g. LeCompte and Goetz, 1984). Nevertheless most of the participants did not seem to be uncomfortable with the taping; indeed many of the students tape-recorded the classes. Occasionally during interviews I was asked to stop the tape recorder during the discussion of a sensitive topic, which I did. If the topic developed into something relevant to the research I would ask if I could turn it back on, the understanding being that what was on tape was ‘on the record’. Within a week of each interview, all interview participants were thanked in writing.

**Observation**

I observed five BET subjects and an orientation program. The subjects were each taught in intensive mode over three nights (Wednesday, Thursday and Monday) from 7:00 pm to 10:00pm, plus one Saturday per subject from 9:00 to 5:00. The table below shows the subjects and cohorts observed. During November, when two classes were running at the same time, I spent half the session in each class. Unfortunately I missed the Saturday of one subject due to illness, however one of the students was good enough to provide me with a tape recording of that day’s class which enabled me to make a partial transcript.
## Class observation schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Title</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>BET Intake group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>6 August 2002</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Thinking</td>
<td>2 – 7 October 2002</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Learning in the Workplace</td>
<td>16 – 21 October 2002</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and Strategy Analysis</td>
<td>20 – 25 November 2002</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Trainee Competence</td>
<td>20-25 November 2002</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Diversity in the Global Workplace</td>
<td>8-13 January 2003</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2 Class Observation Schedule

During observation I intended to take the role of *observer as participant* (Merriam, 1998; Walsh, 1998) for the following reasons:

- Gatekeepers (SIM, ‘The University’ Ethics Committee) were keen for the research to be overt, as was I;
- *Complete participation* would not have been possible as clearly I was not a Singaporean student;
- *Complete observation*, or avoidance of social interaction, was the antithesis to the chosen methodological stance and quite inappropriate in the cultural setting;
- *Participant as observer* would have been possible, and indeed was partially used during the interviews and throughout the immersion period. However taking this role during observation would have made note-taking difficult. Moreover I knew the intended results of some of the small group exercises, so pretending to be a student would have been a potentially distructive charade.

In reality, my position was somewhere between ‘participant as observer’ and ‘observer as participant’, as forecast for cases of overt ethnography by Walsh (1998:223). My observer
activities were known to the group, and any group participation on my part was secondary to the role of information gatherer. During classes I did not usually participate in activities constituting core group membership; in fact I sat at the back of the class wherever possible. However avoiding participation was a fine line to tread, particularly as relationships developed and I became accepted as a member of the group. Generally if I was asked an opinion by the lecturer in the classroom, I would give a considered answer. Lecturers sometimes maximised my status as a ‘more experienced student’ and asked me to give suggestions to the group on topics such as ‘how do you read an academic article’ or ‘how do you manage a bibliography’. The Singaporean lecturer asked me to describe details of an Australian HRD program. On one occasion there were an odd number of students in a group when dyad work was required and the lecturer asked me to participate to make up a pair. I was happy to be reciprocal in these cases (see page 90 for further discussion of role duality), however I was careful to support whatever point I felt the lecturer was trying to make. On another occasion a student, who was involved in some small group work near where I was sitting, covertly asked me the answer to a question. In that situation I declined to answer as I considered that doing so could contaminate the scene and possibly undermine (or be perceived as undermining) the lecturer.

I took notes on a laptop computer and transcribed them during the next day, prior to that evening’s class. This allowed me to reconsider issues on a daily basis. As advised in the methodological literature, my field notes focussed on social organisation, ritual, the physical environment, participant roles and proxemics, interactions, norms and silences (Simon, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Walsh, 1998). Walsh (1998) advises that field notes should be ‘fairly concrete descriptions’ involving meticulous, verbatim written records. However he also concedes that social scenes are inexhaustible; requiring some selection to be made. In this research, interviews with students were conducted after classes; therefore behaviours observed during class could be queried and/or clarified at a later date. Frequently the observations were used to inform my emic understanding of the program prior to the interviews. My field notes were certainly not complete ‘minutes’ of around one hundred hours of class time; they were idiosyncratic and indicative of my preselected interests, (as supported by LeCompte and Goetz, 1984). For example I was careful to record responses to ‘overhead’ questions asked of the whole group by lecturers because I was interested in pedagogical process (even though the response quite often constituted silence from the group), whereas I did not record much of the subject content.
**Textual analysis**

I took advantage of the efficacy of written material to gather information about the program before entering the field and, on return, to keep abreast of the latest developments. University files about the BET program’s inception and development; mission statements and course notes; and websites and on-line classes, helped me to construct a profile of the program and construe its history (Guba, 1981). Publicly available Australian and Singaporean Government policy documents helped me to understand contextually the way in which international education is constructed within political discourse. These issues were discussed at length in the preceding chapters.

Being ‘copied in’ on ongoing BET-related emails from lecturers and the course coordinator helped me to maintain contact with the latest developments in the program. The workplace files and emails included in the final analysis constituted a ‘series of staff decisions grounded in the constraints and contingencies of their work’ (Silverman, 1993). The inclusion and analysis of such written text was, as foretold by Fetterman (1989), a valuable and time-saving form of data collection.

**Analysis and reporting**

Fetterman (1989) refers to the ethnographic fieldworker as a ‘human instrument’ who is analysing data from the outset. This occurs through the constant process of discrimination amongst different data and analysis of their relative worth during the fieldwork phase (Simon, 1986; Fetterman, 1989). This initial ‘active’ analysis was replaced by a more structured process of interpretation and the identification of themes when I returned to Australia and began the analytical phase of the research.

Of course, the data I returned with represented only a fraction of what I heard and saw. The task facing me was to ‘reduce and crystallise a world’ (Fetterman, 1989:34). I was looking for patterns that would help me to produce a reliable report, however I was also alert to identify exceptions to the rule in order to clarify meaning, avoid stereotypical description, and represent the views of all sub-cultures. My understanding developed and theory was generated through working simultaneously on many patterns (Fetterman, 1989).

**Details of the analytical process**

The analytical process included the following steps:
1. Reading all available program documentation (including advertising material), contractual material where available, and relevant government publications in Australia and Singapore;

2. Preparation of complete transcripts of each interview and class observation field notes (approximately 800 pages of single-line-spaced typed transcription);

3. Reading and rereading all transcripts; and

4. Coding all transcripts in QSR Nud*ist to reflect initial and emerging questions and hypotheses.

Reliability and validity

It has been recommended that ethnographic research strategies should seek higher internal validity to correct deficiencies in reports that lack meaning for participants (LeCompte and Goetz, 1984:37). The reader should be able to judge whether the data was used to support the author’s conclusions. Simon (1986) suggests that the data should be allowed to speak for themselves as much as possible. Operationalisation of the data in this study sought to increase internal validity and produce a credible report through the use of ‘thick description’ and verbatim quotations.

Respondent anonymity, data authenticity, and validation

The size of the respondent group made it unrealistic to promise anonymity to some key respondents in this research – for example the BET program coordinator, the SIM management respondents and the manager from IDP. Despite my best efforts, the lecturers are also, no doubt, identifiable to each other in some instances. Nevertheless, both lecturer and student respondents have been rendered anonymous as far as possible. Respondents’ names have not been used in the body of this thesis. Instead, each respondent was allocated a random numerical identifier by a ‘Microsoft Access’ database. Similarly ‘QSR Nud*ist allocated a line number to each strand of text. Therefore, throughout the research where direct quotes from individual interviews or discussions with respondents have been used, the following protocol has been followed: ‘Access Database Number’ followed by interview/correspondence number, followed by ‘QSR Nud*ist’ transcript line number (e.g. [59:1:67-84] meaning: 59 [participant identifier code number], 1 [first interview or letter/email], 67-84 [Nud*ist text strand numbers]). In citations from classroom observations, the protocol is: ‘Class Number followed by Session Number followed by QSR Nud*ist transcript line number (e.g. [A3:134] - meaning class A, night three, line 134). The data are therefore retrievable and documentable, should that
ever be required for audit purposes. However at the time of writing no one other than the researcher had direct access to the data, as promised to participants in the ‘Plain Language Statement’.

**Ethics, quandaries, and limitations**

Ethnographic fieldwork requires constant juggling of the need to pry into others’ lives in order to learn something of importance to the researcher, with respect for participants who ultimately have the most at stake (Fetterman, 1989). I found that the desire to behave ethically during this study constantly challenged my thinking and practice. I was genuine in my desire to be honest with participants, however a degree of manipulation potentially takes place on an almost daily basis in any number of situations, for example:

- During recruitment, when attempting to convince a potential respondent to participate;
- During the shaping of the interview;
  - When using techniques such as attempting to appear to be conducting a casual conversation whilst inserting predetermined questions;
  - When deciding when to take advantage of a golden opportunity or deciding not to pry; and
- During written data collection, when asking people for access to documentation that in any other circumstance would be considered private (e.g. emails).

In struggling with these quandaries, I found it useful to bear in mind the maxim that ‘first and foremost the ethnographer should do no harm’ (Fetterman, 1989:120). Ultimately, only the participants will be able to judge whether I have managed to live up to that exhortation. Some of the challenges I confronted during this research are described in the following paragraphs.

**Role conflict, reciprocity and reactivity**

Reciprocity and role conflict seem to be inextricably intertwined, as responsibilities are invariably conferred by the various roles the researcher plays (for example; observer, interviewer, group member, muse). I was concerned about balancing the need to be rigorous, unbiased, and ethical, with the desire to help - both because the people involved had given me so much of their time and maybe less defensibly – but more humanly - because they had become my friends. The following case exemplifies the dilemma.
Some months after my fieldwork in Singapore was complete I found myself playing the role of mediator between the class president and the course coordinator. The individuals concerned had a difference of opinion about the fact that the coordinator wanted to make subject readings available on-line rather than in hard-copy. Both parties had good intentions: the class president was representing the group of students and the course coordinator thought that he was actually saving the students’ time that they would otherwise have to spend in the library. I also knew that they were both facing significant stresses external to this particular situation. As is often the case, neither of them ‘needed’ the added stress in their lives at that particular time. Possibly as a consequence, the inimical tone of the electronic communication increased on a daily basis.

This was interesting data, and typified a case of escalating miscommunication coupled with nuances of cultural misunderstanding. I was being ‘copied in’ on these emails and both parties sought my advice. Both said that they valued my perspective as someone with understanding of the cross-cultural issues involved. Despite my concerns about contaminating the scene, it felt voyeuristic to simply watch the conflict unfold when I felt that the situation could be very easily solved to everyone’s benefit. My decision was to help in a quasi-consultancy role on the basis that each party knew I was advising the other and the conversations between each individual and I remained confidential. In other words I refrained from putting one person’s case to the other, I simply suggested ‘maybe you should put it like this…’. I was also at pains to reinforce that both parties had valid grounds and good intentions. Eventually the situation was resolved to everyone’s satisfaction. Both parties fed back to me that my suggestions had been acted upon and both continue to communicate and ‘copy me in’ on emails so I assume that my maintenance of confidentiality was respected.

This issue of reciprocity and the need to make ‘on the spot’ ethical decisions are two areas that are fraught with dilemmas for all fieldworkers (Fetterman, 1984a, b; Hurworth, 1998). During this research I found I was quite frequently in a position where I needed to make such decisions with very little time for reflection. My own ‘intellectual autobiography’, the intent to conduct rigorous research and the desire to act appropriately in a foreign culture potentially impacted upon these decisions. My mind was put somewhat at ease by the reflections of more experienced ethnographers such as Fetterman (1989:94) who has said; ‘the ideal [my stress] stance is to observe and record but as a participant the researcher has an ethical obligation to help put out the fire’ and ‘the ethnographer must function as an intermediary between informants’ (1989:214). I followed his advice as best I could, making decisions based on a ‘risk-benefit’ evaluation.
Certainly my presence had an impact on the field, in many small ways the BET class in Singapore, and the lecturer group in Melbourne, were not the same once I departed. Discussion of, and often sensitivity to, the difficulties and opportunities created by the cross-cultural nature of the program seemed to increase during my time in the field. Perhaps my presence researching cross-cultural aspects of the program raised participants’ awareness of those issues. This eventuality (where research subjects realise that they are being watched and alter their behaviour as a result) was first described by Dickson and Roethlisberger (1943) and entitled ‘the Hawthorn effect’. As much as I attempted to remain neutral, I can’t say that I was disappointed by any reactive effect in this instance. If my observations were correct, and cross-cultural awareness increased as a result of my research and presence in the field, then I prematurely achieved one of the aims of the research. However culture-based events continued to transpire which gave me confidence that reactivity had not rendered the study invalid. In the final analysis I believe my decisions were moral and conscious, although they probably would not suit the reader with a preference for a more clinical approach untainted by researcher-participant reciprocity.

‘Going native’

Was I an independent researcher, a member of the student cohort, a fellow lecturer, all of those, or none of them? I have already established that I shared common ground with the respondents. Would it not be human to empathise with them? At times I was confused about the answer to these questions and that was a problem because if I was confused I ran the risk of losing independence. The issue of ‘going native’ is discussed in the research literature and is generally considered to be one of the risks of ethnography. It now seems to me, like reciprocity, to be an issue that is best subjected to a risk-benefit approach and due consideration of cultural sensitivity. To a degree ‘going native’ seems unavoidable, and the concomitant problems that it brings become a matter of degree. After all, one of the prerequisites for ethnographic fieldwork is a lengthy term in a foreign culture and, unless one is totally insensitive to that culture, immersion is bound to bring with it a level of acculturation. Acknowledgement of a level of unconscious integration into the observed culture allows for conscious reintegration into the home culture, which is eventually essential to enable the researcher to withdraw and regain objectivity, to move again from the emic to the etic stance.

Fetterman (1986:38) proposes that researchers must; ‘make constant decisions about how they are going to live their lives, even in the middle of a study’. Whilst at first I was
quite concerned about maintaining an uncontaminated stance, I came to learn that I had to make those decisions and I decided that building relationships was the best way to be allowed access to what people really believed. Whilst I absolutely concede that over-identification with the subject group could be a problem that can cause the researcher to lose objectivity, I also now believe that the issue of ‘going native’ is quite likely culturally relative. In Singapore, I was living in a low-context and collectivist society where people put the group before the individual. In contrast, Australia (and the U.S.A., where much of the ethnographic literature is based) is a high-context and individualist culture where people are relatively happy with superficial relationships (Hall and Hall, 1990). In order to engender trust in Singapore, I came to feel that a deeper level of relationship, and therefore of reciprocity, was required than might be the case at home. I remained conscious of the potential impact of the depth of relationships I was developing. That awareness coupled with the previously mentioned methodological safeguards (e.g. triangulation, checking participant responses to representations of their reality, use of ‘thick description’, and verbatim quotations) represents my best efforts to reduce unfair bias in analysis and reporting.

**Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the methodological decisions taken in this study and has discussed the application of the chosen methods in the case of each of the research participant sub-groups. As discussed in this chapter, the study has been conceptualised in terms of units of analysis within a bounded system. The thesis will consider those units of analysis, before extrapolating to the bounded system of transnational programs being conducted across cultures. The following chapter commences that analysis by reviewing cultural and pedagogical theories and concepts which are relevant to the study.
Chapter Five: Culture and Pedagogy

Introduction

Hawthorn et al. (2004:3) reflect that ‘The impact of globalisation on education [is] becoming an inescapable pedagogical issue’. It is in the context of this growing awareness of the fact that teaching is a cultural activity (Fulop and Marton, 2003:147) that this chapter considers the interplay between culture (as a core aspect of globalisation) and pedagogy.

The Compact Oxford Dictionary of Current English (2002) defines pedagogy as; ‘the profession, science, or theory of teaching’. However, it seems incongruous to separate the act of teaching from its intended outcome: learning. Whilst we can learn without a teacher, the idea of teaching without a learner seems rather pointless. In discussing the work of Watkins and Mortimore (1999), Alexander (2001:540) agrees. She contends that while discussions of pedagogy frequently dwell on the teacher, they should also take the learner into account and, moreover, she observes that ‘[pedagogy] encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it’. Chatterjee (2000:89,90), a female academic of Indian heritage teaching in the USA, further asserts that our:

pedagogical location is challenged by many philosophies...pedagogy becomes a medium through which definitions of identity, race, class and status are translated in the microcosm of classroom cultures.

Thus, in line with these cues, this thesis assumes that pedagogy relies on learning for legitimisation and that the term ‘pedagogy’ includes act and discourse, teacher and learner. Correspondingly pedagogical practice and learners, located within their cultural environments, reciprocally and dynamically influence each other.

This chapter provides a selected review of relevant concepts and research from the disciplines contributing to pedagogical theory (e.g. education and psychology) and cross-cultural theory (e.g. anthropology and psychology). It commences with the analysis of core constructs relevant to intercultural research, then after establishing the necessity for culture-general understanding, compares and analyses several of the better-known foundational cross-cultural theories before progressing to describe the background teaching and learning cultures of the research site and common ‘Western’ responses thereto. Evidence is provided that cross-cultural difference could be expected to have a significant impact on transnational education generally and the BET program in particular.
The East-West dichotomy

It behoves any discussion of ‘Asia’ to consider the origins and complexity of the word. ‘Asia’ is a construction that is widely considered to be enmeshed in ‘endemic Eurocentrism’ (Clarke, 1997:5), and the progenitor of numerous stereotypical and homogenising portrayals (Said, 1979; Evans, 1993; Clarke, 1997; Rizvi, 1997). Furthermore, definitions of ‘Asia’ are neither fixed nor universally agreed upon, whether the term is employed to describe a geographic designation or an undifferentiated ethnic or cultural identity. As Clarke (1997:10) reminds us, terminology such as ‘East’, ‘Orient’, ‘West’ and ‘Asia’ have the potential to become ‘devices for reducing endless complexities and diversities into manageable but falsifying unities’.

Possibly because ‘East’ and ‘West’; ‘Occident’ and ‘Orient’; ‘Asia’ and ‘the rest’ (Mahbubani, 2002) are so obviously bi-polar, they have drawn equally dichotomous reactions both in academic debate about the underpinning philosophies and perceived hegemony of related discourses (e.g. Orientalism, Occidentalism), and in the categorisation of differences between the two supposedly opposite poles (e.g. etic classifications of cultural difference). Many would argue that such classifications are always an oversimplification of the immense diversity found within the region and that ‘without sharp definitions, comparisons based on them are often loose, vague and nearly impossible, if not meaningless’ (Cheng, 2000).

In his classic work ‘Orientalism’, Edward Said (1979) purports that any treatment of the ‘East’ by the ‘West’ is likely to be distorted by the baggage of colonialism. Knight (2000:16) further admonishes those considering anything ‘Asian’ to remember that the characteristics attributed to it and its peoples have ‘frequently been used to enhance European (or more broadly ‘Western’) interests’. Certainly, as we are all aware, stereotypical descriptions of what constitutes ‘Asian’ and ‘Western’ abound – some more benign that others. The ‘West’ is seen (depending on one’s viewpoint and motivation) to be rationalistic, ethical, positivistic and practical, selfish, immoral and hedonistic; whilst ‘Asia’ is perceived variously as inclined toward inward life and intuitive thinking, to be sensual, cunning, exotic, mysterious, inscrutable, mystical and perilous (Evans, 1993; Clarke, 1997). In short:

The assumptions of a basic dichotomy in modes of thought and ways of life has lead to the conception of ‘Asia’ as either a culturally rich civilisation that reflects on the inadequacies of our own, or an alien region of looming threat and impenetrable mystery. (Clarke, 1997:4)
**Conceptualising ‘Asia’**

It is widely agreed that ‘Asia’ is ‘correspondent to no stable reality that exists as a natural fact’ (Said, 1995:331); was originally an artefact of the European imagination and a negative term for that which was not European, (Evans, 1993; Knight, 2000:12). It is nevertheless a term that has long been employed globally and is likely to continue to be used in this way for the foreseeable future.

In reality ‘Asia’ is an extremely diverse region characterised by:

- numerous ethnic and cultural distinctions, both between and within its constituent nations;
- many different languages and dialects;
- a wide variety of religions;
- wealth, ownership and status indicators that have a major influence on people’s life experiences and opportunities;
- generations: as in ‘Western’ societies, the values, attitudes and behaviour of youth in ‘Asia’ differ from the more traditional older generations; and
- acculturation, wherein any of the above groupings might be altered through exposure to globalisation.

Adapted from (Knight, 2000:20-24).

Whilst it is obvious that ‘Asia’ as a region is diverse, some very similar responses to external influences have emerged across the region (Knight, 2000). However, do these emerging similarities mean that ‘Asians’ themselves now accept ‘Asia’ as a descriptor for individuals or the region? Given the insight that ‘Asia’ is an external construct, this is a prudent question for a ‘Westerner’ to ask. The answer is by no means clear and responses are polarised – notably between ‘Asian’ and external commentators.

The literature supports the notion that the average person in ‘Asia’ is much more likely to identify with an ethnic group in the first instance, followed by allegiance to a nationality, before describing themselves as ‘an ‘Asian’ (Knight, 2000; Mahbubani, 2002). For example, and to paraphrase Knight (2000), someone in Singapore might first identify themselves as a person of Southern Indian heritage, identifying with Carnatic and Hindu traditions, then as a Singaporean, and probably only marginally – if at all - as an ‘Asian’. This becomes even more understandable if we consider that the same person might be
young, middle class and educated in the English language, in which case they might reasonably be expected to have more in common with someone from London (for instance) than they would with someone from rural China. Even the category ‘Singaporeans’ is a simplification because of the richness of Singapore’s ‘Asian’ heritages. However, one of the reasons that ‘Asia’ as a term is becoming more accepted in the region is that ‘Asian’ political leaders have used the term to resist perceived ‘Western’ interference in local affairs (Knight, 2000; Mahbubani, 2002). Nevertheless, even at the political level, the reality or otherwise of an ‘Asian-values-based’ coalition throughout the region is contested, as is evident in Burma’s Aung San Suu Kyi’s repudiation of ‘Asian’ values as ‘…a spurious argument used by dictatorial governments in the region…’ (Knight, 2000:26). Notwithstanding the ongoing debate over ‘Asian values’ (which is discussed in greater detail in chapter three), there is evidence that at some level ‘Asia’ does figure in the self-identification of the region, particularly when its people are confronted by outsiders (Knight, 2000). Ultimately, it is probably safest - especially for ‘Westerners’ – and therefore in this thesis - to use the word ‘Asia’ in cognisance of the dangers inherent in naive subscription to the ‘falsifying unities’ to which Clarke refers (1997:3).

**Conceptualising culture, race and ethnicity**

Culture is ‘one of the…most complicated words in the English language’ (Williams, 1976:87) and an enigmatic concept that has an enormity and scope that impacts upon most aspects of our lives (Groeschl and Doherty, 2000; Matsumoto, 2000:19). In academia, ‘cultural studies’ can include anything from fine art appreciation to feminist studies, whereas ‘cross-cultural studies’ include concepts from anthropology, psychology and sociology. Moreover, ‘Capital C’ Culture refers to fine and performing arts; whereas ‘lower-case c’ culture, tends to refer to ‘the way things are done around here’. To further confuse matters, the types of culture are often interpolated (e.g. ‘capital C’ Cultural events can be a component of ‘lower-case c’ culture), and the word ‘culture’ is also interchanged with terms such as ethnicity, nationality and race.

In research with university students in America, cross-cultural psychologist David Matsumoto and colleagues (1997) found that, to the layperson, the label ‘culture’ was used as to describe a group’s expressions, history and beliefs; however ‘race’ was used to identify important cultural differences. Whilst there is considerable disagreement about whether biological or physical characteristics define ‘race’, in this research I will take
Matsumoto's view that 'race is not culture: culture is a learned behaviour...culture is what gives race its meaning' (2000:20-31).

Social scientists tend to prefer to use the term 'ethnicity', rather than 'race' which Tamney (1996) says 'shifts the emphasis from biological similarity to cultural similarity' and which Jayasuriya (1999:4) suggests is easily applied to 'an identifiable social category'. Nevertheless, culture does not share exactly the same meaning as ethnicity and Jayasuriya (1999:4,9) highlights that ethnicity is 'sustained by a process of self ascription and/or ascription by others, especially by the dominant groups in society...and is...situationally determined'. Nationality on the other hand, generally refers to the relatively static notion of a person's country of origin (Matsumoto, 2000:32).

Matsumoto’s (2000:24) definition of culture (below) provides a parsimonious definition of the 'culture' which this research addresses:

\[
\text{[Culture is] a dynamic system of rules, explicit and implicit, established by groups in order to ensure their survival, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours, shared by a group but harboured differently by each specific unit within the group, communicated across generations, relatively stable but with the potential to change across time.}
\]

The foundational role of intercultural theory

It is broadly agreed that the development of intercultural expertise is central to ethnographic research and is founded on an awareness of one’s own cultural values, beliefs and behaviours (Hofstede, 1994a). Thereafter, an awareness of culture-based classification enables individuals to move beyond superficial ‘do’s and don'ts' to provide a ‘meaningful framework to categorise their intercultural experiences’ (Bhawuk and Triandis, 1996:22). An analysis and discussion of selected well-known culture-based classifications that are particularly relevant to this research therefore follows.

Culture general (ecological) classifications

**Country level dimensions and the responses of individuals**

The following sections review selected cultural-general dimensions (usually referred to as ‘ecological' (Carr, 2004:22) that will be referred to in a later analysis of respondent behaviours. In consideration of such models, most of the literature warns that it is important to avoid the unfounded stereotypical ascriptions that can occur when nationality is interpreted as culture. Such misinterpretation is problematic not only because it is statistically incorrect, but because it ignores the surety of an individual’s belonging to
multiple sub-cultures (Matsumoto, 2000:32), and also the capacity for individuals to manifest values through roles and behaviours to differing degrees on a situational basis (Yamada and Singelis, 1999; Carr, 2004:29). This is an important issue because the majority of ecological research has been undertaken at the national rather than the individual level and therefore not all individuals within a group will ascribe to any given dimension, however those values and behaviours can be expected to be found more often statistically within the same society (Triandis et al., 1985; Leung and Bond, 1989; Hofstede, 1994a:112; Kim et al., 1994:5-6; Bhawuk and Triandis, 1996). In short, as Matsumoto (2000:32) argues ‘one’s passport does not necessarily determine one’s cultural values’. Interpretation of this research invites similar considerations because the respondents belong to various and strongly differentiated ethnic groups as well as any number of sociological sub-groups (e.g. gender, socio-economic group etc). Consequently, when this research refers to cultural dimensions in an analysis of its findings, it does so cognisant of the fact that societies and individuals are interactive, rather than mutually exclusive, entities.

**Ecological cultural dimensions: Hofstede and successors**

Many would agree that the ecological cultural classifications put forward by Geert Hofstede (1980) are foundational in intercultural theory (Kim et al., 1994; Sondergaard, 1994; Bhawuk and Triandis, 1996; Bond, 1996a; Yum, 1996; Fernandez et al., 1997). Indeed Sondergaard (1994:448) found that Hofstede’s typology was subjected to one thousand citations and sixty replications in the thirteen years following its publication; thus it had become ‘a paradigm that was taken for granted’. Hofstede’s (1980) research was conducted using data from the IBM Company’s international database of employee attitude surveys. More than 116,000 questionnaires in twenty different languages, from seventy-two countries, were analysed (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). IBM’s questionnaire focussed on employees’ basic values and beliefs. The original studies revealed that cultures differed along four dimensions. There have (unsurprisingly given its wide distribution), been several potential problems identified in Hofstede’s work (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Sondergaard, 1994; Fernandez et al., 1997; Nicholson and Stephina, 1998). These include concerns about whether the dimensions developed were artefacts of the period of analysis, whether the IBM employee group demographic constrained the results, and whether the dimensions may themselves be culture-bound.

Another issue arising from Hofstede’s original work was the exclusion of all countries that at the time were under state socialism (Schwartz, 1994; Smith et al., 1996) – China being
an important example. Hofstede surrogated Singapore and Hong Kong for China in his original work; a factor relevant to this research because the specification of Singapore as a national group that is ‘Chinese’ overlooks the multicultural nature of the country and, despite the Chinese majority in Singapore, has the potential for ‘sub-cultural bias’ (Fernandez et al., 1997). Sub-cultural bias has been identified by other scholars (e.g. (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Schwartz, 1994; Bond, 1996a), and Schwartz, in particular, stresses the need to avoid mixing ethnic samples from the one country when ascribing national cultural dimensions. Nevertheless, it remains noteworthy that Singapore’s distinct cultural groups (e.g. Indian, Malay and Chinese) are clustered closely in Hofstede’s dimensions and are significantly removed from Australian and other ‘Western’ nations (Bond, 1996a).

In response to criticisms of a ‘Western’ bias in his original work, Hofstede later worked with Michael Bond and a group of Chinese-heritage social scientists to test his four dimensions with Chinese-heritage people (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). A survey of Chinese values was developed, and was administered in twenty-two countries on five continents. Three of the dimensions that emerged were found to be similar to Hofstede’s original work, but a new and unique dimension was found. This dimension was originally labelled ‘Confucian Dynamism’, however Hofstede has since labelled it ‘Long-term Orientation’ (Yeh and Lawrence, 1995). The Hofstede/Bond et al. dimensions are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Despite its constraints, Hofstede’s work has been judged rigorous by many of his peers, and has largely been confirmed in replications (Sondergaard, 1994:450-451). Furthermore there are notable overlaps between the Hofstede dimensions and other validated measures (e.g. the Rokeach Value Survey (Hofstede and Bond, 1988:14), as well as parallels with the work of later researchers (again, discussed later in this chapter). Thus, as Bond concludes (1996a:214), the evidence is that Hofstede was ‘tapping into fundamental dimensions of values across countries’.

A further explication of cultural difference comes from Trompenaars’ (1993) ten-year study in which 55 countries were represented by 30,000 managers from 30 multinational corporations. Trompenaars describes seven fundamental dimensions of (national) culture, which are not substantially different from Hofstede’s but which offer a differentiated view (Carr, 2004:24). The first five of Trompenaars’ factors describe relationships with other people, whilst the remaining two are ‘orientation in time’ (which is also identified by Hall: see page 112), and ‘attitudes towards the environment’. Two of
Trompenaars’ dimensions suggest differences between ‘Western’ and ‘Asian’ cultures that are additional to those described by Hofstede and are also discussed later in this chapter.

As with Hofstede’s work, Trompenaars’ methodology and findings have been questioned. Indeed Hofstede (1996) argues that only two dimensions of Trompenaars’ work can be confirmed statistically (individualism/achievement and universalism/diffuse); that his theory is not supported by the database, that the instrument used suffers from a lack of content validity, and he ultimately accuses Trompenaars of a ‘fast food approach to intercultural diversity’.

More recently, during the course of this research, findings of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (the GLOBE study) research program have been published (House and Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program, 2004). This study (entitled; ‘Culture, Leadership and Organizations’) reports the findings of a team of 170 scholars in 62 cultures, from surveys of more than 17,000 middle managers in 951 organisations. The GLOBE scholars set out to conceptualise theories of the relationship between culture and societal, organisational and leadership effectiveness. The program identified nine major attributes of cultures and six major global leadership behaviours. The GLOBE findings are potentially more accurate than previous studies in that they analyse practices (what is happening), as well as values (what is desired).

Thus, a range of models could potentially provide a basis for interpretation of this research. By employing ecological and dimensional models, this thesis does not propose to advocate that any one model is ‘correct’, but rather (to paraphrase (Carr, 2004:26) to ‘adopt a relatively pluralistic attitude toward the models and in awareness of their limitations utilise their essentially social constructivist (sense-making) functions’. Whilst debate between academics such as (but certainly not limited to) Hofstede and Trompenaars illustrates the impossibility of ascribing cultural absolutes, it also continues to sharpen debate and sponsor further learning. Bhawuk and Triandis (1996) conclude that research on the understanding of cultural dimensions continues to evolve, and that despite disagreement, remains a useful reflective aid in the development of intercultural expertise, which is how it will be employed in this thesis.

As Carr (2004:26) suggests, ‘the literature is only just beginning to integrate the different versions of ecological dimensions empirically’, however ‘a little conceptual mapping’
makes it easier to appreciate that the various models are not necessarily contradictory. Such mapping provides a framework for further discussion. Thus the following table, adapted from Carr (2004:24), provides a useful illustration of similar concepts. Because Hofstede’s research has been the catalyst for so many other studies, the following discussion utilises his dimensional terminology. However discussion is supplemented, where relevant, by of the work of other researchers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hofstede</th>
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<td>Power Distance</td>
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<td>Work Dynamism</td>
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<td>Future Orientation</td>
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Table 3: Comparison of cultural dimension theories (Carr, 2004:24)

The national dimensions of cultural behaviour that are most salient to this research: Individualism/Collectivism; Power Distance; Uncertainty Avoidance and Confucian Dynamism/Long Term Orientation, are discussed below.

**Individualism/Collectivism**

The individualism and collectivism constructs constitute one of the most important and long recognised differences in social behaviour (Brislin, 1994; Yum, 1996). However it was Hofstede’s seminal work that drew particular attention to them in recent times (Bhawuk and Triandis, 1996). Hofstede (1994a:51) describes the dimensions thus:

*Individualism pertains to cultures in which the ties between individuals are*
loose…everyone is expected to look after themself and their immediate family. Collectivism, as it’s opposite, pertains to societies in which people…are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout their lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty.

Hui and Triandis (1986) provide support for Hofstede’s contention with further descriptions illustrating a cluster of beliefs and behaviours that could be expected in collectivist societies including:

- concerns about how decisions would affect others;
- sharing of material resources;
- sharing of non material resources such as time, affection or sacrificing of interesting activities for the collective;
- willingness to accept the views of others/ to conform;
- concern about saving face or gaining the approval of the collective;
- belief in the correspondence of one’s own outcomes with the outcomes of others; and
- a feeling of involvement in others lives.

Collectivist values and behaviours are said to be entrenched by the moral political philosophy of Confucianism (discussed further from page 113) (Kim et al., 1994). Underlying these values is the term concern, which encapsulates the preparedness to subordinate individual desires in favour of the group (Lau, 1992; Bhawuk and Triandis, 1996). An understanding of what constitutes the group is essential in understanding collectivism. Hui and Triandis (1986) argue that collectivism is not equivalent to altruism. To illustrate: a study group may or may not constitute an individual’s ‘in-group’, whereas a family almost certainly would. Or, as Hofstede (1994b:xiii) suggests: ‘in a collectivist society, a poor relative can expect to be helped, but not necessarily a poor stranger’.

The much-repeated view of Confucian-heritage cultures as universally collectivist is not undisputed. Lau (1992) correctly argues that cultures that are collectivistic should not be assumed to have no individualistic concerns. He emphasises that Chinese-heritage cultures do have individualistic goals and have individualistic wishes, and proposes that collectivism is a means to fulfill those goals (Lau, 1992). Lau’s hypothesis seems logical given the previous discussion of the problems surrounding ascription of national values to individuals; indeed Triandis et al. (1985) observe that individual differences exist in all cultures. Triandis proposes that people select whether they act ‘individualistically’ or
‘collectivistically’ according to a given situation (Triandis, 1994). He employs the terms ‘allocentrism’ and ‘idiocentrism’ at the individual level:

…the idiocentric selects mostly individualist solutions in collectivist cultures and the allocentrics selects mostly collectivist solutions in individualist cultures…(Triandis, 1994:43)

Accordingly, it is evident that the student participants in the BET classes could, conditionally, be expected to display more collectivist orientations than one might observe in an Australian class. However this would not preclude intensely individual responses (e.g. a person may work with and support a study group whilst at the same time adopting a competitive approach to individual assignments).

On the other hand, Kim et al. (1994:6) assert that individualist societies value privacy and freedom of choice and that status and roles are not predetermined, but defined by achievements. Individualism is considered implicitly ‘Western’, founded on liberalism and ‘reflected in religions, secular and political institutions’ (Kim et al., 1994:19; Tamney, 1996:12). In individualistic cultures, the value of the person exceeds that of any group as such. By way of illustration, Tamney (1996:10) uses the example of the ‘Western’ family, in which each person’s well-being is more important that the status of the group. Again though, just as collectivism does not equate to altruism, individualism does not equate to egoism: ‘rather it is expressed in a respect for each person including the self’ (Tamney, 1996 p.10).

Singaporean society has been described as ‘prototypically collectivist…closest to the pure Hofstede conception of collectivism, high in conservatism and hierarchy and low in autonomy and mastery’ (Schwartz, 1994:111), whilst Australia has a strong individualist orientation. Singapore is also said to be and ‘the least individualistic…plac[ing] much greater importance on the social moral values’ (Lau, 1992:365). Other studies also suggest that Singapore’s major sub-cultural ethnic groups emphasise interdependence of the individual with the collective (Fulop and Marton, 2003). This difference is illustrated in the table below, where the USA, Australia and Britain were ranked first, second and third respectively on individualism whereas Singapore was ranked thirty-ninth out of a potential fifty-three nations (Hofstede, 1994a).
Table 4: Selected Individualism Index (IDV) values (Hofstede, 1994a)

The GLOBE study also utilises the concepts of individualism/collectivism however it differentiates between institutional collectivism and in-group collectivism. The study finds that Singapore is fourth in the world out of a 62 nations on institutional collectivism practices (what does occur) whilst Australia ranks 28th and Singapore is ranked seventeenth for in-group collectivism whilst Australia is 52nd. Thus GLOBE also demonstrates that Singaporeans live in a more 'collectivist' society - both in the workplace and in private life - than Australians.

**Particularism**

One of the dimensions described by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner which has some similar aspects to collectivism is 'particularism', wherein a trustworthy person honours changing circumstances and several perspectives exist relative to each person (Williams and Bent, 1996). In a now famous example that illustrates particularism, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) asked managers from around the world to consider whether they would fabricate the facts (in this case the speed at which the friend was driving) to protect a friend who had been speeding when he hit a pedestrian. More than 90% of managers in Canada, USA, Australia, Sweden, Norway and West Germany said they would not testify falsely – whereas 26% of South Korean managers, 47% of Indonesians; and 48% of Chinese said they would support their friend by providing false testimony. This case illustrates both the importance of the in-group in collectivist cultures and the
relativistic approach to ‘truth’ found in some ‘Asian’ cultures and religions (e.g. human truth is partial, so that one truth does not exclude its opposite).

Thus, in summary, individualism/collectivism and particularism have been strongly differentiated for Singapore and Australia. Because such noticeable differences are predicted, the dimensions are potentially useful lenses through which interpret the data from this study and are frequently referred to in the analysis of data (e.g. in chapter six onwards).

**Power Distance**

Hofstede (1994a:28) specifies Power Distance (PDI) as:

*The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.*

According to Hofstede (1994a:27) PDI scores are about dependence relationships. Thus interdependence between hierarchies would be expected in small Power Distance nations, whereas in large Power Distance nations there would be a wide emotional distance between levels of hierarchy. Hofstede (1994a:28) claims that social classes are visible proof of the existence of societal hierarchy, and that education is one of the main determinants of occupation and thus of social class. In education, the teacher-student relationships mirror parent-child relationships; therefore large PDI situations encourage teacher-centred pedagogies, whereas small PDI encourages learner-centred pedagogies and student initiative. In the workplace, organisations in large PDI nations centralise power structures, status symbols are accepted, superiors and subordinates are ‘existentially unequal’, and manual work has a much lower status (Hofstede, 1994a:35). In contrast, organisations in small PDI nations consider superiors and subordinates existentially equal holders of roles that can and do change regularly, status symbols are considered suspect, there are flat hierarchical structures and managers earn respect through democratic management styles.

The following bar chart illustrates the considerable difference between Singapore and Australia in Hofstede’s PDI. Of note is the fact that Malaysia registered the highest global score in PDI with a score of 104, and Singapore was thirteenth (score 74), double that of Australia at a distant 41st place with a score of 36.
Again, the GLOBE study also identifies Power Distance in cultural dimensions. GLOBE proposes that high power distance rankings are linked to cultures and religions that respect experience and tradition (e.g. Confucian, Islamic and Hindu religions) (House et al., 2004:523). Like Hofstede’s study, GLOBE also shows Singapore ranking higher than Australia on Power Distance, although the gap is not as large as in Hofstede’s study (Singapore ranks 42nd and Australia 53rd out of a potential 62 in terms of ‘practices’ [how society is], whereas in ‘values’ [how society should be] Singapore is ranked 14th whilst Australia is 25th). In other words the GLOBE study posits that Singapore both practices and believes that power should be distributed unequally and that Singaporeans may believe that even greater power distance is desirable. Perhaps counter intuitively (for an Australian), Australia also indicates a desire for greater power distance than is currently practiced.

Clearly the power distance dimension is also highly relevant to this research. The traditionally dependent teacher/student relationship, the role of education as a means for transiting socio-cultural restraints, and the acceptance or rejection of inequality would be expected to cause some discomfort between Singaporean and Australian cultures. Chapters six to eight will explore how that disquiet played out in the BET program.
Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede (1994a:113) defines Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) as: ‘The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations’, and notes that the primary mechanisms which societies use to cope with uncertainty are technology, law, and religion. He further proposes that UAI scores are expressed through nervous stress and anxiety, and a need for predictability and rules. In UAI, anxiety is not about risk or fear – both of which focus on something specific – but relates to reduction of ambiguity (Hofstede, 1994a:116). Consequently, students from strong uncertainty avoidance societies would be expected to enjoy learning situations in which there is one correct answer and where teachers are experts, whereas students in weak uncertainty avoidance societies would be more happy to accept a teacher who says ‘I don’t know’ (Hofstede, 1994a:120).

As can be seen in the following chart, Singapore has the world’s lowest score for Uncertainty Avoidance (8) in Hofstede’s indices, whilst Australia ranks fifty-fifth in the world, with a score of (51).

![Uncertainty Avoidance Chart](chart.png)

Table 6 Selected Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) Values (Hofstede, 1994a)
Based on this finding, one would expect Singaporeans to be very comfortable with ambiguity, have almost no need for written rules, and favour learning situations that are open-ended, with vague objectives, broad assignments, and no timetables (1994a:119). Whilst Singapore and Australia seem to match the remainder of Hofstede’s empirically-based predictions very closely, in the case of UAI nothing could be further from the experience of many researchers (e.g. chapter three), Singaporeans’ own reports, and my experience in the field. Indeed, not many societies are more highly regulated than Singapore, with its compulsory savings schemes, carefully controlled housing allotment, government-sponsored matchmaking etc.; nor more socially engineered via ‘technology, law and religion’. Therefore Singapore as a case in point seems in conflict with the predictions of Hofstede’s UAI dimension.

Later research provides some potential explanations for this apparent quandary. Schramm-Nielson (2000:3), postulates that there is more than one possible interpretation of a given position in Hofstede’s indexes and that reasons for positions must be clarified by looking at context and deeper levels of culture. Schramm-Nielson experienced doubts about the Danish position on Hofstede’s UAI (51\textsuperscript{st} place with a score of 23) and proposes that the fact that Danes had a very low score on UAI should not lead to the conclusion that they can do without structure and that they like to work in uncertain and unpredictable situations. She concludes that the reason for the low Danish score is that ‘they already have a high degree of certainty in life’ and that ‘it is no doubt an expression of their great need for security that they have built a society that provides it’ (2000:10). Schramm-Nielson’s conclusions about Denmark could equally apply to Singapore.

Broadly supporting Hofstede’s dimensions, the GLOBE study defines uncertainty avoidance as:

\begin{quote}
the extent to which members of collectives seek orderliness, consistency, structure, formalised procedures, and laws to cover situations in their daily lives (House et al., 2004:603).
\end{quote}

Two related illustrations from the GLOBE study that are of particular relevance to this thesis are:

1. the proposition that uncertainty avoidance is a key factor in feedback seeking behaviours, and that underlying reasons for this include motivations toward goal achievement, ego protection and enhancing one’s image (House et al., 2004:604); and
2. that short-term feedback is provided through the acceptance and enforcement of standardised decision rules (House et al., 2004:606).

In a noticeable contrast to Hofstede’s findings, the GLOBE study positions Singapore as third in the world in terms of practising uncertainty avoidance, and 46th in terms of the type of uncertainty avoidance that society values. Australia is 19th in practice and 51st in values. In other words, according to the GLOBE study, Singaporeans could be expected to be quite uncomfortable with ambiguity, have a preference for formalised procedures and laws, be keen to protect and enhance their image through active feedback seeking (protection of ‘face’?), and exist in a society that is replete with rules, whilst possibly desiring a less formal, structured lifestyle. My experience in the field and the reports of respondents (related in chapters six to nine) also support Schramm-Nielson’s conclusions and the hypotheses of the GLOBE study, whilst they contradict Hofstede’s predictions on UAI.

Confucian dynamism/long term orientation

As previous outlined, the Confucian Dynamism/Long Term Orientation dimensions to Hofstede’s work emerged from collaboration between Hofstede, a group of Chinese Scholars, and Bond (the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) [CCC]). High Confucian dynamism characterises future oriented principles (persistence, status-ordered relationships, thrift), whereas low Confucian dynamism is more present oriented (steadiness and stability, protection of face, respect for tradition, and reciprocation of greeting, favours and gifts). Yeh and Lawrence (1995:655) propose that there is actually a high correlation between ‘long term oriented Confucian dynamism’ (e.g. persistence, status-ordered relationships and thrift) and individualism because there is a tendency for countries scoring high individualism to score low on Confucian dynamism and vice versa.

As can be seen in the following chart, Singapore and Australia rank eighth and eleventh respectively on Confucian Dynamism (Long Term Orientation). The two countries are closer on this than on the other Hofstede dimensions, however there are fewer countries involved in this measure and the score gap of (48) to (31) is still quite large. From this research we could assume that Singapore would have a future-oriented, dynamic culture in which tenacity and thrift would be important. Given the previously mentioned government economic imperative, this is not an unreasonable expectation. Unlike the previous study, Malaysia (having an Islamic Malay majority) was not included in the CCC study, however it is noteworthy that India scores fairly high on the index (Hofstede,
1994a:168). This partially explains why Hofstede moved to retitle the dimension ‘long
term orientation’, losing the Confucian focus.

Singapore’s Indian populace is well suited to coexisting in a collectivist and even a
Confucian-heritage environment, according to the work of two Indian academics, Sinha
and Tripathi (1994), who profess the view that Indian culture is ‘coexistent’, in that the
boundaries of the self shift constantly. They highlight that this coexistence of
contradictions is reflected in various facets of Indian culture and behaviour, especially in
the enormous breadth of religious beliefs. Accordingly, whilst in Indian religion
individualism is strong, Indian people share emphatically collectivist family orientations

Table 7: Selected Long-term Orientation Values (Hofstede, 1994)
The GLOBE study highlights that future orientation is a construct that is not exclusively
Confucian and can be found in all cultures (House et al., 2004:283). Salient examples
from GLOBE descriptions of Future Orientation beliefs include: the desire for achieving
economic success, having a propensity to save for the future, valuing deferment of
gratification and employment of visionary leadership. This is a particularly important
dimension for this study as Singapore ranks highest in the world in practice of future
orientation (whilst Australia is mid way through the scale), whereas Singapore is ranked
mid way in terms of values and Australia low in values. In other words both countries would seem to be looking forward to less need to be future-oriented, but at the present time Singapore is archetypally so.

**The work of Edward Hall**

The work of Edward Hall (1990) (also later with Mildred Reed Hall) describes a culture-bound ‘silent language’ that exists outside the range of people’s conscious awareness. Hall uses the terms ‘low context’ and ‘high context’ to describe one component of this dynamic. In high-context communication most information is vested in the physical environment or the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. Low-context communication is the opposite: the mass of information is vested in the explicit code. Studies building on Hall’s work have suggested that ‘low context’ cultures tend to also be individualist, whereas ‘high context’ cultures tend to be collectivist; therefore things which are considered self-evident in collectivist cultures must be said explicitly in individualist cultures (Gudykunst et al., 1988; Hofstede, 1994a:60).

Hall also describes cultural differences in chronemics (use of time). His research found that some cultures use time in a ‘monochronic’ manner: where time is perceived as linear schedules take priority, and are treated as sacred and unalterable. ‘Polychronic’ time is characterised by the simultaneous occurrence of many things and by a great involvement with people (Hall and Hall, 1990). Again, there are correlations between these dimensions and individualism/collectivism. Individualistic societies tend to use monochronic time patterns whereas collectivist societies tend to be more polychronic (Hall and Hall, 1990; Hodgetts and Luthans, 2000). Not surprisingly, once again Australia and most ‘Asian’ countries were found to communicate quite differently in Halls’ research.

**The East West dichotomy revisited**

As a result of this overview of culture-general dimensions:

> We know that individuals differ in their values, that values influence behaviour, and that people from different cultures differ on average from people of other cultures in both their values and behaviours (Bond, 1994:74).

The significant correlation and similarities between the dimensions reviewed in the preceding paragraphs tend to reinforce the existence of a basic Asian-Western contrast (Bond, 1996a:223), or ‘philosophical dividing line that separates Western from Eastern thinking’ (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Whilst all nations are experiencing varying rates of modernisation and change, nevertheless fundamental differences exist between reported
and expected culturally-based behaviours. In Singapore, group-centred behaviour, relativity of ‘truth’, respect for education, and an inherent respect for teachers are in contrast to the cultural predispositions identified by ‘Western’ countries. Again a conclusion of the existence of fundamental cross-cultural differences is reminiscent of the work of Bennett (1993b) (chapter two), who considers the denial of cultural difference to be an ‘immature minimization strategy’, and we are lead to the conclusion that these differences go well beyond naive stereotypes.

Thus, it has been revealed on the previous pages that Australia and Singapore could be expected to differ significantly on predictable cultural dimensions. This prediction is reinforced by Hofstede (1986:303) who proposes that teacher/student interaction is: ‘an archetypal human phenomenon…deeply rooted in the culture of society…and that cross cultural learning situations are fundamentally problematic for both parties’. To illustrate this, he cites differences in societal positions and roles of teachers and students, expected patterns of interaction, preferred didactic and pedagogical approaches, amongst a significant list of predictable potential opportunities for cross cultural misunderstanding in transnational classrooms. Therefore, whilst each person within the student and lecturer groups in this research would not be expected to behave according to a modal cultural typology, national cultural dimensions provide useful clues to understanding behaviour and it is reasonable to conclude that the cultural differences predicted by this large body of research would be evident and potentially problematic for the interactions in the BET program.

Culture-specific classifications

Whilst a singular focus on difference may be unhelpful, like Hofstede (1986), Ziguras (1999:3) - an Australian academic working in transnational education - has proposed that:

*Educators must be familiar with their students’ backgrounds, assumptions and expectations…In transnational education this means having some familiarity with the student’s country of origin and the educational practices that the student would be used to.*

Accordingly, a brief exposition of the culture-specific educational histories which provide some familiarity with the Singaporean respondents’ experiences follows.

**Confucian-heritage cultures**

Confucius (Master Kong, or Kong Fu Ze, whom Jesuit missionaries renamed Confucius) was born in 551 and died in 479 BCE. He was a civil servant whose true vocation was
political: to convince the rulers of his time to bring about harmony and peace (Ng, 2000). However, his political career was a failure (Leys, 1996) and he altered his tactics and began accepting pupils (Ng, 2000). It was not until after his death that the Confucian way of thinking became the state orthodoxy in China under Emperor Han Wudi (140-87 BCE). Over centuries the persuasive influence of Confucian concepts has been: ‘employed in an analytical, abstract, philosophical sense and as a useful heuristic for describing the professed values of Chinese people’ (Gabrenya and Hwang, 1996:308). The Confucian ethical system regulates social behaviour via three principal ideas: benevolence; righteousness or justice; and propriety or courtesy’ (ibid 1996:309). Whilst the popularity of Confucian philosophy in China has waxed and waned, it was reinvigorated by philosopher and educator Chu Hsi (1130-1200), and subsequently, for almost two thousand years, Confucius has been canonised as China’s first and supreme teacher (De Bary et al., 1989; Leys, 1996). The resulting extra-ordinary importance (called an ‘over-emphasis’ by Chan (1999)) attached to education by Confucian-heritage societies is a common feature throughout South-East Asia (Bond, 1986; Leys, 1996; Chan, 1999; Zhang, 1999; Reagan, 2000). In addition to the recurring theme of reverence for education, various attributes are commonly associated with Confucian-heritage cultures, as summarised below (not in order of importance):

- Maintenance of harmony (Bond, 1991; Bent and Bond, 1997; Ng, 2001; Tamai and Lee, 2002);
- The notion of maintenance of face: ‘Harmony is found in maintenance of face; meaning one’s dignity, self-respect and prestige. Paying respect is “giving face”’ (Bent and Bond, 1997);
- Filial piety: the Hsiao-ching or Book of Filial piety was one of the most widely accepted Confucian works (Lee, 1989; Bond, 1991; Leys, 1996; Zhang, 1999; Ng, 2001; Tamai and Lee, 2002);
- Respect for tradition, the elderly and ancestors (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Tamai and Lee, 2002);
- Respect for social order and the importance of the group (Bond, 1991; Bent and Bond, 1997; Tamai and Lee, 2002);
- Ordering and hierarchy of relationships, with differential status including reciprocal moral obligations (Bond, 1991; Tamai and Lee, 2002);
- Trust: of family and in-group (Bond, 1991);
• Belief in fate – a stronger bias toward luck or fate as compared with ‘Westerners’ (Bond, 1991);
• Preference for the tangible and concrete (Bond, 1991);
• Thrift (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987);
• Persistence (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987);
• Having a sense of shame (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987);
• ‘Human heartedness’ (kindness, patience, courtesy) (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987); and
• The belief that favours need to be repaid (Tamai and Lee, 2002).

Pearson and Entrekin (2001) remind us, that people of Chinese descent living outside China have been indiscriminately stereotyped as ‘the overseas Chinese’ or a Chinese monolith (Bond, 1996b), despite diversity in their geographic locations and dialect groups. Chapter three proposed that in countries where overseas Chinese dominate economies, Confucian ideals maintain a stronger significance. This apparent maintenance of traditional cultural identity by overseas Chinese in multicultural nations has been repeatedly reported in the research literature (Matsumoto, 2000:72). Bond (1996b) found enduring Confucian philosophical values in societies of immigrant Chinese in Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Similarly, Lau (1992) found that students in Hong Kong and Singapore placed a greater emphasis on collectivistic values than did students from mainland China, and that this was particularly true for students from Singapore. Furthermore, in a study of the attitudes of Chinese parents in Shanghai, Taiwan and Singapore, Wu (1996) established that they were the most conservative and traditional: that they placed great emphasis on the education of their children and the maintenance of Chinese traditional values related to family and moral education. In an analysis of this pattern, Matsumoto (2000) speculates that the immigrant groups bring with them the culture of their native group at the time of their immigration. The immigrant group then crystallises its sense of culture within a multicultural environment by maintaining the traditional culture, yet at the same time their native country is undergoing change. This may explain why immigrant groups eventually conform more to the vernacular Confucian-heritage stereotype than contemporary Chinese. Indeed, during this research a senior academic at my Singaporean University said to me ‘oh, we [Chinese Singaporeans] are more Chinese than the Chinese’.
Confucian-heritage socialisation and pedagogy

The supplementation of Confucianism with Taoist and Buddhist beliefs over time, has been termed ‘neo-Confucianism’ (Chen and Chung, 1996; Chan, 1999; Ng, 2000), or ‘post-Confucian’ (De Bary et al., 1989). As mentioned above and in chapter three, the pre-occupation by Chinese-heritage parents with the provision of a ‘quality’ education for their children is an ongoing phenomenon in Neo-Confucian nations, including Singapore (Leung, 2001; Frean 1998, cited by (Chan, 1999)). These practices and beliefs are clearly linked to a heritage where even in ancient times: ‘degree holders enjoyed unprecedented honour and prestige’ (Lee, 1989:109). In Confucian-heritage societies the continuing belief that education will eventually lead to upward social mobility and enhance family status has been shown by many researchers to remain a key motivator in the pursuit of learning (Chan, 1999; Hoare, 1999; Pratt et al., 1999). In this pursuit of status, many Confucian-heritage students are encouraged to aspire to ‘sam si or the three top professions: medicine, law and accountancy’ (Chan, 1999) and as in ancient times, degree-holding status remains ‘avidly coveted’ (Lee, 1989:109).

For centuries, success in examinations has been the gateway to opportunity in Chinese-heritage societies. This has an historical basis in the Imperial Chinese examination system (Stevenson and Lee, 1996). Promotion to the aristocratic ranks of the civil service was accessible only through the Imperial examination system and was ‘often the most reliable and impartial mechanism for the poor to move up’ (Lee, 1989). Much of the Chinese high regard for education and family values can be directly attributed to this two-thousand year exam tradition, and the requisite family support required for success (Ng, 2001; Li, 2002). As a result, there is little dispute that teaching and learning styles in Confucian-heritage countries are founded on ‘rote/repetitive learning’ (Chan, 1999). The surface nature of rote learning has been attributed to the fact that Confucius considered everyone educable, and decreed that difference in intelligence does not inhibit one’s educability, however incentive and attitude does (Lee, 1996). Consequently, in Confucian-heritage cultures, education and learning are associated with effort, and failure conversely associated with a lack of effort (Pratt, 1992; Biggs, 1996; Lee, 1996).

Another frequently cited reason for the supposed Chinese preference for rote learning is the memorisation required to learn thousands of stems and at least 214 radicals in order to read Chinese ideographs (Kember, 1996; Chan, 1999; Mok et al., 2001).

Research by Pratt et al. (1999) established that memorising or mastering the basics of foundational knowledge was important to Confucian-heritage students and teachers, not
just for the eventual utility of knowledge, but also for the discipline and persistence required to commit the knowledge to memory. Pratt et al. (1999:12) also found that in Confucian societies ‘...the power of the examination was evident not only in its control over access to more privileged education but also in the power it held over authorised knowledge’. They contend that in Confucian societies there seems to be little ambiguity about what is considered authorised or ‘valid’ knowledge in a given subject. This concept of ‘authorised knowledge’ is important in an analysis of ‘Asian’ pedagogies and will be revisited later in this chapter.

However, in contrast to the image of Confucius as the progenitor of rote learning, is the viewpoint that he was, in fact, an ‘enlightened’ teacher who used techniques such as participative group discussion and open questioning (Ng, 2000), and was dialogical, interactive and personal (Li, 2002). Chang proposes that it is more likely that the evolution of ‘vernacular Confucianism’ (Chang 2000, cited by Biggs and Watkins, 2001a:297) has lead to the current ‘hierarchical patriarchal system demanding unquestioning obedience’ (Ng, 2000:315) and ‘sycophantic Confucianism’ (Ng, 2001:71). In ‘vernacular Confucianism’, attitudes to the nature of teaching and learning held by teachers, parents and students are quite punitive (from a ‘Western’ perspective) and include beliefs such as; ‘punishment is considered beneficial to children’, ‘children are spoiled if praised’ and ‘failure is the result of laziness’ (Gow et al., 1996; Watkins, 2000; Biggs and Watkins, 2001b; Ng, 2001). Such beliefs may stem from the grim Xun Zi (300-237 BCE), rather than the more constructivist Confucius (Biggs and Watkins, 2001b:280). Nevertheless, in Confucian-heritage cultures, study is a serious endeavour and some say that students are not supposed to enjoy their learning (Leung, 2001). However, it is equally possible that perceptions of enjoyment are different, and that East and Southeast Asians derive their enjoyment, as Leung postulates, from ‘having put in hard work and having knowledge of the subject’ (Leung, 2001:41).

**Other major pedagogies in the region;**

To this point the chapter has focussed on Confucian-heritage pedagogies. This has occurred for two interconnecting and pragmatic reasons: Confucian-heritage people are in the majority in Singapore, and there is a significant literature base as there has been a great deal of research activity into Chinese culture and values in the past three decades (Bond, 1986:xviii). However many families in Singapore share different educational traditions. The following is an overview of the traditional approaches to educational thought and practice for the remainder of Singapore’s cultural groups.
Indian/Hindu educational tradition

Whilst most assuredly not all Indians are Hindu, a significant number (at least half) of Singapore’s Indian community are Hindu (Ministry of Information Communications and the Arts Singapore, 2003). There is a commonly accepted connection between Hinduism and Indian cultural identity (Reagan, 2000). Hinduism differs from the religions we are most used to in the ‘West’ in that it has no fixed minimum doctrine. There is no one God, no single code of commandments; one can believe in ‘absolute reality, or in many Gods, or be an atheist, and still remain a Hindu’ (Sinha and Tripathi, 1994:131). Indeed:

\[\text{to insist that there is only one true religion is, from a Hindu point of view, a sign of ignorance and self-deception. As the nineteenth-century Indian teacher Sri Ramakrishna said, “all paths lead to God”. (Hulmes, 1989:132)}\]

Epistemology is of deep concern in Hindu education, as human beings are believed to be held captive by their ignorance. Education is instrumental in assisting an individual to reach higher stages of existence (Chandras, 1977; Hulmes, 1989; Sinha and Tripathi, 1994). Unlike Confucian-heritage learners, Hindus have traditionally believed that not everyone is mentally prepared to acquire knowledge (Chandras, 1977). However, traditions, perseverance and application are seen as the most likely path to success as ‘there is no easy way to truth’ (Hulmes, 1989:128) Traditionally education was for boys, who commenced formal education with a guru, living in the home of the teacher. Admission to a teacher’s home was based on moral fitness and good conduct. To be accepted, potential students, had to show certain qualities including ‘a calm and unperturbed mind, self-restraint, self-denial and patience’ (Chandras, 1977:20). Once in the teacher’s house, the student worshipped the teacher as his own father or God. In return, it was the teacher’s responsibility to teach ‘the truth exactly as he knows it…to love the student as his own son’ (Chandras, 1977:27), and to teach students to conform to the demands of moral law (Hulmes, 1989). From this perspective, Hinduism also displays elements of collectivism in that: ‘ignorance of what is right upsets the balance of things…each individual bears some responsibly for the well-being of the community as a whole’ (Hulmes, 1989:125) According to the Upanishads, swadhyaya or self-study was futile (Chandras, 1977). The indispensability of the teacher in attainment of enlightened knowledge was stressed. Teachers acted as role models who provided examples for students to emulate (Hulmes, 1989; Reagan, 2000).

Traditionally, education for the masses employed an oral tradition, as written texts were in Sanskrit, which was, and is, considered a sacred language. Whilst in ancient India, people were able to transcend their place in the caste system through vedic learning; in
recent history India’s caste system has made it impossible for the individual to change from one class or varna to another (Chandras, 1977). Over time, education became vocational and every person was educated according to the respective duties the caste had to fulfil in society. Inheritance, rather than learning, became the determinant of membership of the elite and priestly Brahmin caste. Knowledge of Sanskrit and the role of teacher was reserved for the Brahmans, which helped them to maintain both their religious and social status (Chandras, 1977; Hulmes, 1989). The oral tradition necessitated rote learning through the chanting of holy songs and the repetition of texts as lead by the teacher. Exams were mostly oral in nature and designed to test memorisation. However some teachers also used interactive pedagogies (e.g. prashna-uttara: questions and answers).

For the few who had access to elite learning, pedagogies were more sophisticated. Hindu theologians and philosophers have identified six methods of knowledge intended to provide direct knowledge of the ‘Absolute’. These include pratyaksha (sense perception), anumana (inference), Shabda (scriptural authority), upamana (analogical reasoning) arthapatti (hypothetical supposition or ‘method of implication’) and abhava (negation). Perhaps the most fascinating of these to the ‘Western’ university educator is anumana. Anumana refers to logical argument and includes both inductive and deductive reasoning. It includes a five-part syllogism:

- The thesis is to be established
- The reason for maintaining the thesis
- The example of the reason
- The application of the reason and example
- The conclusion (that is the thesis established)

Despite the obvious similarity, this syllogism precedes the development of syllogistic reasoning in the West (Reagan, 2000). Arthapatti also has similarities to ‘Western’ pedagogical practice, in that it ‘involves the identification of a missing premise in a dilemma or argument’ (Reagan, 2000).

**The Buddhist tradition**

There are two major streams of Buddhism – Theravada and Mahayana. At the core of Buddhism is the ‘Triple Refuge’: ‘the Buddha, the Doctrine and the community’ (Reagan, 2000) wherein teachings cover three broad categories: wisdom, ethics and meditation.
Theravada Buddhism emphasises the original Buddhist scriptural tradition (hence it’s name; ‘Teaching of the Elders’). It emphasises the monastic life, is somewhat austere and is found in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Mahayana Buddhism gives greater freedom of devotional and metaphysical belief and is found in Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, Mongolia and Japan (Reagan, 2000).

Education in traditional Buddhism was within the context of the monastery - in the final element of the ‘Triple Refuge’: the community. However monastic education by no means meant that knowledge was jealously guarded, as the monastery was an integral part of the community. Again, traditional Buddhist education was based on a close, intimate relationship that existed between student and teacher in which respect for teachers ranked immediately after respect for the Buddha, the Law and ahead of parents (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991). The teacher/student relationship was, again, reciprocal and obligations on both parties are substantial. Instruction was primarily oral and debate played a central role (Reagan, 2000).

**Islamic educational tradition**

Islam can be translated to ‘submission to the will of God’ and the real focus of Islam is not Muhammad, but rather, Allah (God) (Reagan, 2000). Muhammad is important in his role as God’s prophet. Conformity to the will of God is both an obligation and a privilege, and affects all aspects of human existence, which obviously includes education (Hulmes, 1989). God’s will is passed down through the Qur’an which ‘is believed to be an exact, literal transcription of the words of God Himself, precisely as they were given to Muhammad’ (Reagan, 2000). Therefore recitation of The Qur’an is ‘seen as sublime and edifying, even when a Muslim does not intellectually understand its words’ (Reagan, 2000).

The Qur’an was the first Islamic textbook and, since the time of the Prophet, education has been inextricable from the religious context. For Muslims, ultimately all knowledge is made available by Allah. Thus the omnipotence of God as the source of knowledge allows little place for critique. Hulmes supports such a contention with the observation that:

> *Islam appears to make exclusive claims to be the one true religion for all, and tolerates no other systems of belief, except in a subordinate way…In requiring obedience and submission it appears to limit critical inquiry.*

*(Hulmes, 1989:32)*
Islamic educational philosophy includes an obvious concern and affection for children. One of the best examples in the Islamic tradition of educational philosophers is the theologian, mystic and teacher Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), according to whom, there are actually two ways in which knowledge might be acquired; through human reason and ‘light from God’. Al-Ghazali believed that all children had the capacity to learn, however the philosopher Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) thought that ability was not given equally to all people, and that there were innate intellectual differences among people (Hulmes, 1989; Reagan, 2000). According to both Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun the key to effective teaching was the right relationship between the teacher and the pupil.

According to Islamic belief, children have a basically good nature and thus the purpose of education is not viewed as one of ‘correcting’ but rather one of guidance, through gentle advice rather than reproof (Hulmes, 1989). Teaching is seen as a social craft and Islamic education is concerned with developing the unique characteristics of a person in such a way as to allow him/her to adapt to the standards of society (which should share the ideals of Islam) (Reagan, 2000). Despite the preceding ideals, in practice, Imams who are employed by the community and who should model appropriate behaviours and examples, undertake much of the teaching of Islam in the mosque. Imams are generally not trained to teach, meaning that rote learning and old style pedagogies are the norm (Hulmes, 1989). Discipline is strict and special attention is given to memorisation. Thus, a good memory could be said to be more useful to the Muslim scholar than intellectual analysis.

Whilst many Muslims today would agree that the old-fashioned pedagogies of the Imam and the mosque are not longer adequate, simultaneously they may disagree with a non-Muslim’s interpretation that the old ways of teaching encouraged learning by rote, and discouraged free and critical inquiry. ‘What emerges from discussion on the point with Muslims is the fear of the “corrosive” influences of Western scientific and technical knowledge... that the authority of Islamic beliefs might be diluted if students are encouraged to question in an un-Islamic way’ (Hulmes, 1989:52).

**Culture specific pedagogical overviews: a rationalisation**

The preceding discussion of culture-specific pedagogical heritage is rendered more complex by consideration of the fact that Singapore has more recently than Australia been subject to colonial rule. As a result, the British education system has also become part of Singaporean’s teaching and learning heritage (and many aspects remain, as described in chapter three). Therefore it is likely that both Singapore and Australia (but
more recently and even currently, Singapore) have been affected by ‘left over power pedagogies’, to paraphrase Fuller (2004:148), who observes that:

\[
\text{the authority and status previously found in colonial schools…continues to be reproduced} \ldots \text{The mass conditions and uncertainty inside the classroom push the teacher to seek control, and to engage in rituals that signal authority but which do very little to encourage learning.}
\]

Thus it is clear that the teaching and learning cultures of Singapore are complex, and the above descriptions of pedagogical traditions are necessarily short. As Alexander (2001:3) observed in relation to comparative education: ‘nobody embarking on a study of education in other cultures ought do so without being acutely aware of how little, despite their best endeavours, they end up knowing’. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse further the thousands of years of educational history underpinning the pedagogies of Singapore’s ethnic groups. Nevertheless, despite its brevity, the preceding discussion reveals some obvious and pervading commonalities that are shared by Singapore’s major ethnic groups, including:

- a collectivist orientation;
- a high value placed upon education;
- respect for educators;
- an intimate and reciprocal relationship between educator and student;
- a high level of parental support for education;
- repetitive learning;
- respect for ‘authorised’ or expert knowledge; and
- education as a source of power and status.

There are also notable differences, (including the existence or absence) of:

- oral tradition;
- examination orientation;
- debate;
- general attitude toward the nature and education of children; and
- attitude toward the ‘educability’ of individuals.
In brief, and as Biggs and Watkins (2001b) conclude, the crucial point in an examination of traditional ‘Asian’ pedagogies and learning styles is the fact that [many of] these beliefs and behaviours are current today.

‘Asian’ pedagogies: ‘Western’ responses

‘Western’ misperceptions?

‘Western’ observers consistently perceive that an ‘Asian’ socialised learning style is steeped in a tradition of passive and rote learning (Hofstede, 1986; Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; Niles, 1995; Biggs, 1996; Seelye, 1996; Volet and Renshaw, 1996; Kelly and Ha, 1998). This tends to be a persistently negative stereotype, however some propose that ‘Asian’ learners are commonly misunderstood by Westerners (Gow et al., 1996; Biggs and Watkins, 2001b).

Significant research pertaining to ‘Asian’ pedagogies (Chinese heritage in particular) has been taking place in the last decade. Two volumes of research focusing on Chinese learning and teaching practices have been published by the University of Hong Kong Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) in collaboration with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (1996, 2001). Biggs and Watkins (Australian academics who are or were working at the University of Hong Kong) have edited much of research, although Chinese heritage teachers and researchers have written many of the chapters. Much of this research has relied on ‘student approaches to learning’ (SAL) theory, which uses both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and assumes that students’ learning styles are a function of their perceptions of the task and the environment. One of the major findings by Biggs (1996) is that ‘Western’ observers frequently misinterpret Confucian-heritage learning practices as rote learning (memorising without understanding), when in fact what is occurring is repetitive learning (learning to enhance future recall alongside understanding). Cultural differences in perceptions of the relationship between memorising and understanding exacerbate this misperception (Biggs and Watkins, 2001b). Biggs and Watkins (2001b) have proposed that whilst Confucian students do frequently learn repetitively, this learning approach is an interlocking process to ensure retention and to enhance understanding. Moreover, they believe that whilst ‘Western’ students tend to use repetition to check memory and perceive understanding as a sudden insight, Confucian-heritage students perceive understanding to be a long-term process that requires considerable mental effort. Other researchers agree: Lee (1996) extrapolates that ‘memorisation precedes deeper understanding and is not an end in itself’ and Kember (1996) suggests that ‘the most
important distinction between the two approaches lies in the intention, or absence of the intention, to understand’. Reliance on memorisation in ‘Asian’ societies has also been attributed to cultural respect for authority, and a response to a heavy content load and English curriculum (Watkins, 1996).

The possibility of ‘Western’ misperceptions highlights another important difference between ‘Asian’ and ‘Western’ approaches to depth of learning and underscores the previously discussed Confucian-heritage attitude to ability (e.g. anyone can learn with sufficient effort). Much of the ‘Western’ literature has tended to extrapolate from ‘observed’ rote learning, to an assumption of extrinsic motivation and surface learning on behalf of ‘Asian’ students. In the literature, surface learning is generally taken to mean ‘attempting to commit to memory until it can be regurgitated in an examination’ whereas deep learning; ‘an active engagement of material determined by the students themselves to be of interest and relevance’ (Gow et al., 1996:121-122). Whilst SAL research (e.g. Kember and Gow, 1991; Volet and Renshaw, 1996) has confirmed that Chinese heritage learners are more achievement-oriented than ‘Western’ learners, it has not confirmed that they are less inclined to deep learning. On the contrary, recent research would indicate that ‘Asian’ learners do well in exams as well as developing understanding and making meaning through deep approaches to learning (Gow et al., 1996), although the observable behaviours associated with their learning strategies may not be the same as those of ‘Western’ learners.

**Challenges facing ‘Western’ observers**

Over the period 1995 – 1997, Kelly, Wong and Pratt conducted research in Hong Kong universities, prompted by the observation that many dedicated ‘Western’ academics who were apparently successful teachers in their own countries, expressed frustration and disappointment with their inability to be effective teachers in Hong Kong (Kelly and Ha, 1998). The same dilemma has been reported by work-place-based adult educators ‘teaching’ adult ‘Asian’ students in multicultural Melbourne (Hoare, 1999). Evidently a suite of paradoxes and sources of confusion face ‘Westerners’ interacting with ‘Asian’ learners.

The literature reports a list of issues that challenge the ‘Western’ educator newly arrived in ‘Asian’ countries, with a frequency that has a definite pattern of predictability (Kelly and Ha, 1998; Chan, 1999; Hoare, 1999; Ziguras and Walsh, 2000; Leung, 2001; Dixon and Scott, 2003; Hawthorne et al., 2004). The following is an amalgamated list of some of the common concerns:
• Passive and compliant behaviour that may present problems for those more used to participative styles of teaching;

• Students not speaking in class;

• Lack of abstract thinking;

• Lack of curiosity;

• Lack of creativity;

• Requirement for close supervision and constant direction from teachers;

• Over-reliance on the opinion of ‘experts’ (e.g. lecturers);

• An over-emphasis on concrete examples;

• Inability to be introspective – instead trying to ‘guess’ the answer the teacher wants;

• Students who are used to ‘spoon-feeding’;

• Constraints on behaviour presumed to be caused by ‘face-maintenance’;

• The need to compromise in group situations; and

• ‘Mis-use’ of support materials by students in order to rote learn.

Such a recurring list of perceived ‘deficits’ on the part of the ‘Asian’ learner underscores the impact of cultural difference on pedagogical practice and the emergent dilemma facing both educators and ‘Asian’ students in transnational education. Perhaps a little of the (above) prescribed introspection is required on the part of the educators; after all, as we have seen, ‘Asian’ learners have excelled both at home and as ‘international’ students. Challenges for both teachers and learners are clearly abundant, and the strategies which could be used by both groups are further analysed in the following paragraphs.

Learning styles

_read the book a hundred times and the meaning appears’ – Chinese maxim._ (Mok et al., 2001:161)

Learning style is imputed to be one of the bases of cultural difference which has developed as a result of our past life experiences and learning environment: most of us develop learning styles that emphasise some abilities over others (Kolb, 1984; Cushner, 1994; Gow et al., 1996; Rodrigues et al., 2000). As mentioned previously, in Confucian-heritage cultures academic success is attributed to effort, and intelligence is not
perceived as fixed. Learners have been brought up to respect wisdom, knowledge and expertise, and to avoid challenging those in authority (Chan, 2001). As a result they seek constant approval and confirmation from their teachers, paying particular attention to what should be reproduced (Gow et al., 1996:115). In its turn, appropriate pedagogy is expected to provide pupils with the information necessary to pass the relevant exams, leading to results which allow access to social mobility (Gow et al., 1996). This tradition, coupled with the desire to avoid losing face, contributes to the typical achievement orientation and academic success of ‘Asian’ students (Gow et al., 1996:107). Students are supported, encouraged and threatened by a collectivist framework: ‘a heady mix of motivational steam: personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward, and yes, possibly even interest’ (Biggs and Watkins, 1996; Biggs and Watkins, 2001b). The foreignness of those socialisation processes is evidenced in the previous discussion of challenges facing ‘Western’ educators, whose own socialisation processes were often much more individualist and their motivations more intrinsic.

Pratt (1992) found that ‘Asian’ adults had conceptions of learning that were qualitatively different to Westerners. He used a phenomenographic research method, in which nineteen Chinese Scholars (who were visiting Canada for one year) and thirty-eight Chinese adult educators (who remained in China) were interviewed. The scholars in Canada were interviewed when they first arrived, and again just prior to return, one year later. Results were compared with the Chinese group and commonalities emerged. Learning was understood as:

- The acquisition of knowledge or skill from others;
- The fulfilment of responsibility to society; and
- A change in understanding of something external to oneself.

Pratt found these conceptions to be compatible with, and possibly derivative of, cultural factors. In Pratt’s work, the link between belief and behaviour is clear: these beliefs contribute to our understanding of why didactic styles of teaching and learning have been traditionally preferred in ‘Asian’ classrooms.

**Teaching styles and classroom culture**

The perception of traditional ‘Asian’ classrooms as conservative and expositional is not isolated to ‘Western’ (mis)-interpretations. The Chinese themselves have sayings which reflect this viewpoint; e.g., ‘cramming the duck’ in Hong Kong, or ‘mantangkan’ (literally,
teacher-talk throughout the lesson) in Mainland China (Mok et al., 2001), or even *cheem* (profound, too difficult for anyone other than an expert to understand) in ‘Singlish’.

Ho’s (2001) research sought to ascertain whether ‘Asian’ teachers actually are authoritarian: the result being ‘yes and no’, depending on the context and the formality of the situation. The following aspects of teaching styles are perceived as relatively common in ‘Asian’ classrooms (Chan, 1999; Ho, 2001; Leung, 2001):

- Strict codes of behaviour;
- Formal classes;
- Use of punitive measures;
- A strong moral responsibility to guide students;
- Personal needs are not addressed;
- Lecture dominated;
- Teacher dominated;
- There is only one right way (e.g. to answer a question); and
- Limited questioning or discussion.

However, whilst the above teaching styles are related to the formal classroom situation, Ho and others have observed that out of the classroom teachers (Kelly and Ha, 1998; Chan, 1999; Biggs and Watkins, 2001a; Ho, 2001):

- Interact with students on friendly terms;
- Attend to students’ personal needs;
- Interact on a student-centred basis;
- Are expected to guide students;
- Interact with students with considerable warmth;
- See their role as extending well beyond the classroom itself; and
- Take a pastoral role as well as in instructional view of teaching.

Thus, as Ho (2001) found, ‘Asian’ teaching styles could appear very authoritarian or very student-centred depending on the context. Chan (1999) also stresses that, whilst an
authoritarian approach predominates in classroom settings, the relationship between teacher and student includes considerable ‘hand holding’ and a high degree of mutual respect and responsibility. This role duality is repeated throughout the literature (Ziguras and Walsh, 2000; Biggs and Watkins, 2001a) and again provides a fertile ground for cross-cultural misinterpretation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it has been reported that South East Asian international students (in this case, Singaporeans in particular) bring an expectation of these reciprocal obligations to transnational education. Volet and Renshaw (1995:216) found that Singaporean and Malaysian students in Australian universities placed a high value on outside-class interaction with tutors and lecturers, and indeed this was found to be ‘a major source of friction between the two parties when it became evident that Australian tutors expect students to ask all their questions during tutorial time’.

**Structuring constructivism**

In a 2002 conference paper, Munro-Smith (2002) - an Australian lecturer teaching in Singapore at SIM - reflected that effective teaching of adults that builds on current knowledge through discussion and negotiation requires a constructivist approach. The lecturer interviews and classroom observations in this research (chapters six and eight respectively) indicated that most of the participating lecturers also favoured broadly constructivist pedagogies.

Constructivism is a widely accepted meta-theory that has been investigated for its transferability across cultures. According to constructivist theories, learners acquire knowledge in predictable phases, ranging from the very concrete to the abstract (Bruner, 1990; Wilson, 2004). Knowledge is constructed rather than received, via the development and interpretation by individuals of cognitive maps or schemata (Pratt and Nesbitt, 2000). Constructivist learning environments emphasise active participation, self-regulation, social interaction (Krause et al., 2003), and flexibility in thinking (McLoughlin, 2001). Constructivism was predated by andragogy, a particularly popular ‘theory of adult learning’ that was largely responsible for the shift in ‘Western’ adult education from teacher-as-authority to teacher-as-facilitator (Pratt and Nesbitt, 2000:3). In adult education, constructivist theories are evident in the stress placed on critical reflection, and along with andragogy, the move to learner-centred education (Pratt and Nesbitt, 2000:4). Whilst pedagogies that employ constructivist paradigms are being exported to ‘Asia’ and regularly used in multicultural environments, the great majority of research supporting constructivist approaches comes from ‘Western’ educational settings. Researchers, (e.g.
(Pratt, 1993; Paige and Martin, 1996; Chan, 1999; Hoare, 1999; Rodrigues et al., 2000; Chan, 2001; Ziguras, 2001a) have questioned whether such approaches are effective in non- ‘Western’ and multicultural learning environments and how well they transfer across cultures (not restricted to ‘East/West’).

In Asia, where ‘an effective teacher is viewed as someone who provides clear guidance for students rather than letting them flounder when exploring for themselves’ (Chan, 2001:301), the idea that students should control their own learning and make meaning on their own terms contradicts accepted ‘good teaching’ practice as well as broader cultural values. Moreover, as education in ‘Asian’ traditions is considered important for its intrinsic value, any attempt to reduce it to what is perceived as a surface approach, is subject to criticism (Lee, 1996:34). To illustrate, Paige and Martin (1996) found that the use of an experiential activity in a cross-cultural learning program did not work for some participants who thought the activity did not leave sufficient time for reflection. They considered it very likely that these preferences were culturally related. Indeed the literature proposes that many ‘Asian’ learners might think that ineffective teaching is taking place if they are continually asked in class to express their opinions or solve a problem by themselves (Chan, 1999; Hoare, 1999).

Constructivist models (e.g. experiential learning, problem based learning) are generally, by nature, inductive. For example, problem-based learning differs radically from traditional ‘Asian’ methods of education… ‘it is exceptionally interactive, based on a capacity for lateral thinking and critical reasoning’ (Hawthorne et al., 2004:5). There is evidence that such inductive pedagogies may exacerbate cross-cultural discomfort (Bent and Bond, 1997). As Biggs (1996:55) contends: ‘In the West, we believe in exploring first, then in the development of skill; the Chinese believe in skill development first’.

Given the significant number of apparently substantive differences between traditional ‘Asian’ learning strategies and ‘Western’ pedagogies, it might be appropriate to consider whether constructivist methods should continue to be employed in ‘Asian’ educational settings. Yet their discontinuation would be an ill conceived and unwarranted reactionary response. In fact, both recent literature and contemporary practice indicate that constructivist pedagogies can be employed as effectively in ‘Asian’ cultures as they are elsewhere. However, there are culture-based implications that must be considered. Used too early in a class or learning program, experiential activities can create a stressful learning environment for people from many cultures (Paige and Martin, 1996; Ng, 2000). Chan (1999:303) found that in Hong Kong specifically; ‘to be effective, [approaches such
as simulations and role play] have to be introduced slowly with clear instructions and guidelines as well as adequate preparation time’. The following quotation, from an ‘Asian’ female teacher working in the USA, illustrates this structuring perfectly:

*I have learned not to insist in a new learning situation that [minority group] learners bring their experiences, in true Freirian and feminist fashion, to the circle. I will only invite sharing when I sense that students trust the group – and me – enough to risk something that seems to go against their understanding of learning and teaching, as well as their preferred behaviour.*

(Ng, 2000:317)

Ng’s example supports the work of McCaffery (1986): both authors provide a useful illustration of how culturally sensitive sequencing and structure means that a learning program may need to begin by using educational methods that are more familiar to participants, and then gradually move to more constructivist methods. Paradoxically, educators increase student-centredness by at first adopting methods which they have come to believe to be outdated and even teacher-centred in their own society (Hofstede, 1986). The literature repeatedly shows the importance of such sequencing and structure to ‘Asian’ learners (e.g. Ziguras, 2001a). Stevenson and Stigler (1992:198) observed the ‘stunning…widespread excellence of Asian class lessons’, and proposed that lesson coherence would be improved by sequencing of activities, and an explanation by teachers of the purpose and interrelatedness of lesson components. Like Stevenson and Stigler, Biggs and Watkins (2001a) observed that Japanese teachers use ‘impeccable sequence and timing’, while the Singaporean respondents to Velet and Renshaw’s (1995) research highlighted their opinion that Australian lectures were not well structured.

Thus, the literature implies that the creation of a safe and trusting learning environment, which is person-centred rather than content-focussed will encourage most learners to participate in activities, and is therefore more cross-culturally appropriate (Paige and Martin, 1996; Hoare, 1999; McLoughlin, 2001). In view of the above, coming to understand the way things are done locally before seeking to change them would seem logical but may not happen as frequently as it should, possibly because of the global hegemony of ‘Western’ university doctrine. However, surely: ‘…to dismiss local practices in other parts of the world without understanding them is fraught with danger’ (Ziguras, 2001a:16).

**Group learning**

Brislin et al. (1986) suggest that group versus individual preference for learning is [a] potential difference in the way people learn best, and much research supports the notion
that students from ‘Asian’ backgrounds thrive in small-group learning situations. This appears unsurprising given the previous discussion of the collectivist nature of ‘Asian’ cultures. In ‘Asian’ learner groups much self-initiated group learning often takes place outside the classroom (Chan, 1999). Both within and external to classes, ‘Asian’ students seek cues in relation to assessment, and will self-initiate collaborative work to seek each other’s cue perceptions and how to handle an unfamiliar situation (Biggs, 1996). ‘Seeking help from a friend’ was found to be a much-favoured learning preference for Singaporean students, especially in comparison to their Australian counterparts (Volet and Renshaw, 1995). Also in Singapore, Munro-Smith (2002:2) observed, as I did, that ‘students can be seen [in the grounds of universities] sitting for hours around a PC belonging to one of the group as they discuss their reports’.

In contrast to self-initiated group formation, there is evidence that when the teacher in collectivist settings imposes small-group learning, it may be difficult to encourage the commencement of discussion. This may be because ‘[in ‘Asian’ societies] members of discussion groups often wait their turn and people will only interact once relationships are defined’ (Chan, 1999). As forecast in Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (collectivism and Power Distance in this instance) people in ‘Asian’ societies typically behave according to social expectations of their role, particularly when a group leader is yet to be decided. Hofstede further maintains that in collectivist cultures, students from different ethnic backgrounds often form sub-groups in class (Hofstede, 1994a:62), which was, to an extent, supported in the classroom observations of this research. It is also predicted that both externally initiated and self-initiated groups will often have designated group leaders, and that once the group task is concluded, the designated group leader will be expected to announce the decision of the group (Hofstede, 1994a; Chan, 1999). It seems possible that the designation of a group leader who reports back, but does not necessarily ‘own’ the group’s response, supports the previously discussed ‘face saving’ behaviours. Indeed when we consider that in constructivist small-group learning situations, students are likely to be challenged by a range of sophisticated interactions that are all taking place quickly, and in a second language, including ‘smooth turn taking, identification of topics where personal and group knowledge is weak or inadequate, and critical feedback’ (Hawthorne et al., 2004), it is not surprising that the potential anonymity of a group is appealing.

As an example, the classes I observed in my fieldwork elected a ‘president’ as spokesperson for the class, yet never in twenty years of adult education have I observed this behaviour in Australia. This reinforced Chan’s (1999) proposal that in ‘Asia’ rank has an impact even in informal group work, and that those employed in government positions
are recognised as a result of their status. It is possibly but unlikely to be coincidental that both BET class presidents were male members of the armed forces. Of course, like so many other observations in this chapter, sub-group allegiances and leader designation behaviour are not confined to collectivist cultures, and may occur in the individualist Australian classroom. As always, it is a matter of degree.

**Computer based learning: significant possibilities, significant resistance**

Previous research has shown that ‘Asian’ students do prefer face-to-face contact with lecturers and peers; consequently student reactions to the internet as a mode of delivery have been generally negative (Lawley et al., 1999:78; Daniel, 2000:7). The student respondents to this research, who placed a high value on face-to-face contact with Australian lecturers, confirmed this. ‘Distance’ or ‘online’ education was perceived by them to be a cost-saving exercise on behalf of the university or partner institution and the least desirable learning methodology, which lacked both prestige and learning opportunities. Munro-Smith (2002) and Ziguras and Walsh (2000) also report negative responses to computer-based learning from adult Singaporean students. Ziguras and Walsh’s article describes the difficulties experienced when transferring across cultures the combination of a constructivist teaching style and computer-based learning. They report on the establishment of an on-line notice board in a transnational program delivered in ‘Asia’. In their case study it was envisaged that students would use the board to ask questions and initiate discussions, however this did not eventuate and students commented ‘there was not much to see on the notice board’. They expected a flow of information from the lecturer and were not interested in initiating public conversations themselves (Ziguras and Walsh, 2000). Munro-Smith (2002:2) noted that the overwhelming majority of Singaporean students ‘remained keen on handouts’, a finding which was again replicated in this research. In summary, it seems possible that the now familiar ‘Asian’ preferred learning patterns such as a desire for a closer relationships with teachers; preference for small group learning, discussion and cue seeking; not wanting to stand out from the group; education as a means of attaining status etc. may be reflected in this resistance to entirely online modes of teaching.

The BET program mostly used computer-based learning as an adjunct to face-to-face teacher-facilitated classes. For example, students could access reading materials or overhead presentations used in class through online links on a subject web page, and they regularly contacted their Melbourne lecturers by private, one-to-one, email. Even the
two subjects which focussed on computer-mediated learning as subject content were
delivered face-to-face in Singapore by a Melbourne-based lecturer. The exception to this
rule occurred late in the BET program after I had returned from my data collection phase,
and was a direct result of the SARS outbreak in 2003. Because these instances were an
exception to the planned BET program brought about by an emergency, and they
occurred after my research phase was completed, I will not comment on them apart from
to say that even those lessons were delivered through teleconferencing so were not
purely on line. The experiences of BET lecturers and students during the SARS outbreak
will be reported in research being prepared for publication by one of the lecturers. This
instance does, however, point to another issue in transnational education that is beyond
the scope of this thesis; that of sustainability in times of crisis.

Assessment: invitation to deep learning, or propagator of surface
approaches?

‘What types of assessment will be used to compare the skills of persons
educated and trained in different corners of the globe?’ (Little, 1996:434)

The various forms that assessment can take (e.g. participation-based, collaborative or
individual assignment, ‘open book’ or traditional examination) are inextricably bound in
the socio-cultural and historical context of both student and assessor. Academics can
make assumptions about how common these forms of assessment are (Lee, 1998;
MacKinnon and Manathunga, 2003). However, whilst legitimate in their own cultural
context, many of these methods can seriously disadvantage those for whom the chosen
method is alien (Bates, 2001:6).

As previously discussed, highly competitive examination systems have long been, and
remain, the pre-eminent form of assessment in ‘Asian’ countries (Chan, 1999; Biggs and
Watkins, 2001b). Even today, teachers, parents and the general public judge students’
examination performance to be the most important indicator of good teaching and
academic achievement (Lingbao and Watkins, 1996). In addition to teachers, students’
achievements reflect on their family. If intrinsic motivation were at all lacking within this
pressurised collectivist framework, the exam looms as an extrinsic motivational tool. It is
therefore not surprising then that high anxiety levels have been reported amongst ‘Asian’
students. Thus anxiety and traditional respect for authorised knowledge may partially
explain the tendency of ‘Asian’ students to be more concrete or pragmatic in assessment
tasks than their ‘Western’ counterparts (Chan, 1999). In analysing the learning
approaches of Chinese people, Gow et al. (1996:111) took the view that, whilst deep
learning is the goal of higher education, the process of assessment is often shallow (an observation that could apply to other countries – both ‘Asian’ and ‘Western’). Gow et al. (1996) further postulated that tight time frames, excessive amounts of material and perceived difficulty of tasks have a negative effect on students’ locus of motivation and their resultant capacity to adopt deep learning approaches. Gow et al. (1996) suggest that students would be more likely to adopt a deep approach if they were given time for contemplation and discussion with others, and if assessment tasks probed for understanding of principles rather than the reproduction of facts and procedures.

Contemplation and discussion time would also ameliorate problems with the more obvious and practical issue of language, which is a ubiquitous concern in the literature. ‘Asian’ students almost invariably reported to have trouble with written English and this fact propagates a damning ‘incapacity to fulfil a foundational requirement of ‘Western’ tertiary education…[providing evidence of] critical thinking’ (Hawthorne et al., 2004:2). The extent to which allowances should be made for varying levels of English proficiency is yet another ongoing debate that is intrinsic to transnational education and part of the argument surrounding perceived dilution of academic standards (Cummins and Smith, 1999; Hawthorne et al., 2004:2). Of particular concern in relation to ‘Asian’ students, is the fact that the level of English required to provide assessable evidence of creative thinking, for development of arguments and ideas, and for participation in academic discourse can condemn students to incomprehension and force them to revert to rote memorisation (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; Chan, 1999; MacKinnon and Manathunga, 2003). As an added complication, academic language - governed by rules of evidence-based logical analysis and structured debate - is quite different to the language of business and government. Adult students, who are proficient in brisk, businesslike professional discourse, ‘must learn to speak an academic discourse that is unhurried, speculative, analytical and uncommitted…and until [they do] grades suffer’ (Northedge, 2003:24,35). These challenges make it difficult for any students new to ‘Western’ education and academic discourse, let alone written English, to move beyond a surface learning strategy. The experiences of the BET participants in relation to assessment reveal problems that the preceding discussion seems to forecast, and are reported and analysed in chapters six to nine.

**Chapter conclusion**

Diversity and similarity are recurring themes throughout this chapter, which has shown that many culturally-based differences are evident and should not be denied in
transnational programs. The chapter has provided numerous examples of the ways in which the participants were subject to the influences of culture at many levels. The chapter has demonstrated that ‘Western’ constructs of ‘Asia’ and ‘Asian’ learners and pedagogies have frequently been based on ‘deficit models’. It has also hinted that in the rush to obtain the transnational education dollar, ‘Western’ universities may be reinforcing the very learning strategies that many lecturers consider ineffective. An understanding of this likelihood advances the principle that we need to be constantly wary of ethnocentrism in order to participate in culturally inclusive teaching and learning. In awareness of diversity, assumptions need to be questioned, reflection undertaken and changes made.

The following two chapters will report data collected during interviews with lecturers and students. Chapter eight then reports data from classroom observations and begins analysis of behaviours, whereafter chapter nine concludes the thesis with synthesis and analysis of the various perspectives and recommendations for future practice.
Chapter Six: Data from Lecturer Interviews

Introduction

This chapter is the first of three to report data gathered during the research fieldwork. The chapter commences the discussion of data from interviews with lecturers, however analysis of the content is limited to aspects of the data that are related to the lecturers’ group. Thus data analysis is constrained, pending the reporting of student responses in chapter seven. Chapter eight will then report data from classroom observations and will juxtapose the data from the three sources (lecturers, students and observations).

The analysis in this chapter follows a conceptual framework developed by Pratt (1999) over decades of similar study, in which he attempts to build an understanding of different conceptions of teaching across cultural variations. He proposes that any study of teaching must address the essential constructs of learning and knowledge. Consequently his original research framework focuses on epistemic beliefs, normative expectations and pedagogical procedures. With co-authors Kelly and Wong (1999) Pratt supplemented his framework with a focus on the role and value of ‘foundational knowledge’; the roles and relationships of teachers and students; and attributions of responsibility. I found Pratt et. al’s (1999) expanded framework to be useful as a skeletal structure on which to organise the ‘flesh’ of data reporting, and thus have adopted the framework as headings for this chapter.

As would be expected, lecturers’ individual responses varied and therefore, whilst generalised patterns of beliefs and behaviours remained evident throughout the research, it is certainly not the case that all lecturers were entirely in agreement on most issues. Therefore where I report stories of general agreement in this chapter, I will also attempt to provide a voice for differing opinions.

Terminology

The ‘lecturer’ respondents use a range of words to describe their work role, including ‘educator’ and ‘facilitator’. I have used the word ‘lecturer’ from the outset of this thesis because that is the work-role-title used by the university and also by SIM and the students. The tension between that term and those preferred by the lecturers themselves provides one of many examples of the clash between university ‘corporate or faculty’ culture and sub-cultures. The masculine pronoun has been used throughout the chapter, despite the fact that two of the five lecturers were female. This represents an attempt to
preserve anonymity within a relatively small respondent field and should not be read as negative gender-discrimination.

**Normative experiences and expectations**

Our normative experiences and expectations exist as a result of our primary socialisation (Deaux, 1976 as cited by (Ward et al., 2001). As a result we acquire our core values early in life and:

> ‘come to regard them as reflecting reality and therefore as absolutely true. This may result in belief systems that are not universally shared and values that are…cherished by their respective groups’ (Ward et al., 2001:10).

These culturally embedded reference points are then utilised in the formation of conceptions (Pratt, 1999). The following discussion of normative experiences and expectations aims to reveal some of the culturally embedded reference points of the lecturers.

**Early learning experiences**

The lecturers’ recollections of their early childhood experiences were replete with positive memories of families who encouraged learning by exposing their children to a wide variety of stimuli. They spoke of ‘informal and educationally rich’ [84:1:69] backgrounds: families that encouraged reading for pleasure, where ‘books were everywhere’ [84:1:60], a ‘sense of curiosity’ [80:1:8] was fostered, ‘good conversations were shared’ [81:1:4], and learning was ‘supported for learning’s sake’ [82:1:193]. Thus it seems highly likely that positive formative experiences contributed to the lecturers’ common enjoyment of learning.

These experiences served as an introduction to a continued appreciation of learning throughout most lecturers’ years of compulsory education. For some, those sound early foundations may have been advantageous when difficulties were faced and may have served to ameliorate negative educational experiences in the longer term. Although one lecturer spoke of teacher-dominated classrooms; ‘a complete absence of any audio visual aids and very traditional methods’ [84:1:63-64], he nevertheless reflected that the experience had either suited or shaped his learning style because he thrived in the environment and continued to embrace learning. Others recalled; ‘wonderful teachers, experiences at university, brilliant…teachers’ college’ [80:1:6-12] and ‘found learning relatively easy’[83:1:0].
However, the pathways to academia were not direct and foreseeable for all respondents:

If you had said to me...when I did my matriculation that I would do a Doctorate...no way. Because I didn't have those aspirations...There were no role models, nobody encouraged me to do that.'[83:1:79-83]

As would be expected, some respondents’ career paths were more direct than others. However they apparently shared a sincere enthusiasm for their current work role.

**Career histories and current work environment**

Four of the lecturers had early careers as school teachers, one had also been a technical teacher, and one had a background in scientific research and management prior to becoming a full-time academic. Therefore most of the respondents came to teaching HRD from a compulsory-education background that led to the teaching of adults as postgraduates. Additionally one respondent held an MBA, two had worked and lived in international university colleges, one had taught in the Philippines and Thailand prior to the BET program, and all had travelled extensively.

At the time of this research, all of the lecturers been employed by the university for years, and had previously transferred from an institute that had amalgamated with the university as a result of government policy and which had experienced radical downsizing. The shared work history from that institute, which specialised in the education of adult-teachers of technical and vocational education, would very likely have contributed to the establishment of the strongly evident workplace sub-culture that some respondents felt was under siege from the more traditional pedagogies and work practices of prevailing university culture. This sub-culture was doubtless sustained by the fact that all the lecturers and administrative staff had later transferred to the same Centre within the education faculty of the university. The Centre specialised in adult learning and was described by one respondent as a ‘hybrid...where nobody should claim exclusivity to their expertise’ [84:1:140]. It may be relevant that for some time, including the period during which much of this research was conducted, the new Centre did not have a permanent leader. In the following citation from an interview, one of the respondents recounts challenges facing the Centre. Aspects of his story, particularly the valuing of the Centre’s unique cohort, are typical of most members of the group:

The Centre is getting smaller...not through any fault of its own, but I think through lack of leadership, through lack of understanding of the cohort, and, I suspect - from the faculty per se - a lack of understanding of [our] particular students and disciplines. We've had a lot of flack thrown at us...because there is a view that education has to take place in a school or educational
Given the above sentiment, it is not surprising that in this environment of ongoing organisational change, evident frustration contributed to some of the more significant differences of values and beliefs amongst the respondents. In general, whilst they were positive about working in the university, lecturers wanted to preserve what they perceived to be the unique educational values of the Centre. For example, one spoke of ‘our own ethos’, which he described as ‘being nicely intact’ [81:2:574]. Whilst the Centre’s adult learning ethos did seem to be intact, the responses of individuals to broader university work culture were more varied. Some had embraced the university culture to a greater extent than others. The former affirmed the requirement to adapt from ‘the old collegial teaching culture into individualistic research’ [84:1:136] on the grounds that in order to achieve in the university environment, ‘you have to be very specific about who’s done what when it comes to, you know, the crunch. The rewards and incentives in academia are about you and you alone’ [84:1:137-146]. Another, who had spent most of his career in academia observed that:

...we are trained as individuals...a PhD is seen as appropriate training for an academic. It focuses on your standing as an individual. Whilst in a community of reference, it is still your individuality...and that has difficulties when moving to other cultures'. [82:1:12-15]

As an outsider I saw in the Centre a complex overlap of the respondents’ (largely shared) expressed desires. Despite the expression of a desire for more collaborative working experiences, people rarely came together to work collegiately unless, for example; a new program was being developed; there was an immediate requirement for ‘dealing with different situations in a problem-solving kind of way’ [81:271-75]; or a second opinion was sought on a decision such as assessment. Desires for collaboration were being subsumed by heavy workloads, an individualistic university system and seclusion brought about by professional specialisation. Respondents used the word ‘respect’ frequently to describe this work pattern: respect for the individual’s professional expertise; respect for people managing a high workload and respect for ‘each other’s boundaries’ [82:1:319]. This environment made reaching consensus difficult despite calls from within the Centre for lecturers to present ‘a united front to students’ [81:1:155]. Consequently, individual lecturers differed in their approaches to issues such as whether to accept assignments in electronic format; the format and amount of feedback a student could expect; the relative importance of technical aspects of essay construction, etc.. As one respondent described; ‘academics tend to be kind of ornery people – if someone says ‘here’s a mandated
rule’…forget it!’ [82:1:320-321]. Thus, for reasons including a belief in democratic individualism, lecturers’ idiosyncrasies prevailed in their interactions with students. At the time of this research, the issue of what a ‘united front’ to present to students might be was not agreed upon, and was perceived by some as ‘not manageable…in a human dynamic’ [81:1:168-171].

Whilst this may be the case in most Western universities, the lecturer who reflected that such an individualist culture might not transfer well cross-culturally was proven correct. This would possibly have been predicted by Ward et al. (2001:15) who propose that:

> when individualists and collectivists meet, they bring to the encounter different social attitudes, moral values and behavioural inclinations. Their cognitive styles differ as will the manner in which they communicate, particularly in relation to how they express their emotions and wishes. How they act will…differ as a result of their core value orientation.

The individualism/collectivism dimension is only one example of the many discussed in the previous chapter (page 102) that are relevant to this research. However, Triandis (1990) has identified individualism/collectivism as being particularly relevant to the analysis of ethnocentrism. Thus it is important that, as with all cultural rules of behaviour, many of the respondents appeared, at least initially, to be unaware of the possibility and legitimacy of other ways of behaving or the potential impacts of the individualist nature of their workplace.

**Expectations of educators**

*Some [lecturers] go to extraordinary lengths to help individual students, give of their time freely to help them overcome a range of problems in order to achieve their learning outcomes. [82:1:120-121]*

The above statement was made by one lecturer in reference to his colleagues and epitomises the lecturer’s expectations of teachers. ‘Student-centredness’ and ‘good teaching’ were very important to all the respondents and this attitude was reflected in their positive appraisals of each other, and was also confirmed in my observations during fieldwork. According to the lecturers, ‘good teaching’ called for the following attitudes and attributes: a student-centred orientation, an honouring of ‘adult learning values’, supportiveness, creativeness, preparedness to spend time guiding lower achievers, a desire and capability to attend to different learning needs, a genuine interest in pastoral care, and discipline-specific expertise. The effective lecturer was able to ‘unpack things for students to make meaning for them’ [80:11:15-118] and provide ways for the student to interrogate materials that may be strange or difficult. At the same time, it was the
lecturer’s responsibility to ensure that the class could maintain an active and participative interest in the subject. Some lecturers sought an ‘equal relationship’ with students and most spoke of themselves as facilitators of learning. Facilitation was described as ‘building on students’ interpretations and supporting them while they increase their understanding from their own perspective’ and ‘engendering insight and curiosity’ during which the teacher was ‘one actor of many in the learning process’ [82:2:177]. Whilst the extent of the facilitator role varied amongst respondents, the group was clustered toward the ‘facilitative’ end of a notional didactic-facilitative continuum.

Nature of teacher-student relationships

[Students] were tremendously hospitable, tremendously caring. My health suffered during the BET teaching time and there were prayers to Ganesh…Buddha…in the Mosque in Singapore… in every Christian denomination in Singapore. That wouldn’t happen with your students here. It’s that intensity of relationship that has really been a phenomenal thing for me. [82:2:347-353]

The above quotation speaks of the intensity and overwhelmingly positive nature of the relationships the lecturers formed with students in Singapore. However, the majority experienced complications in forming relationships that were unprecedented in their Australian experience. Relationships were clarified after significant reflection on appropriate roles, ethics, and values, and were developed by way of a gamut of emotions including discomfort and uncertainty.

Most of the lecturers spoke of their relationships with students in terms of their formal roles at a given time (e.g. teacher, student, graduate). The nature of relationships was very clearly linked to lecturers’ moral and ethical teaching values and their views on the nature of authority. Apparently, whilst for most lecturers it was desirable to be friendly with students, it was less acceptable for a close friendship to develop; at least whilst the parties were in a dependent relationship. However, in practice, those role-dependent lines blurred, and it appeared that the lecturers found it difficult and unnatural to avoid the development of friendships when they and their adult students had interests in common and enjoyed each other’s company.

Typically lecturers believed that ‘getting to know the students on a personal level’ was an intrinsic teaching value and an important component of adult learning, however this value was complicated by ethical issues, even in Australia. In Singapore, this was one of the first issues that lecturers recognised as being a result of cultural
difference and one reflected that ‘it puts pressure on you when there is a cultural norm that is not interpreted in the same way as yours’ [81:2:129-35]. As this lecturer related, whereas in the past he had purposely maintained a slight distance from students, for him Singapore had ‘changed the ball game’ [81:1:56]. Lecturers needed to find an unfamiliar middle-ground between professional and personal relationships, and this was challenging given the preference of most for relatively egalitarian relationships combined with their incontrovertible position of power (at least in relation to assessment).

Where roles were (apparently) clearly defined for both parties – such as meeting with a student after hours on campus in Singapore to discuss the student’s progress – there was little inherent confusion, however the Singaporean hospitality and predilection for combining business with entertainment was a catalyst for misunderstanding. Frequently the Western notion of appropriate roles and behaviours in a professional setting did not fit the Singaporean practice (e.g. venue, who pays). For example one lecturer described a meeting with a student that took place in what unexpectedly eventuated to be a relatively expensive restaurant, and for which the student paid before the lecturer was alert to what was happening (this was also something I experienced more than once. I would reach for my wallet to find that the bill was already settled). The lecturer’s concerns were related to the motivation behind the action; whether there would be an expected ‘quid pro quo’ in terms of assessment: they wondered whether the student could afford it, and how other students in the class would construe the lecturer’s actions. Other lecturers found themselves in similar situations; ‘the hospitality of the students...was wonderful and constituted a very positive experience...but [was] problematic in terms of the marks’ [80:2:85-88].

The clarification of roles and relationships was further complicated by lecturers’ eagerness to learn about Singapore in the most accessible manner available to them: that is, through the students. In contrast to the discomfort brought about by circumstances involving gifts or favours, the lecturers were very keen to accept invitations from groups of students to visit Singaporean landmarks and cultural sights, and to share the experiences of peoples’ daily lives. Furthermore, as ambassadors for Australia, the lecturers thought it their responsibility to accept such invitations in order to show politeness and gratitude and to share Singaporeans’ pride in their country. The outcomes of these ventures were highly valued and tangible in terms of cultural learning and pedagogy, as portrayed in the following quotations:

I am much more comfortable with Singaporeans because I got to know so many of them very well...they are more likely to be open with me about how
they think and how they feel about things. So you have that awareness of their culture…it helps me learn and helps them open up [in class] where they are not relying on me as the expert, so I am just one of the group [83:2:21-23,100,103]

I felt it was far better to learn by living as Singaporeans did, so I accepted offers to go to people’s homes. I spent the time learning about their ways of living and their social mores… diverse religious practices, and would avail myself when invited to go along and see and learn…which to me means that I’m gaining some respect and they can see that I’m respectful of them. [80:98-105, 357-361]

These vignettes from reports of teacher-student relationships demonstrate one of the significant intercultural challenges the lecturers faced. They wanted to learn, and to be perceived as friendly ambassadors. However when in the role of teacher providing pastoral care and academic support, they became uncomfortable when students responded in ways to which they were unaccustomed [e.g. with gifts and favours]. In summary, lecturers initially sought a way to accept Singaporean teacher-student relationships on Australian terms and thereby to separate behaviours and responses according to the role they were playing at the time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was not terribly successful¹. Ultimately the situation became so uncomfortable for some lecturers that the course coordinator took up the issue openly in a class forum and with S.I.M.. He explained the university’s official standpoint on acceptance of gifts and favours, and the rationale behind it. Eventually the situation was at least partially resolved through the development of a class-based learning opportunity. A session focussing on ethics and intercultural communication in transnational business was conducted during a subject focussing on organisational behaviour. Analysis of differing cultural approaches to gift giving and business practice ensued. Whilst some confusion doubtless remains on either side, the situation was clarified somewhat and the lecturers’ cultural and ethical values and confines were spelt out. Invitations from students continued, which was welcomed, however from that point onward lecturers reported feeling more comfortable about discussing issues such as who pays when dining. The lecturers hoped that the students better understood the motivation for their behaviours, and doubtless everyone shared the following sentiment:

¹ As an aside, it is worthwhile mentioning that during my fieldwork the students were responding to me in the same way. They were extremely generous with time, money and gifts. They had nothing to gain from me in terms of the program, quite the opposite in fact: I was seeking their valuable time, offering nothing but friendship and asking a lot of questions in return. I reassured the lecturers to this end; however as the costs of gifts to lecturers rose above token levels, the situation became unacceptable under university guidelines.
I felt a big relief when they graduate, because they’re adults, and now, I feel the burden of my professional responsibility to do with marks can be left aside. [81:2:121-125]

Lecturers’ initial expectations of Singaporean students

The lecturers’ perceptions of Singaporean students changed quite significantly during the four years of the BET program. Initially, they tended to conceptualise a generic ‘Asian’ student, although they did so consciously and with reservations in most cases. Lecturers had scant opportunity to authenticate their preconceptions prior to departure because the university did non provide pre-departure or cross-cultural briefings, ‘not even basic stuff like how to get from the airport’ [80:1:406-407]. Consequently the lecturers were left with three main sources of potential information on which to base their expectations: their experiences of teaching Asian students in Australia; in one case the experience of teaching in Thailand and the Philippines; and in most cases the advice of other faculty members who may have taught in Asian countries. This was a particularly unfortunate set of circumstances as most of those reference points were at best negatively skewed and at worst ethnocentric and ill-informed. This caused high levels of pre-departure anxiety for some of the lecturers; a situation that will be revisited in a discussion of ‘cultural learning’ at the conclusion of this chapter.

One lecturer recalled the advice he received from a university colleague as:

The way to get to Asian students is give them…lots of materials, keep them busy, make it tough, they expect it. And don’t do too much group-work; they expect you to be up front, and them to be down there. And you give and they take, and that’s it…that was… pretty close to what I was told. [80:2:173-183]

Fortunately the lecturers were perceptive enough to recognise the stereotypical nature of these propositions, indeed one lecturer reflected that ‘in my endeavours to find out [about Singaporean students] I was told some incorrect things that reinforced in my mind this sort of colonial attitude’ [80:1:366-368]. Consequently he ‘listened but didn’t take heed’ [80:2:179-180]. Another reflected that ‘[the advice] didn’t resonate for me as I had no experience’. [83:2:109-110] Yet in abandoning these sources of (mis)information, the respondents were left with only their pre-existing composite picture of an ‘Asian student’: a generic Asian Singaporean from a ‘half-way house between Australia and India’ [81:1:226]. The lecturers’ reported expectations were customarily positive; ‘[I] consciously had preconceived ideas of people from different races, but by and large they were…ones that allow me to have a positive view’ [81:241-244]. However some reported concerns. For example, one lecturer wondered if student time-keeping behaviours would be ‘rubber
time like in the Philippines’ [80:1:209-213]; and another; ‘what could I say and not say, how should I relate to them as students’ [83:1:175-180].

In summary, based on their limited sources of information, the group expected that these generic ‘Asian’ students would be:

- quiet, committed learners;
- meticulous, keen on note taking and reading;
- approving of, and comfortable with, assessment via exam;
- very reticent to get involved (e.g. in role play); and
- unused to thinking in different ways.

**Lecturers’ later perceptions of Singaporean students**

It is interesting that although the lecturers taught the same group of students, some found them very different to their expected ‘generic’ model and others found fairly much what they expected. Most of the lecturers who had sought pre-departure advice from colleagues concluded that:

> the original advice was wrong: [Singaporean students] did not want ‘more’, fast paced, a lot of material thrown at them. They didn’t want that at all. They wanted material, but they wanted to understand, they wanted to learn. They wanted to get it from me, yes, that was certainly felt. But they wanted it at a rate that didn’t fit with what I was told by any stretch of the imagination’ [80:2:413-416]. ‘And they are extremely anxious about exams so that information was incorrect as well. [80:1:395]

Moreover, as opposed to their initial expectations, lecturers observed that Singaporean adult students were:

> Capable of operating at a variety of cultural levels...so they give me back what they think Anglo things are. I get very little in terms of Confucian thinking or Malay thinking back because they are constantly reading all the stuff out of North America...even though I seek to understand them and use the exemplars...I think they switch to Anglo mode when they are in discussion in class or getting back assignments to me. [82:2:87-93]

> Quite prepared to be very, very critical of their system in class, and I wasn’t prepared for that. [82:1:220-223]

> Prepared to challenge… [82:1:247-48]

> Able to give negative feedback to lecturers elegantly, although indirectly… [81:1:401-405]
Thus, there was a general level of agreement that the students were more prepared to speak out and ‘be upfront’[82:1:246] than lecturers had been lead to expect and also that the Singaporean students coped very well with new epistemologies and pedagogies once they adapted; which lecturers gave the majority of students credit for doing relatively quickly. Furthermore, lecturers discovered patterns of behaviour that they had not been advised about before they arrived. Some found that the stereotypical ‘perfect, committed’ Asian student was also an inaccurate portrayal; ‘people in Singapore are not always punctual, diligent…in some cases they knew how to play the system, to avoid, to string things out a little’ [80:2:17,66].

Another behaviour pattern that lecturers noticed was that they described students ‘wanting to be right…to be correct’ [83:1:198]. They observed that this difference affected classroom pedagogies when students were ‘not speaking because they don’t want to appear to be wrong’ [83:1:268] and when students sought and relied solely on direct information from the lecturer as the primary source of knowledge. One lecturer’s recollection illustrates the behaviours associated with this pattern and how alien he found them:

[in my first session] I walked into the classroom and the person in the front row had six tape recorders lined up…I said “you’re not serious, you’re not going to tape all of this because I don’t lecture”…but they taped every little bit, it was scary. [83:1:242-248]

Lecturers observed that the students ‘found it difficult initially that there wasn’t a correct answer’ [82:2:209]. Possibly as a result of students’ apparent desire for a right answer, at least half of the lecturers described the Singaporean students using terms such as ‘pedantic’ [82] or ‘demanding’ [83], and agreed that:

you had to be very specific about what you said in terms of instructions … much more than you’d need to be with an Australian student. In what’s to be done, how it’s to be done, what is due process…much more pedantic in process. [82:2:106-111]

As another respondent recalls:

[students asked] what do I need to do, A, B, C, D, and that will give me E, which will give me a first grade honours? So they looked at things in a very logical, linear and rational manner…they had to learn that no it’s not a matter of A, B, C, D and voila there’s E, because there were all sorts of ways in which that might take them, so that was a new experience for them. [80:2:349-354]
Feedback-seeking behaviour is also related to discussion of ‘right answers’. Lecturers unanimously recalled that Singaporean students were highly anxious and consequently sought feedback much more actively than Australian students. Indeed, as one lecturer said, they demanded it: ‘…a high expectation that you’ll give them lots of feedback…and it’s not feasible to do so…I’ve had to learn to say I’ll look at a draft…but no more than two pages’ [83:2:152-155].

Whilst lecturers found Singaporean students to be substantially different to their pre-departure stereotypes, some observed that the stereotypes were partially accurate: everyone agreed that Singaporeans were indeed courteous and polite, indeed one commented that they were ‘overly courteous’ [80:2:89]. One described them as ‘uncritical’ [84:1:100] and another similarly reflected that; ‘I didn’t experience a great number of students presenting arguments and thinking things through in a logical way…but it was a delight when I did’ [81:2:246-250]

Finally, the majority of the lecturers observed that the students’ behaviours changed, as evidenced below:

As they got used to me they relaxed, but still they were not as gregarious, not as open in terms of asking questions in the majority of cases. [80:2:160-162]

…at first they did not enjoy reflective learning, after a while, yes, but not initially…they needed some confidence building. [80:2:428]

In summary, whilst lecturers’ perceptions of their students changed during the program, they remained generally positive. This stands in contrast to similar studies by Pratt et al. (1999) who found that expatriate Western faculty members in Hong Kong often categorised their students in negative terms and concluded that they had ‘only an instrumental view of education’.

Lecturers’ perceptions of student motivations

There is a market for the educational values that we espouse. And at the core of those values is critique, and dissent, and the justification of one’s point of view…these people have self-nominated for the course, so these are people who are attracted to a Western model of learning, a qualification and to the identity of the university. [84:2:59-60, 108-111]

Clearly the lecturer speaking above is convinced that a significant motivation for Singaporean students to enrol in an Australian university is the attraction of a Western model of learning and the status to be gained from attaining that qualification at a
prestigious Western university. Not all the lecturers were equally convinced that this was a key motivational factor. Some felt the motivations were pragmatic, and did not stress the status or difference of an offshore degree. Certainly everyone agreed that the students wanted to gain degree credentials in order to position themselves in the labour market and that (for a minority) the BET program might be a starting point for further academic aspirations. Others spoke of students who were seeking a way out of the workplace into consultancy, and observed that ‘they want a qualification that’s relevant to what they are doing at work’ [82:1:293-301] that would enable them to ‘go away with something they feel they can actually use’ [83:1:115-119]. Finally, at least one lecturer was unsure and was left pondering student motivations and their conclusions about the program:

*If they want and have sought a Western university, what is it that is different ... that they want? If they want some Western values then I have an obligation to show them what they are. So to me...their expectation is that they will be doing something different and it's not necessarily an imperialistic or a colonising set of values that are being imposed...but I haven't gone there uninvited...they might have their eyes opened a bit...and realise they are being presented with something they might not want.... But I can't do anything about that. I am part of the whole deal in wondering that, as they might wonder that.* [81:2:293-312]

**Discussion of normative experiences and expectations:**

The preceding analysis of normative experiences lays a valuable foundation for understanding of the beliefs and values of the lecturers, which in turn aids analysis of their subsequent cross-cultural experiences.

As Pratt (1999, n.p.) proposes, ‘within each community of practice there is an accepted identity or social role of ‘teacher’. Those who wish to adopt that role draw upon their socialisation experiences and ‘learn scripts that will allow them legitimacy within that community’. The lecturers’ primary socialisation experiences encouraged a positive attitude toward learning, and that gave them legitimacy in their communities. The extent and their awareness of culture-bound traits such as individualism differed, as did the level of ascription to ‘facilitative/experiential pedagogies’. Nevertheless, the group respected each other’s professional skills and colleagues’ differing teaching styles. Thus, the group shared a teaching culture. However individuals were allowed and expected to differ from the norm, within the boundaries of an ‘adult learning’ community.

Analysis of lecturers’ normative experiences and expectations suggests the view that their primary socialisation and community of practice provided little to prepare them for
teaching in an Asian country. This conjecture is supported by the difficulties that they experienced both prior to arrival and in the social situations they encountered in Singapore. Slight levels of ethnocentrism are evident prior to exposure to Singapore (e.g. the comment on page 147 that Singaporeans did not think logically [whose logic?]), and the presumption that Asians attended Australian universities as a preference and because of prestige - whereas chapter three posited that the decision to study at an Australian university is often a ‘fall-back’ position. However such difficulties and cultural gaps between perceptions would be reasonably expected between any culturally different individuals or groups. This issue is revisited at the conclusion of this chapter in a discussion of culture learning.

**Epistemic beliefs**

According to Pratt (1999:n.p.) ‘epistemic beliefs are related to the nature of what one is teaching, the aims or purposes of education, the nature of learning, and the kinds of evidence that are acceptable when making claims about what people have learned’. The following paragraphs explicate lecturer’s epistemic belief patterns and build further on the picture provided by the discussion of their normative experiences.

**The nature of learning**

Individual interviews demonstrated that, epistemologically, the lecturers’ group had much in common. Most recognised learning that emerged from ‘many pathways’ [80:1:38]; ‘occurr[ing] in a range of ways, not just formal school environments’ [83:1:5-6]. There was significant agreement that ‘real’ learning was not generated by an ‘ethos of lecturing and tutorials’ [81:76-77] but emerged through a cyclical process that includes analysis of individual experience, group discussion, interrogation, critique and testing of ‘the usefulness of theories through practice’ [81:2:339]. Knowledge was generally perceived as something that was formed and consequently more transitory and dynamic than pre-existing. In short, ‘real’ learning required thinking, adaptation and application.

In reading the lecturer interviews, the words ‘real’ and ‘true’ frequently prefaced the word ‘learning’. Moreover, it seems that ‘real’ learning is accorded legitimacy when anchored in elements of self-knowledge. For some respondents, an individual’s experience and self-knowledge were crucial foundations for learning. This philosophy corresponded with a focus on ‘empowerment’ of the individual, as epitomised by phrases such as ‘learning to speak for oneself’ or ‘giving their own view’ [81:2:341-344]. At the same time, however, most of the respondents proposed that when learning occurred in isolation it was not ‘real’
learning, ‘even if you have a fine intellect’[81:2:125]. Therefore, for many lecturers, whilst thinking, adaptation and application could occur in isolation, group interaction was considered essential to deeper, profound understanding. ‘Real’, and ‘deep’ learning was maximised through group discourse, which built on the expertise in the room. It was associated with exposure to difference and diversity, and the product of a ‘really good discussion’, which ‘rises above surface conversation’ [81:2:274-277]. Inherent in this journey to deep learning were elements of discomfort and risk. Therefore lecturers sometimes felt the need to ‘push people’ in order to enable them to ‘get a real taste of learning’[82:1:43]. Noteworthy however, is the tension between the discomfort and risk that some respondents considered essential to learning. This point will be revisited later in this chapter during a discussion of pedagogies.

The lecturers’ particular and recognisable learning culture was transmitted to students under the sobriquet ‘learning how to learn’, which was considered to be very important. Seemingly, ‘learning how to learn’ meant doing so in the well-intentioned learning environment favoured by the lecturers. This transmission of learning culture was recognised, accepted and enacted by some in full consciousness of its Western educational properties [84:2:227]. But it is unclear, however, whether all the lecturers accepted or recognised that they were attempting to transmit an inherently ‘Western’ or foreign approach. It seems possible that in this context, ‘learning to learn’ could be read as essentially ‘learning to learn as we do’, because surely it cannot be denied that people from Singapore do learn and do think for themselves (and did so before our lecturers arrived). As one lecturer proposed, the nature of learning in the BET program meant that ‘some processes might be more valuable than others’[81:2:344]. While the preceding comment was made specifically in relation to the construction of academic argument in assessment, it could equally apply more broadly to a general view of epistemology and pedagogy.

Another important concept in analysis of lecturers’ epistemological beliefs was the interplay of application of knowledge with creation of knowledge. Herein opinions amongst lecturers were somewhat divergent. Specifically, several lecturers considered that an element of application was central to grounding of knowledge and transfer of learning. This was typified by comments such as:

...make meaning in terms of being able to transfer that into their lives...I don’t mean utilitarian... I mean you are now thinking, and applying and understanding and being insightful...able to think, be curious... [80:1:116-119,351]
The next level is that they can apply all those concepts. [83:2:94]

Application of knowledge as contextually based …your job is to help [students] see the potential of that. [81:2:378-79]

They had very good applications of theoretical knowledge to their workplace, some of them were quite brilliant. [82:2:231]

One way to interpret the above is that for the lecturers ‘real’, deep, higher level and insightful learning happens when students are able to make meaning of theory through application. Another view shared by some lecturers, however, was that application of knowledge was not as important as creation of knowledge, for example: ‘I don’t have the view that [assessed] work is application of knowledge, it is creation of knowledge’ [84:2:180-181]. This aspect of the teaching culture is an example of one point on which there may be general agreement (e.g. that knowledge is constructed in the classroom) with some deviation from the mean (e.g. on the issue of importance of application versus a more theoretical stance). It is relevant to this research however, because of its impact on pedagogy and therefore on students’ experiences of the program.

Locus of responsibility

I used the old Chinese proverb that if you give a man a fish you’ll feed him for a day, you teach a person to fish and you feed him for life…and you know one of the students who had been most opposed to this having to do this work themselves came back later in the course to say: I have learned to fish. [82:2:154-158]

The above quotation eludes to the initial resistance that one lecturer faced when grappling with the issue of responsibility for learning. The view of most lecturers that their role was that of facilitator implies a shared responsibility. For example, the quotation which follows illustrates the extent to which a ‘hand’s off’ approach by lecturers was intentional: ‘when they break into groups…make sure you don’t interrupt unless you become an authority figure’ [81:2:432]. This illustrates the prevailing adult learning culture in which the knowledge students bring to the class is regarded as valuable as that brought by the lecturer/facilitator. Correspondingly, students accept a high level of responsibility for their own learning, which is further evidenced by comments such as ‘discovering things for yourselves is an important part of adult learning’ [82:1:176], and ‘really it’s [the students] job to contextualise it and you’re only there to help them’ [82:1:186].

The lecturers realised that the self-directed learning they encouraged was more autonomous than that to which many of the students were accustomed. Consequently,
lecturers became progressively less surprised when elements of self-direction resulted in discomfort and resistance on the part of the students (although in one instance – the ‘learning to fish’ case cited at the start of this section in which students were expected to download and research journal articles rather than being given pre-printed subject-readings– the strength and emotion behind the student resistance brought about not only surprise but significant tension). Individual lecturers recalled that, early in the BET program, ‘[students] wanted to get it from me’ [80:2:415] and ‘why didn’t I just give them the articles [versus asking them to do a literature search]’ [82:2:157]. Despite initial resistance, the lecturers maintained their self-directed ethos and accordingly the pedagogies they employed were designed to support student self-sufficiency. The students did adapt to this environment, although to varying degrees. As one lecturer reported: ‘[student attitude] changes through the course from “I will sit at the foot of the teacher and just learn from them” to that you learn from each other, from discussion, from self-discovery’ [82:2:146-148].

The nature of what one is teaching

Delightful…leading people to be intensely engaged…it’s enriching. [80:2:408-411]

These educational values, that we hold close to our hearts… [84:2:64]

To me it is very valuable work. [80:1:36]

Getting them over the hurdle…they’re very precious when you can do that. [83:1:98]

The BET cohorts largely consist of diploma level students, most of whom are enrolling in university-level studies for the first time. As a consequence, the nature of BET teaching is often compensatory and lecturers spoke of ‘giving a second chance to people who may have lacked opportunity through the normal channels’ [83:1:95]. The lecturers used sundry building metaphors in describing the nature of their work including; ‘opening doors [to application and new ideas]’; ‘building and extending [understanding]’, and ‘taking [students] to the next level’. Possibly the expectation and accomplishment of ‘getting people over hurdles’ was what kept the lecturer group motivated and contributed to their considerable work satisfaction.

Validity…who knows, who learns, who judges?

As previously proposed, for many of the lecturers valid knowledge is that which is relevant, current, engaging and, frequently, is actively constructed in the classroom.
Therefore whilst academic knowledge, including the learning and understanding of foundational theories, is considered important, ‘foundational, formal expertise’ is not overtly reified. It is intended that teacher-centred and textbook-based cognitive inputs combined with facilitative pedagogies will encourage curiosity and, thereby, development of insight: emergent knowledge will be cyclically interrogated, translated, contextualised and applied.

There was no clear agreement amongst the lecturers on the nature of ‘valid’ knowledge. Further discussion surrounding the application and creation of knowledge is tied up in a potentially prodigious philosophical discourse, and is beyond the scope and intent of this thesis. However it is noteworthy that lecturers were slightly more aligned on the question of what constituted ‘valid process’. For instance, one lecturer recognised that ‘learning can be implicit and tacit…not just according to written objectives’ [81:2:471-472]. At the same time, a ‘spirit of critique, interrogation of ideas and literature’ [84:2:228] and ‘learning to think for themselves’ [81:1:178-180] was expected of students, who needed to display ‘valid process’ behaviours in order for lecturers to judge their own pedagogies as successful. Perhaps there is a tension between lecturers’ espoused epistemologies (e.g. facilitated, dynamic knowledge construction), and the somewhat linear ‘valid process’ of ‘reasoning, explanation and justification’ [81:2:336-344] that students needed to replicate if their work was to be positively assessed.

This ‘valid process’ of knowledge creation, application and assessment occurred in the traditional Western university culture. ‘Valid process’ could be perceived as of greater consequence than ‘valid knowledge’, especially in terms of assessment of learning. Possibly ‘valid process’ was important to lecturers because it preceded and surrounded the construction of knowledge. Alternatively, maybe it was their role as assessors that forced lecturers to discuss, debate and elucidate ‘valid process’. Whatever the reason, or combination of reasons, it would seem that whilst knowledge was considered transitory and malleable, the process required to actualise knowledge, or at least to prove or justify its construction, was more concrete, and was required of students. In short, lecturers expected students to think differently as an outcome of the BET program as well as learning curriculum content.

**What is the ‘right answer’?**

It is axiomatic that if the lecturers regard the nature of knowledge as constructed and transitory, then there was no single ‘correct answer’ to a question or assessment task. This likelihood had interesting implications for both classroom process and student
assessment and further supports the contention that ‘valid process’ was important for students to replicate if they aspired to high grades. This chapter has already discussed the fact that lecturers thought students somewhat ‘pedantic’, and it seems noteworthy that in response the lecturers took a culturally relative standpoint in relation to the application of concepts in assignment tasks. This cultural relativity seemed to exponentially increase with lecturers’ exposure to Singapore, as the following examples illustrate:

You’ve got to decontextualise it...there’s much greater power distance in Singapore...more hierarchical...much more rigid, ...more formal in all their processes than we like to think of ourselves. We would think that is bad management practice; they would think it’s good management practice. You have to take that into account…”[82:2:218-219]

There might be some answers I’d cringe and say, my goodness, that sounds highly militaristic. But understandable, that’s the culture in that particular workplace and the person is illustrating his understanding in this way...the only time I would say it is not correct is if its been interpreted in a very limited way…[80:2:319-333]

If they are not bothered by a hierarchical workplace, why not...it may be that a clan basis or a guanxi basis actually is more supportive of work based learning than a Western model or a flatter participative model workplace. [84:2:192-195]

In assignments students had to demonstrate meaningful learning by sharing how constructs and concepts are lived in their world...And in some cases rightly, they felt that their approach was more suitable...for their particular circumstances than what I was suggesting. And that’s fine, and I’m open to all those sorts of things. I need to learn too. [83:2:300-307,372-376]

As is evident above, if there were no 'right or wrong' answers, and knowledge and application were contextually based, then as long as an argument could be justified and supported through appropriate and valid process it would be assessed in culturally relative terms.

Whilst, from a Western perspective, such flexibility may seem appropriate and admirable, it seems that students did not necessarily share or even comprehend lecturers’ assumptions about the nature of knowledge. Indeed as we recall from page 146, students ‘found it difficult initially that there wasn’t a correct answer’ [82:2:209]. In other words, it seems likely that while lecturers considered it unrealistic to expect a right answer, students were nevertheless trying to find one.

Summary: epistemic beliefs

The preceding discussion of epistemologies suggests that lecturers shared a recognisable teaching and learning culture based on epistemologies that were reflective
of Western educational paradigms, which – building on the discussion of normative experiences - is unsurprising. In general, the lecturers held to the belief that learning emerged, and was constructed in the classroom. Whilst there was some disagreement surrounding the issue, the general consensus of the lecturers’ group was that application of knowledge was an important component of the learning process.

The lecturers, either consciously or unconsciously, attempted to transmit their learning culture to students in Singapore, however some of their epistemological beliefs were foreign to the Singaporean students. A self-directed milieu in which responsibility for learning was shared between teacher and student; the supposition that some processes might be more valuable than others, and the notion that there was no ‘one right answer’ apparently combined to produce ambiguity for students, at a time when certainty was what they may have been seeking. Once again, there was an inherent cultural clash in this initial mutual lack of insight into another culture’s motivations and values. These normative and epistemologically-based values, beliefs and behaviours, combined with the responses of the student cohort, are inextricable from eventualities within and outside the classroom. These eventualities will be reported in the ensuing discussion of pedagogies.

**Pedagogy**

*Preferred processes and the factors that shaped them*

As would be expected, the lecturers employed individual teaching styles, that had been developed through significant career experience. There was an explicit acceptance and valuing of the fact that everyone would teach a little differently. However pedagogical preferences were clustered predominantly around a constructivist and/or experiential learning culture: ‘values centred around adult learners, with an experiential façade’ [84:1:131]. Whilst three of the lecturers characterised their pedagogies as constructivist, other typical descriptors included; inclusive, facilitative, participative, interactive, nurturing, experience-based and student-centred. As one lecturer recalls, the application of these constructivist type pedagogies in Singapore required a comprehensive set of skills employed by competent practitioners:

*It was very difficult initially, particularly the first group…the first year, first subject…to have them ask a question or respond to a question when I threw an overhead question to the group. There was a pregnant pause, so I had to help. Or someone would sheepishly say something and I’d say “oh, I can’t quite hear”, so I’d move down the room and say “well [this student] said…what do you think?”…group process was particularly difficult. [80:2:154-158]*
Consequently lecturers had to utilise their full repertoire of facilitative techniques and also develop new skills in order to effect the desired learning environment. In such an environment, the lecturers’ ability to ‘draw out what was in the room’ [84:1:227-228] was fundamental to success. Implicit in this ‘drawing out’ of the class was a requirement for the lecturer to make judgements about the level of students' verbal responses and interactions. In order to increase the level of verbal interaction, lecturers reported a versatile range of elucidation techniques including:

- carefully judging appropriate times at which to ask questions;
- paraphrasing questions and comments from quiet students and reframing those inputs for the whole group in order to facilitate further discussion;
- monitoring group intensity;
- judging opportune times in group process to break the class into syndicates;
- posing focus questions that would facilitate discussion;
- deciding whether or not to have small groups report back to the main group;
- giving tactful and encouraging feedback to groups and individuals in the classroom whilst reinforcing theory; and
- inviting the group to contextualise theory to their national and cultural context.

At the same time, in order to facilitate discussion, lecturers recognised the need to create a generally ‘comfortable environment’. Such an environment would encourage students to make comments; ask questions at any time; critique theories, the lecturer and each other; and practice constructing and supporting their arguments: it was a classroom where lecturers could ‘see [students] thinking and applying, not necessarily agreeing with [the lecturer]’[80:2:383-385]. In short, at least half of the lecturers would be expected to have concurred with the following observation: ‘I tried to ensure they would be happier and comfortable, because when we’re not happy and we’re not comfortable I suspect we’re not learning, so I think that is important’ [80:2:408-409].

As previously mentioned, however, there is possibly a tension between lecturers’ espoused epistemology and espoused pedagogy. As already discussed, initially the Singaporean students were not comfortable with a constructivist pedagogical milieu. Thus student comfort and expected verbal interaction were inextricable issues, to which lecturers responded differently. Compare for instance: ‘I am not keen on people lurking in silence. I know they have a right to do it and all the rest of it but I do try to draw out what’s
in the room’ [84:1:227-228] with; ‘I am conscious that there’s a lot who don’t speak so for them it’s...I don’t get them to report back as they are uncomfortable with it, but have groups just so that they can have the conversations and learn from each other’ [83:2:267-269]. While the lecturers would have agreed that the ability to respond to students’ different interests and learning modalities were foundational teaching skills, several of the lecturers also believed that it was their responsibility to expose the students to a range of different pedagogies. At least initially, therefore, the resultant state of disequilibrium could not easily be reconciled with student comfort. As a consequence, several lecturers encountered a dilemma when considering the extent to which they should adapt their teaching style to suit the different needs of the Singaporean students. Achieving a balance of student comfort and cognitive input alongside constructivist and experiential learning, was an ongoing challenge. This was exacerbated by a third factor which inevitably affected pedagogies: the actual structure of the program.

Most lecturers considered that the program structure was unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons; both pedagogical and practical. At the time of this research the staff members who had developed and negotiated the first BET program were no longer employed at the university. Throughout the program, a senior lecturer held the position of course coordinator. The coordinator’s duties were primarily related to liaison with staff and students on academic and pedagogical matters, while faculty generalist managers conducted the contractual negotiations. However, in practice, the course coordinator was the primary contact point with the partner institution and once the program commenced, the coordinator was essentially a project manager for all matters, academic and otherwise. Somewhat frustratingly for the coordinator however, non-academic university staff regularly altered the structure and delivery modalities of the degree during the negotiation process with the partner institution, leaving the coordinator and their compatriot at SIM to negotiate ‘around’ the contract in order to meet unexpected eventualities and emerging needs. During the negotiation process, the degree program had been shortened in order to render it more marketable in competitive and impatient Singapore, where the time required to complete an offshore degree or post-graduate program was progressively becoming a selling point and consequently increasingly abridged. Accordingly the university was faced with

...a dilemma because if [we] don't condense it into an eighteen month program, we would not get a [sufficiently large] group [to make it financially and pedagogically sustainable]. So we had to trade off some of the pedagogy in order to get the program to happen, and then adjust the program to make it fit the students later. [83:2:160-167]
Accordingly, several of the lecturers commented that the program was ‘too pressured, not pedagogically sound’ [83:2:160]; ‘the pace rolls on, one subject after another’ [80:1:288]; ‘allowed no time to reflect and it works against syndicate activities and dwelling on things that help shape understanding’ [80:1:292]. Furthermore three lecturers commented that the pressured nature of the program may have encouraged students to cut corners, which lead to some plagiarism issues. Lecturers also complained that the structure resulted in them not having enough time to get to know the students; (e.g. ‘too many names, getting people confused’ [83:2:262], struggling to do justice to the same subjects in less time, and hindering their preferred student-centred approach). Some lecturers found that these factors resulted in them needing to be more content-focused and favour task over relationship: thus several lecturers observed that the course structure forced them to be more didactic than they would normally prefer. For the students’ part, as one lecturer reflected; ‘considering they are under pressure to write in English in a short space of time, to a high quality, when you think back on it, [their achievement] has been pretty impressive really’ [83:2:160-167].

Perhaps the lecturers should take more credit for the students’ achievement. As the course coordinator observed, where the program was successful it was largely due to staff goodwill. Many time and workload related issues also affected pedagogies and had to be resolved by lecturers, above and beyond those that they faced on a day-to-day basis in Australia. The time difference between Singapore and Melbourne meant that after a long flight, ‘[teaching is] draining…7:00 to 10:00 at night, which for me is late…the first night I’m always really, really tired, and I hesitate over words and feel a bit vague, I’m just so tired…it takes a few days before I can adjust’ [83:2:410-406].

Lecturers tended to compensate for the compacted nature of this program through increased email contact with students, very frequently in their own time, and via numerous meetings with students in Singapore at all hours of the day, night and weekend, when they were supposedly ‘off duty’. After observing the lecturers’ work in Singapore, my initially somewhat romanticised view of their international work changed considerably and I find it unsurprising that they described the work as ‘draining’. Indeed it is to their credit that the program continued to the high praise that it did over a six-year period with the same staff throughout.

**Evolution of pedagogies**

Thus we find tired lecturers teaching a program which they considered fraught with inherently undesirable pedagogical restrictions, in a hitherto unexplored physical,
national, and cultural environment, to a cohort of students who did not respond as their experiences predicted. Therefore it is perhaps not surprising that, although some experienced conflict about the desirability of changing their pedagogical preferences, they did make changes; although some were more significant than others. The following stories illustrate some of the challenges that encouraged lecturers to reflect on their pedagogical practices:

*In the classroom fewer [students] were comfortable working in groups. Fewer felt, and I can only go by, they didn't exactly say I'm not learning as much, but I got it from their facial expressions, or they way in which they responded, that they felt that this was a bit of fun, and not a serious method in terms of approaching learning. That the way in which you do learning is, we all sit in our desks, and [lecturer] facilitates, and we maybe ask a few questions and maybe not, and then we go away.* [80:2:145-151]

*Silence. I could not get them to comment, and then the realisation struck me that culturally, they're not going to speak out in a way that they might lose face or offend someone or it might get back to somebody else. You know, it's all of those things, it just hit me that here was something really, really important, that in any future class I just have to take account of.* [83:2:44-50]

*I have a divergent and unstructured style...But if you need some structure to get started with, I'll give you some structure...but I am never sure the degree of structure I should start with...or whether I should throw them in the deep end.* [81:2:409-416]

As a result of a multitude of new and perplexing stimuli such as those above, lecturers’ teaching styles changed, however slightly. Most lecturers adapted to the Singaporean students by providing more structure and formality early in the program and then moving to a less structured, more facilitative milieu. Whilst this may also occur in Australia, one lecturer recalled that; ‘in Singapore I hang on to the structure a bit longer’ [84:2:234]. Another adapted his teaching style by staging progression and incorporating more formal modalities before concluding with a facilitative style; ‘they like lectures so I give them some mini lectures, then we practice about it, then apply it’ [83:2:206].

The issue of group-work was a topic of focus during discussions on pedagogy. Again, there was no shared preference: some lecturers used group-work more frequently than was usual in the Australian context, particularly small-group syndicates, and some less. Clearly the degree of change described would be dependent on the percentage of group-work lecturers used in the first place, which naturally varied according to their teaching styles. Those who used less group-work were in a minority and reported that they did so because;

- The structure of the program required it;
• Students did not seem to value syndicate learning;

• They spent more time explaining words and concepts in Singapore which allowed less time for activities; and

• There was less time available therefore they encouraged students to work in groups after class time.

Others found whole-class guided discussion relatively unproductive. Either few students would respond or it would always be the same people who volunteered to. Thus lecturers increased their use of small-group-work because they found that syndicate work readily encouraged students to enter into dynamic discussion. In spite of these difficulties, as the following story shows, lecturer insights and resulting adaptations to pedagogies were ongoing, and the learning curve continued until the final days of the program. One respondent recounted his surprise when, after three years teaching in Singapore, he tried to convene a plenary discussion to conclude the days work. During the preceding syndicate work the students were ‘on track...really engaged and very motivated...they produced some really terrific stuff’ [83:2:41-44]. However when he tried to facilitate a plenary discussion he once again elicited only silence and evident discomfort. He decided on reflection that ‘they were more open to discussion in small groups than large groups...maybe whole-group-work doesn’t work because they are expecting to have to give the right answer’ [83:2:75].

Other lecturers, on reflection, thought they may have been overly cautious in the early days of the program and subsequently made fewer accommodations to perceived Singaporean learning styles as their experience of the program increased. A lecturer reflecting on previous experience concluded that in future he would ‘probably be less accommodating to the local view in order to engage more intellectually’ although he added he would do this whilst remaining ‘sensitive to the background of the learners’ [84:2:26-35]. This particular lecturer taught a diversity-focused subject and had found it more difficult to gain group engagement with issues that were sensitive in Singapore; ‘with the potential for gender analysis for example’ [84:2:327-328]. He had come to consider that it was nevertheless important to confront local paradoxes. By way of example, he considered that Singapore was a country with ‘appallingly high capital punishment rates…the Lee dynasty locked in…and at the same time having some sort of gay pride festival…those things are interesting for me politically and they would fire me up to take a more interrogative stance in future...’[84:2:42-46,50-51]. For him, the questioning of political and social mores in Singapore was not cause for concern: a
stance he defended with a strong argument in support of the epistemological values of critique, dissent and justification, which he believed the program had a responsibility to encourage.

The political and cultural environment in Singapore provided challenges for another lecturer who nevertheless demonstrated that it was possible to overcome very high levels of student anxiety and resistance to particular pedagogies - to the eventual surprise of the students themselves. This lecturer had proposed an independent project focusing on organisational change management. The proposal was met with anxiety and high resistance from students: ‘Initially students thought ‘there’s nothing I could do that would produce change in my organisation in Singapore’ he said ‘…As it happened, that wasn’t the case…the end results that came out were really very interesting, some of them were quite brilliant.’ [82:2:221-232]

(Re)forming a curriculum

I was concerned about the nature of the materials I was going to take to Singapore, because it was ostensibly derived from the West…from England and the USA…how meaningful would they be and would they be applicable in such a society? [80:1:195-200]

When I first talked about 360 degree assessment [in class], I realised it was not a good concept in Singapore… you don’t do it, you can’t implement that because you don’t criticise those who are above you. And what could you expect from those below you? It’s not a culturally appropriate assessment tool. [83:255-262]

As the quotations above demonstrate, several lecturers went to Singapore with concerns about the nature of their subject content or developed those concerns early on in their transnational experience. Most were conscious that the majority of their foundational theories had an inherently Western bias and some were concerned that because they were from a ‘Western’ background, students would perceive a superior, ‘colonial’ attitude [e.g. 80:1:369] in their presentation of ‘Western’ literature. Furthermore, they worried that this could be exacerbated by their inability to contextualise the content due to their limited understanding of students’ work and life experiences. However at the same time, as one lecturer recounted: ‘I know that in terms of application of knowledge, the subjects I teach have fantastic scope’ [81:2:364]. Thus it could be concluded that several of the lecturers arrived in Singapore open to learning about the local context, and willing to contextualise and make adaptations to the content of their programs. Others were less concerned or aware about the cultural appropriateness of their program content, however after teaching several programs, all the lecturers had been forced to confront the issue. Once in
classrooms, content was evaluated and the emerging learning was contextually embedded, in other words: ‘[in the Singaporean context] we are not making adaptations to theory, but we are making adaptations to application of the theory’ [82:2256-258]. In the course of this interpretation, adaptation and re-construction of program content, the lecturers' common view that both teacher and learner were egalitarian actors in the learning process became particularly pertinent: essentially both parties needed to collaborate in order to 'make meaning'. Making meaning meant crossing bridges of cultural understanding; both national cultures and workplace-based cultures. Herein, it is noteworthy that while one lecturer held an MBA, none of the lecturers had held management positions outside of school or university environments, nor had they performed HRD roles in business organisations, whereas most of the students had done so and/or were doing so at the time of the BET program. Therefore, if an element of application was required in order to facilitate learning and 'make meaning', then lecturers and students were all the more mutually dependent. In fact, discussion of the student's workplace-based anecdotes gave meaning to the lecturers' theoretical expertise. The following quotation, in which the speaker uses the word 'language' metaphorically, illustrates this translation of content beautifully:

In a sense you have to find a common language that is a pidgin of symbols and images, and it's kind of constructed with the purpose of communicating something. And then you have to translate out of that common language back to your language. They translate out of that common language back to their language. [81:304-307]

This mutual reliance was particularly the case for the lecturers in the first iteration of the program. By the third iteration they had learned more about the Singaporean context and felt more self-confident and self-sufficient. Several of the lecturers increased the incorporation of Singaporean theoretical examples as the classes progressed. Local data would be presented by the lecturer for class discussion (e.g. in a planned manner using Singaporean authored academic literature or relevant Singaporean government policies and programmes, or simply on an ad-hoc basis using relevant articles from 'each day’s edition of The Straits Times' [82:2:197]). Lecturers reported that this was well received by students and that they were thanked for incorporating more accessible examples of local data. Alternatively, class input would be used to provide local examples and thereby contextualise content. In either case, a process followed whereby lecturers would seek the students' 'qualification and exemplification of issues…and then I might say “oh well that's similar to…” and therefore I'm making meaning and they are making meaning and
we connect as a group [80:1:337-342]. Through these processes both Western and Singaporean examples were included in what became a truly internationalised curriculum.

Whilst inclusion of Singaporean materials was well regarded by students, as previously observed, they were used to operating on a range of cultural levels. Although lecturers recognised that local data was meaningful to local students they were also aware that there had been some complaints from students about two subjects that were taught by local lecturers, on the grounds that the content was too local. Therefore, some lecturers used local content to build bridges to understanding, however they were also keen to make parallels with Australia, look for similarities and thereby embrace both countries in a ‘little comparative study’ [83:2:269]. Transnational research (e.g. Hofstede, 1994a) was also referred to in order to enable the class to reflect on global as well as local and Australian contexts [82,84].

Assessment

The preceding discussion of pedagogy has been mostly classroom-focused, however, of course assessment is a key component of pedagogy, and is largely enacted out of the classroom environment. Three key issues in relation to assessment and feedback have already been discussed. They are: that lecturers considered students demanding in terms of structure and feedback; that students were attempting to provide the ‘right answer’ whereas lecturers were probably seeking the ‘right process’; and that examinations had been recommended as the ‘assessment process of choice in Asia’. These issues will now be briefly revisited from a pedagogical point of view.

Examinations

Examinations had been included in the BET program against the better judgement of most of the lecturers. Exams were not used in the Australian version of the program and, in fact, several of the lecturers had never set an exam before they had to do so for the Singapore program. As already noted, senior staff at the university had recommended that exams were a respected form of assessment in Singapore and were favoured by students and teachers alike. Although there was some disagreement in my interviews with staff members from the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), it appears from University records that SIM may have initiated the inclusion of exams. A senior SIM manager conceded to me that although Singapore was moving away from an examination centred teaching culture, exams were still publicly considered to be an important criterion for student evaluation. She felt that some element of examination
remained important for a program to have credibility. Thus, in spite of their reticence, those lecturers who were unable to mount a strong enough case for the exclusion of exams from their subject included one examination and one essay per subject (successful arguments for the exclusion of exams included that the subject was ‘too philosophical’).

In response to the mandating of examinations, lecturers attempted to adapt the examination process to an ‘adult learning’ milieu. Examples included making the examination ‘open book’; allowing student notes in the examination room; providing a range of topic choices sufficient to suit a range of interests and learning styles; and writing the examination once in Singapore after having had the opportunity to judge the cohorts’ level of knowledge and ability. Despite their adaptation to exams, without doubt the lecturers preferred a formative/summative assessment format that allowed feedback and reinforcement between a first and final essay for each subject.

As it eventuated, lecturers found that exams produced a somewhat paradoxical effect on Singaporean students: they raised their already high anxiety levels, yet students ‘seemed to value exam results more’ [than essay results] [81:2:43-44]. Eventually, during the three iterations of the program, the number of examinations was reduced due to disfavour with both students and lecturers and with the approval of all parties.

**Essays: challenges and standards**

It does seem to be the case that, while lecturers quite easily developed cultural relativity in relation to contextualised knowledge, some faced a significantly higher level of discomfort in relation to culturally relative process. The Centre had issued all students with a ‘writing guide’ booklet addressing conventions of essay writing. However individual lecturers’ focussed on certain technical conventions more than others. Some were more likely to penalise students over technical aspects and written English. For others, issues such as analysis, argument, creative thinking and spirit of critique were the core focus of assessment.

The diminution of academic standards due to ‘poor English’ was a particularly vexing issue for some lecturers. Lecturers reported ‘a very mixed experience’ [80:1:237] in relation to students’ English language ability ‘from really struggling, to Masters or Doctoral level writing’ [80:1:236]. Certainly there was an acknowledgement that ‘they’re having to come to terms with writing in the English language in an academic format when the
content is new...that's a lot to ask in a short space of time [80:2:171-173]. One lecturer, cited below, relates his significant personal struggle with the issue:

Their English is a pidgin English, to communicate verbally...to get the business done....not English that allows for abstract thoughts to be discussed in depth...and that's a disadvantage, but to say so is offensive...and that might be so but...why are you enrolling? While you are in Singapore, accept the Singapore standard of writing of English? It doesn't take away from the fact that they are bilingual and I would be at a total loss if I were in their shoes...but I still have a responsibility to point out what the standard of good English is once they leave Singapore as they might not be taken seriously...so there's a task to be done even though it's unpopular...so I might be becoming more firm about this rather than pensive. [81:1:362-364]

The lecturer above ultimately decided that grammatically correct standards mattered and should be required. Another viewpoint, possibly taken more frequently, was that; 'You can allow for someone who has come from a very poor background...English is not good, we've got to be flexible while still adhering to our processes' [82:2:312-214]. In summary, this issue illustrates the fact that lecturers regularly and consciously struggled with choices between culturally relative standpoints and their own values, or the values of their organisation. In some cases local values won out, in others the lecturers’ or university standards were considered worthwhile maintaining and bridges were crossed to a new middle ground.

Taking it all back home

I am actually teaching diversity in diverse environments, so on one hand that’s high stress, on the other hand if you can pull it off its incredibly enriching for a variety of other contexts because you have unlocked a way to do it well. [84:282-293]

The efficacy of the BET program as a staff development exercise cannot be overestimated. One of the strongest patterns to emerge from the lecturer interviews was the positive impact that their experiences of teaching in Singapore had had on their professional and personal lives. Everyone recognised that the experience had changed their practices. They had learned to adapt their pedagogy and content to suit a different audience and subsequently found that this had direct application in Australian classrooms. Moreover, as one lecturer who was teaching assessment observed; 'most organisations are multicultural, so if you go applying a Western concept, it's going to offend some people' [83:2:284-287].
The lecturers had increased their repertoire of case study examples and consequently were able to widen the inter-cultural context of all their classes. Some reported feeling more confident and credible in the multicultural classrooms of the Australian university; ‘[in one of my classes] of twenty students, nine are international...I have used some pedagogies that work in Singapore with international groups here...so it has implications for what we do here’ [83:3-50]. They found that case studies based on experiences in Singapore and/or Singaporean literature engaged and interested all their students. They also discovered that they could communicate more easily and comfortably with international students in Australia, particularly Singaporeans. In addition, as one lecturer mused, ‘[the Singapore experience has] firmed my interest in cultural difference...in a fantastically positive way. It has provided me with the opportunity for a deeper re-examination of cultural difference as it effects society and forms of government’ [81:2:507,603]. Finally, and this can only be significant in a university that overtly values internationalisation of the curriculum: ‘Singaporean examples are good when the concept of globalisation comes up...and at a personal level [teaching overseas] makes globalisation and associated issues of our time a little bit more engaging, not just theoretical’[81:2:327,553].

**Pedagogy: discussion**

In the preceding paragraphs the lecturers describe the use of pedagogies they have selected and developed throughout their careers and the application and adaptation of those pedagogies in a foreign environment. These pedagogical choices reflect lecturers’ normative experiences and epistemological philosophies. Initial analysis of key points from discussion of pedagogies reveals a recurring and interlocking pattern of change and conflict. In terms of change we see the development of new skills, alterations to program structure, alterations to pedagogies, negotiation of new roles, adaptations to application of theory, increased repertoires of anecdotes and case studies, and internationalisation of the curriculum. We also see the lecturers faced with conflict and discomfort in relation to issues such as the dilemma over whether and how they should adapt their pedagogies to suit the apparent desires of the Singaporean cohort; the difficulties of teaching after time-zone changes, to a group of students who don’t respond as they expect; dissonance over the potential Western bias of their program and the related concern over being perceived as ‘doing the old colonialism act’ [80:1:369]; inability to contextualise content; and difficult decisions about standards of assessment. These conflicts and changes to behaviour are typical experiences of individuals experiencing acculturation.
Learning a new game: lecturers as sojourners learning culture

Acculturation, as defined by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936, 1954) (as cited by Pham and Harris 2001) is ‘a process of adaptation to a new environment as a result of two independent cultures coming in contact with each other’. Berry (1986) described stages of acculturation to which the lecturers’ experiences correspond very neatly: contact, conflict due to differences, and adjustments made to reduce perceived conflict. In the past, acculturation was viewed as a unidirectional process, which assumed that the optimal outcome was assimilation to the dominant culture (Pham and Harris, 2001). Berry (1986) describes four levels of acculturation strategy, the most desirable of which for sojourners (‘between-society culture travellers whose stay is usually temporary’ (Ward et al., 2001)) would be ‘integration’. In ‘integration’ (or ‘biculturism' Pham and Harris, 2001), rather than assimilating, individuals accept both their own cultural values and host cultural values. In order to relate in this bicultural manner, acculturating individuals must confront two issues: whether to maintain or reject their own cultural values and whether to accept or reject the host culture’s cultural values. This focus on values supports the views of other researchers who have noted that unidirectional (e.g. assimilationist) models of acculturation do not account for individuals’ own cultural values (e.g. Mendoza, 1984; Kim & Berry, 1985; Sodowsky, Lai, and Plake, 1991 as cited by Pham and Harris 2001).

Acculturation theory is a useful key to understanding the experiences of both lecturers and students in the BET program. In transnational education the nature of ‘the dominant culture’ is open to interpretation. Lecturers are travelling to Singapore, yet students are also moving to the new culture of a Western university. In the final chapter, it will be argued that one predictor for successful transnational programs would be the adoption of successful acculturation strategies by both groups. At this juncture, it is evident that whilst lecturers did experience conflict through contact, and whilst many chose to make adaptations and thereby acculturated, in some instances they also chose to conserve their own cultural values (e.g. they did not move significantly from their constructivist pedagogies; they found ways to encourage the students to acculturate to Western learning styles and assessment paradigms; and to a large extent they managed to reduce dissonance regarding assessment ‘whilst still adhering to processes’). In short, they proved that ‘it is possible for the acculturating individual to engage in appropriate social behaviour in two independent cultures without a loss of cultural identity’ (Pham and Harris, 2001). However like many acculturating individuals, the lecturers learned the hard
way – on the job and open to the judgement of themselves and others. Their difficulties could possibly have been ameliorated by learning some of the rules of the game before playing it.

Bochner (1986) draws the analogy that learning to be effective in a new culture is like learning a new game, in which one party (as in the case a sojourner entering a foreign host culture) or even nobody (in the case of mutually foreign territory) actually knows the game. Sojourners initially find themselves in the former situation, where they must first learn the rules, and then develop expertise in playing the game itself.

The BET lecturers are sojourners who have been culture contact game learners throughout their time in the program; a situation which many of the writers in the field regard as a major, stressful life event with potential outcomes ranging from mild discomfort to severe, debilitating anxiety (Ward et al., 2001). It is therefore not surprising that the initial lecturer interviews reflected varying levels of anxiety, for example; ‘I was a bit scared about some of the situations…’ [82:2:9-10]; ‘I knew absolutely nothing about Singapore people prior to going’ [80:2:7-8]; ‘…[you need to deal with] unanticipated difficulties beforehand…the same would apply to Singapore and there’s the additional overlay of whether its going to be culturally different or not’ [81:1:226-236] and ‘I was terrified I wouldn’t be good enough’ [83:1:165].

Such anxiety is probably entirely natural and certainly predictable. Indeed Bochner (1986) suggests that contact variables for inter-cultural contact predict the main dimensions that will contextually affect the intercultural interaction. The following discussion briefly considers BET lecturers’ experiences against Bochner’s contact variables.

On whose territory the interaction is taking place: in this case the lecturer sojourners are clearly visitors to Singapore and therefore are typical ‘game’ learners. However it could also be argued that the students are in the foreign culture of a transnational classroom – in which case both groups would be learners and the context further complicated;

The time span involved: lecturers visited Singapore in one week to ten-day blocks, in some cases returning several times a year;

The purpose of the sojourn: lecturers were visiting for business purposes, as ‘experts’ and also as representatives of the university and the Australian Education system;
The relative status and power of participants: clearly lecturers were sojourners in positions of significant formal power;

The frequency, degree and intimacy of contact: as previously discussed, lecturer-student contact was frequent, even constant. The contact was described as ‘demanding’ and sometimes both intimate and sensitive. This was particularly the case in pastoral care situations (which, as well as the more usual student difficulties, included dealing with the unexpected and tragic death of a popular student and also the SARS outbreak in Singapore); and

Any visible distinguishing features: lecturers appeared different – they were white Anglo Australians, which differentiated them from the class and SIM staff. Moreover, whilst both lecturers and students spoke English, most lecturers were not bilingual, whereas everybody in the class spoke a mother tongue other than English, and occasionally used those languages and ‘Singlish’ in the classroom.

The preceding analysis amply demonstrates that, in the context of Bochner’s criteria, the lecturers experienced the full gamut of contact variables that can potentially contribute to inter-cultural discomfort due to a lack of awareness of the rules that govern interpersonal conduct in a given culture. The reaction to these experiences has been called ‘culture shock’ and was originally described by Oberg (1960) as being precipitated by anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social interaction. These include the ways we orient ourselves to daily life and include words, gestures, customs and norms that we acquire in our primary socialisation. Until quite recently analysis of culture shock was based on a clinical ‘pseudomedical model’ (Bochner, 1986) which tended to stigmatise sufferers due to a diagnosis of perceived personality deficit (e.g. rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity). Apart from unhelpful stigmatisation, culture shock theory also carried overtones of ethnocentricity and assimilation, wherein inability of the sojourner to adapt was seen as a weakness and the goal of ‘treatment (e.g. intercultural training)’ was to resolve differences through their elimination. However, Bochner (1986) and Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) suggest that, whilst on the most basic level ‘culture shock’ can be attributed to the absence or distortion of familiar environmental clues, the most fundamental difficulties experienced by cross-cultural travellers occur in social situations. The lecturers’ experiences mirrored this dilemma as typified in the following reflections:

I didn’t feel relaxed about asking just anybody in the street about where something might be or so forth…I had this impression they were just so sort of busy…that I’d be interrupting…In Melbourne I might look at a person and
say 'hmm, that looks like a person I could approach’…but I noticed a
difference in body language. [80:252-62]

You have to pay attention to things that happen just while you’re living…in a
food court…giving of business cards…cultural signing and signals. [81:2:87-
88,93,101,286]

You have to check your understanding of things with the locals. [82:2:76-78]

It’s really only come through doing it, through learning by mistakes and
successes and interacting…so you know it’s understanding, getting much
better and getting inside the culture. [83:2:111-113,385-90]

As the quotations above illustrate, the lecturers would probably agree with Ward et al.
(2001), who propose that ‘culture shock’ should not be viewed as a deficit model; that
salient aspects, or ‘rules’ of these social and behavioural situations can be learned. The
major problem is, however, that, people are generally unaware of these rules because
our primary socialisation fails to teach us that others do ‘it’ differently, consequently rules
are only recognised when a transgression occurs. In this chapter there have been many
examples of what Bochner (1986) calls ‘culture learning’, which have occurred as a result
of transgressions. The gift-giving issue discussed on page 142 is one illustrative case
study of a situation where both parties were unaware of the rules governing the other.
Another example occurred when a well-meaning lecturer was posed a question from a
student via email. He subsequently forwarded the question by email to the entire student
cohort, thinking that the question posed and his response would benefit the group. The
reaction from the originating student was very strong, very angry and doubtless involved
loss of face. The lecturer recalls;

Often they’re not going to tell you their problem. They’re less open about
their issues than students here would be…and so you use the
networks…using an intermediary, you’ve been the major source of
that...[respondent was referring to researcher at this point] but you can’t use
other students… I made that mistake once and caused loss of face and I had
to go through giving a formal apology in front of the class…and that’s not a
problem, just me being culturally insensitive. So having an intermediary,
having a person who understands and is a friend of the system and the
people, yes that’s been important. [82:2:321-330]

It would seem possible that some of these in-situ and transgression-induced culture-
learning situations may have occurred because the lecturers initially did not realise the
significance of the cultural gap between themselves and their students. Fox, (1997 as
cited by Ward et al. 2001) suggests the view that when people from two different cultures
meet, they will have difficulty in communicating with one another to the extent that their
respective ‘codes’ differ. As discussed in chapter five, the cultures of the lecturers and the
cultures of the students in fact varied greatly along most empirical dimensions. Consequently one would expect those ‘codes’ to differ significantly. However the lecturers (whose pre-departure preparation included reading Singaporean government websites and tourist literature, and whose previous sojourns were as tourists to Singapore’s shopping precinct and high rise hotels), may have expected a monocultural Singaporean who was a borderline Westerner. The fact that English is the business language in Singapore may have served to reinforce this perception, however as Triandis et al. (1972) propose, shared language may actually serve to obscure cultural differences. In fact, the lecturers’ learning curves increased exponentially with their time in Singapore, as eloquently described by the citations below:

[The Singapore Government] are trying to create some sort of artificial image of culture that doesn't actually exist ...and they're not sure what it is anyway...You see a front that initially looks very Western, and that is not Singapore. That's the tourists’ Singapore, and you're going to have to be humble enough to let the students show you the real Singapore...then you realise it's a myriad of cultures and there's multiple levels of culture within it. It's the subtlety of differences in culture I'm beginning to understand somewhat. [82:2:7,11-18,361-368]

...so there's lots of importation of those American dreams and ideals in Singapore. And those sorts of things are felt in everywhere in every country. But that's superficial... [80:2:249-251]

Whilst all the lecturers experienced significant culture learning, and even personal revelation, a realisation of the subtlety mentioned above and the complexity of cultural difference was experienced to a various extent. One common, and unsurprising pattern was that learning increased with the amount of time spent in Singapore. Lecturers reflected that:

Cultural awareness happens over a very long period...my sustained time in Singapore has enriched my appreciation of cultural difference yet again...whereas if it had been an 'in and out' situation I wouldn't have had that...time has allowed me to relax and engage...when you feel comfortable enough to be receptive. [81:2:14-57]

I think that for [the students] time has to pass and they have to know and trust as well...before they begin to say some of the things that irk them...and part of the deepening of my appreciation depends on their ability to say some of those things. [81:2:199-209]

Over time I have found myself being much warmer to them because I am comfortable in the fact that I understand them a lot better and I'm not going to offend anybody or say the wrong thing...I can actually engage with people. [83:2:25-30]
However, as Bochner (1986) highlights, increased contact does not necessarily reduce hostility, and people generally prefer to interact with similar rather than dissimilar individuals. Again, the extent to which the goodwill and openness of the lecturers and students contributed to the positive outcomes of this program should not be underestimated: discussion in recent paragraphs elucidates that there was ample capacity for bad feeling and misunderstanding. Such a negative outcome was all the more likely given that the lecturers shared with many in the business sector a perfunctory (or more usually in this case, non-existent) pre-departure training and no ongoing systematic during-sojourn support (other than my presence during the fieldwork period as a cultural mediator who was also learning) (Ward et al., 2001).

Chapter conclusion

Sheer familiarity dims the keenness of our perception, and we cease to notice a good deal of what goes on in our daily lives...in order to shake ourselves into awareness, we must experience new or contrasting conditions. Cross-cultural comparisons can help us discover characteristics of our own culture that we fail to notice because we are so familiar with them. (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992:16)

This chapter has reported the experiences of the lecturers venturing on their first forays into the terrain of the transnational educator. We have seen that they departed not as ‘empty vessels’ but as individuals with all the preconceptions, values, beliefs and general cultural baggage that we all carry. In some instances they shared much of this baggage with their colleagues and in others they stood alone. Whatever the case, they were people with ‘good intentions’ however they were generally not well supported toward the development of an effective biculturalism by their normative experiences, their community of practice, or their employer. When they attempted to transmit their culture of teaching and learning in Singapore, they met with varying levels of conflict and resistance which, to paraphrase Stevenson and Stigler (above), shook them into cultural awareness. They learned a lot in a relatively short space of time, and they often learned in a difficult, ‘thrown in the deep end’ transgression-induced manner. That the program was successful at all is at least fifty percent to the credit of the lecturer-sojourners who managed to negotiate this uncharted territory.

The next chapter will report the views and responses of the student cohort in a similar manner. Following this, chapter eight will portray the culturally ambiguous territory of the classroom, through the reporting and analysis of class observations. Thereafter, chapter
nine will conclude this thesis with recommendations for future programs and future research.
Chapter Seven: Data from Student Interviews

Introduction

This chapter is the second to report data gathered during the research fieldwork, and following the format of the previous chapter will report and commence discussion of data from interviews with the BET students, however analysis is limited to aspects that are relatively unique to the students’ group. Further analysis is constrained until the following chapter, which will combine the ‘third perspective’ gained from classroom observations, together with juxtaposition of responses of student and lecturer groups, thus allowing for ‘thick description’ and a more holistic analysis of the program.

As in the previous chapter, the masculine pronoun is used and the conceptual framework proposed by Pratt and colleagues (1999) is followed broadly. The chapter also commences with the foundational consideration of normative experiences: this time the culturally embedded reference points of the students.

Normative experiences and expectations

The influence of the extended family

The students’ recollections of their early childhood influences reached beyond the nuclear family and included extended family and society in general. In the majority of cases, BET students came from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A minority had received minimal educational encouragement from their parents and usually this was because, despite their aspirations, parents had not been able to financially support their children’s education; ‘My dad told me it is not possible for me to do A-levels as I had three other siblings…that was tough…for the first fifteen years of my life I never reflected, the intent was to bring money home’ [35:1:54-61]. Typical stories told of parents, most frequently the mother, who were uneducated and often married at a very young age (e.g. thirteen). Fathers were educated to basic level in the mother tongue but not in English, making it difficult for them to earn a living. Families were often quite large with, for example, up to sixteen children. The lack of any social security system meant that trouble in the family (e.g. illness or the separation of parents) resulted in children having to give up education; ‘quit school to work…to play son and daughter’ [44:1:242]; ‘my brothers and I had a family to sort out, and I needed to start work at the age of thirteen’ [66:1:163-167] and ‘help to run the family business’ [46:1:46-49].
In the experience of the respondents, both as children and as parents, a pressured lifestyle with a focus on career left less time for family learning activities; ‘…in Singapore, the economic focus means it’s career first, not family first’ [64:1:322]. However, at the same time the focus on career reinforced the place of education as a means of ensuring success for the family and following generations. It was generally agreed that; ‘if you are not from a wealthy family, it is very unlikely you will have opportunities’[22:1:167-174]. Indeed, Singaporean society, including access to education, was considered by the students to be clearly stratified along class lines; ‘those who are rich you are one gang; those who are poor you are another gang’ [66:1:159-60]. Due to this stratification, significant effort was required to bring about a shift in a family’s economic status.

Some students described their parents as strict, but not overly punitive; ‘just say you have to work hard, that’s all’ [64:1:38]. This pattern was recurrent and a matter of degree. As one student stated, ‘the typical Asian parent would use the cane’ [when faced with poor school performance] [3:1:226]. In the opinion of another respondent, the ‘Western’ manner of parenting was ‘not quite focussed…the hardship kind of family produces good students’[40:1:953]. Thus, families did encourage students while they were in school and the strict Asian system was perceived by many as being worthwhile in the longer term (as forecast by the research reported in chapter five). In the case of the adult BET students, much of the encouragement to enrol came from spouses, and even children. They spoke of how important this support was; ‘families are very very important…my husband is very very proud…tells his friends what achievements his wife has’[66:1:142].

The adult students’ own parents were held in the highest respect, for even when students had been denied education as children they acknowledged their parents’ battles against overwhelming odds. During interviews, two students related a story that illustrates the passion of feelings about parents. It would seem that during a BET subject, an Australian lecturer had said something similar to; “all assignments must be in on time, even if your parents was to pass away there is no extension” [49:1:488]. In any culture, this would be a tactless comment (in Singapore, it was described as ‘crude’ [49:1:487]). As a result the lecturer totally lost the students’ respect. The strength of feeling about this incident is revealed in the following quote that came from a student in a different intake to that in which the incident occurred (and who, therefore, was not directly affected):

If your mother is ill, it’s your mother, not just anybody…definitely you will not be motivated to go on with an assignment…As an Asian you would just give up this class even if it meant totally failing the whole course. And then you would lodge a complaint. Because this is nonsense, this is not, cannot be acceptable. [64:1:322-329]
Early learning experiences

When considering the following discussion of the early learning experiences, it is important to recall that the respondents were adult students. As they frequently highlighted, their early experiences would likely be different to those of a cohort of younger students in Singapore today, and during the research period the government was planning changes to the education experience in Singapore. However, as discussed in chapter three, whether those changes will occur quickly remains open to debate, and indeed social stratification in Singapore is viewed by some as becoming more pronounced (Tan, 2003). As one respondent reflected: ‘The Ministry of Education say they want to change, they want to do more project based, not so exam based. But it seems that now they are doing both, so even more pressure!’ [70:1:341-342]

Certainly ‘pressure’ was in integral part of the students’ recollections of formative learning experiences, along with discomfort, structure, lack of control and negativity. The interview questions that brought the following responses were in no way leading, yet the contrast between the students’ recollections of early learning and the lecturers’ could scarcely be more stark.

‘They just throw and you pick up’

In a strong and consistently recurring theme, the majority of students referred to their own learning experiences as being rote-based. ‘Spoon feeding’ was another recurrent term. Moreover, the students reflected on what they had come to consider as the surface nature of rote pedagogies, for example; ‘it’s memorised, doing more on the surface’ [20:1:114]; and ‘they say you must study two, three times in order to remember. This is based on memory rather than application’[26:1:53-55].

Pedagogies were described as ‘one-way’, and aspects of one-way pedagogy included lack of explanation, reasons and rationale; teacher-centredness; and not being permitted to ask questions. This was succinctly summarised by one respondent as: ‘they just throw and you pick up’[22:1:51]. Several recalled that they were; ‘trained to listen to the teacher and you are not supposed to interrupt’[49:1:81]; ‘…at school you are taught…when your elders speak you do not answer back. It’s a respect thing…’[74:1:372]. Whilst some held the value that this was appropriate respectful behaviour; ‘…always respect the teacher, whether he is right or wrong just keep quiet. Ok, that is the right thing to do’[36:1:217], others found that it had a limiting effect on their learning as adults and trainers, for example: ‘They just teach, that I thought was the only method’[22:1:132]; and
Respondents reflected that their early learning experiences had been very structured; a series of hurdles that must be passed with little encouragement of divergence or creativity [66:1:148], or even interest; ‘just pass and then proceed to the next level’ [70:1:38]. It is noteworthy at this juncture to revisit the reflection of one of the lecturers (page 146) that students were seeking an ‘A, B, C, D….first grade honours…’ [80:2:349-354] formula for success from him. His comments were mirrored almost verbatim in one student’s recollections of the education system; ‘I was not allowed to do anything differently, you know, you had to do A, B, to get to C, … pass examinations and get all this knowledge which I hardly use now’ [71:1:39-42]. Not surprisingly, examinations were ubiquitous in students’ memories. Typical of these reflections was the opinion that Singaporeans of their generation were ‘exam smart’ but ‘may not be good at applying’ [40:1:697-703]. However the students agreed that in Singaporean society exams were still considered the main proof of learning, and that the much discussed ‘meritocracy’ in Singapore rested on promotion by exam results.

The role of the teacher, unsurprisingly, was significant in students’ memories. On the whole, responses were as predicted in chapter five. Whilst there were positive memories of teachers who helped to build confidence, provided pastoral care, and motivated students, these were most frequently referred to as ‘young teachers’. Possibly many of the adult students’ primary school experiences occurred when teachers in Singapore were not subject to the same qualification regulations as they are now (as discussed in chapter three, Gopinathan and Ho, 2000a; Gopinathan et al., 2001). Whatever the reason, these ‘older teachers’ were the subject of derision. Stories about teachers ‘throwing chalk at my face’ [20:1:99], ‘getting a beating with a ruler on the hand’ [20:1:139-141] and ‘flying dusters when she gets angry’ [76:1:98-99] were related. Teachers were described as ‘Tai Tai; (a Chinese term for a wealthy, materialistic woman)...just want to come in and get the day over, and say “wow I got a new handbag”...’[66:1:187-188]. This resulted in passionate emotions and negative evaluations of learning that were imprinted at a young age; ‘my bad experience really leaves an impression to this day. I guess it was the teacher who makes a difference. I am absent from the class because I hated the teacher’ [20:1:99]. In fact a resultant dislike of
what was described as ‘academic’ learning and subsequent truancy were relatively common outcomes of early learning for student respondents.

As a result of all of the above, the typical BET student did not have positive memories of their foundational learning. Unsurprisingly, many had not excelled in the Singaporean school system, although one respondent did reflect that although; ‘certain learning outcomes can be painful…the process as well as the outcome…eventually I am lucky that I did all those things’ [51:1:22-28].

**Late bloomers get (almost) no second chance**

For late bloomers, your destiny has been predetermined’. [30:1:382]

One finding of this research, possibly unique to Singapore, is that several of the male respondents positively recalled the foundational learning experiences they had in the armed forces during their two-year compulsory national service term. Most acknowledged the reformist nature of national service, for example: ‘you have to learn what they want to teach you, in spite of if you don’t want to’ [10:1:26] and ‘most guys who have gone through national service, they are bound to be changed’ [36:1:85]. Some simply waited out their time in national service; ‘just wanting to finish and get back to normal civilian life’ [76:1:214]. However a significant number of others related that national service provided teamwork and communication skills that were life changing in that they opened up personal and career opportunities that were hitherto unavailable. It seems that national service gave some male BET students their chance to transcend socio-economic boundaries. Several respondents reported that that the egalitarian nature of national service broke down class barriers, and that access to educational opportunities and overseas placements provided by the Ministry of Defence gave them a second chance at learning or their first exposure to the training that was to become their career; ‘the military gave me a chance to upgrade myself [8:1:87]; ‘the MINDEF selected me to go to a diploma course…so that was my starting point of learning again’ [26:1:113-115] and ‘I served in the United Nations Force in Angola…it had a tremendous impact on my perception of life…I just want to know more’ [51:1:44-93].

Female students, however, did not experience national service. Most of the BET students remained somewhat resentful of the uncompromising nature of their school system; ‘there are human parts that our education system neglects’ [76:1:40]. The students were insightful about the education system’s pervasive sociological impact. Ultimately, the
consensus amongst the students would be akin to a belief that the education system taught people not to think independently, as the following analogy illustrates:

_The teacher says today I want you to draw an apple, and she would say, no, no, no, this is the way you must draw. And so that hindered his creativity... So in time he went to another school...and someone say “ok, I want you to draw on your own”. He needs someone to actually tell him what to do. This is what the Singapore government is doing._ [66:1:207-215]

Both the pedagogies and curriculum of primary and tertiary education were negatively evaluated and were considered to have an ongoing restrictive influence on ‘the fabric of Singaporean society’ [30:1:456-463]. As another respondent reflected, the ‘baggage’ of the school system was still with the BET students; ‘so you want to do creative thinking, fat hope! Very hard because we have not been exposed to this before and therefore it can take a long time and create tension between [Australian teachers and students]’ [30:1:456-463].

The ability-based educational streaming system described in chapter three was thought to reinforce the socio-economic constraints many of the students had experienced. Whilst respondents considered that streaming was predicated on ‘good intentions’, respondents’ personal experience, and in some cases the experiences of their children, lead them to believe that streaming decided their fate much too early in life, providing no freedom of career choice, ‘labelling’ [49:1:116] children and establishing lifelong inequities.

Some of the older students had not personally experienced streaming. However at least three of these felt they had been ‘part of an experiment’ [4:1:57-60] in which students of their generation had been were processed into technical schools to suit the needs of the economy. They were promised jobs, which did eventuate, but one was left wondering ‘whether I wanted it or whether the government made it such... after several years I realised I don’t enjoy what I am doing’ [4:1:57-60]. The struggle to gain access to education and climb the ladder of socio-economic success resulted in and supported the existence of myriad tutoring centres to ‘supplement the normal education so [children] will be better off’ [22:1:473]. However, whilst extra tuition may help a child in the highly competitive system, those who possibly needed it most were obstructed from obtaining any advantage because; ‘the poor just lose out because financially they are just not able to keep up...it’s just too bad, that’s the truth about our society’ [22:1:469-481]. Moreover, the pressure of the combined school and tuition systems meant that ‘children don’t have much experience of play’, being sent to ‘piano class, ballet class, music class...parents really start banging a lot of learning so young!’ [70:1:322-332].
The over-riding focus that the Singaporean education system placed on mathematics was another pervading theme, and maths was a subject in which many of the BET students did not excel. Unsurprisingly there was quite a high level of resentment amongst the BET students who again spoke of stifled creativity. They felt that they had been excluded from the opportunity for success because they did not fit the ‘government model’ and that they could offer different skills and abilities, which had gone unrecognised by society. As one complained; ‘I was taught like a computer. How I am taught now as an adult I feel really short-changed for all those years I spent in school’ [71:1:39-41]. In short many felt undervalued and unable to contribute as fully as they would like to society, which in a collectivist environment was disheartening.

**Motivating factors behind students’ enrolment**

‘Big time paper chase’

OK, it's a degree. Big time, you know, paper chase. [10:1:211]

As the students repeatedly reported; ‘In Singapore, actually having that piece of paper is important’ [68:1:91]. Credentialing oneself to the degree level was seen as crucial to ‘where you sit…’ [20:1:184]. As one middle-aged student recounted; ‘without paper you really can’t survive. Even if you are having thirty year work experience and are a subject matter expert…with the paper you go forward, without it’s the end for you’ [33:1:160-164].

It was broadly agreed that potential employers would want to see a hard copy of a testamur attached to a written application and that often recruitment decisions seemed to be made based on such documentation in isolation. The students felt that interviews in Singapore were often, to quote one respondent, a ‘formality…they just want to make sure you have two eyes, that’s the colour I want, alright you are in’ [10:1:372-380].

Clearly then, the realisation of degree holder status is considered crucial to success in Singapore. Most BET students either held or aspired to human resource development roles when they enrolled in the program. Apart from, or as well as, this ‘paper chase’, their motivations for enrolling tended to fall into one of the following three categories: job security/promotion; credibility/status, or self-actualisation/contribution to society. Of course, these categories were also interwoven, in that promotion would increase credibility and status and potentially lead to self-actualisation. The following sub-headings discuss these categories in greater depth:
Job security and promotion

I think we are very practical people, as in “this is where the money is…OK”…you can’t take this economic aspect out of learning. [4:1:232-234]

[I want to know] how this information can apply in the workplace. And that is basically it…[22:1:11-12]

Job security and promotion was the most frequently mentioned motivator for undertaking the BET program, and most students referred to this at least once during the interviews. The spiralling unemployment rates and retrenchments that were occurring in Singapore during this research (chapter three, page 31) were a source of concern to most of the students, and many spoke of ‘equipping ourselves in case we are out of a job’ [4:1:243]. They saw the possession of a degree as a making them ‘more marketable’ [190:1:190], a ‘good selling factor for myself’ [10:1:213]. Others were expecting the possibility of promotion on completion of the degree, or had enrolled with that goal in mind but had since changed or lost their positions. The clear link between degree-holder status and promotion meant that, despite demonstrated on-the-job experience, ‘having a diploma is holding me back’ [71:1:197]. As well as hedging bets against unemployment in a competitive work force where ‘everybody’s taking courses’ [8:1:95], the possession of a degree was directly linked to salary as; ‘those with a degree get very well paid’ [44:1:252]. Consequently, study was pragmatically calculated as an investment and the economics of enrolment carefully considered, much like one might purchase stocks and shares:

I might not get my investment back …this course costs us $24,000; after graduation you must actually find a job that pays you $1000 for every extra year and then in twenty-four years you break even. I will not get my money back in terms of the value of the course that I have actually incurred. [22:1:242-249]

Apart from monetary return, students hoped that the BET degree would provide a professional qualification that was directly transferable to the workplace. Some sought this independently, whilst others were encouraged (and sometimes financially supported) by their managers and HR departments. Almost without exception, the students sought learning that they could ‘apply straight away in the workplace’ and that would enable them to see ‘the workplace in a different perspective’ [30:1:302].

Credibility and status

I was looking at my friends’ business cards, and you have a string of degrees after the name. [23:1:113-116]
The students frequently recounted that undertaking the BET program gave them ‘tremendous self confidence’ [51:1:94-96]. In general, this occurred as a result of increased credibility in the workplace and/or status as a degree holder. In practical terms, credibility meant being able to justify why ‘things [were] done that way…[supporting an argument by reference to the literature]… ‘this theory, so and so, say so’ [51:1:94-96]. Several people candidly spoke of the added advantages of being able to convince colleagues of the merits of an idea by ‘using correct languages…seems a bit scientific…since they are not willing to go and browse through a library and come up with something else’ [76:1:177-184].

Like HRD staff in many countries, BET students were often teaching others because they were subject matter experts, however they recognised that they had no foundational educational knowledge; ‘because we know a certain job it is assumed we are able to teach, which I think is a big fallacy’ [76:1:54-56]. These students were also seeking credibility, but for them application of learning was sought at what was possibly a more sophisticated level; ‘[I] really do not have any grounding to be able to say, “I have a theory behind this”…BET opens a new view and the books correlate things’ [28:1:25-30]. In other words, in many cases self-confidence grew because BET learning was validating students’ practice and providing formal recognition of their prior learning experiences.

The ability to converse with management as an intellectual equal was also linked to self-confidence and another frequently mentioned benefit of BET learning. As one student shared; ‘I deal with a lot of school principals…sometimes they kind of look at you like, oh, OK, you are not the same level…My boss will say “Bloom’s taxonomy”…well before, God knows what is Bloom’s taxonomy! But sometimes I understand now’ [36:1:95-99].

Apart from status and credibility in the workplace, status in society was also discussed. Respondents said that status in Singapore was important. They referred to their current or past roles (e.g. trainer, waiter) as low status and sought the titles of higher status jobs such as ‘consultant’ or ‘professional’. The feeling that society would ‘look at me differently’ [26:1:165] because of academic credentials was quite ubiquitous.

**Self-actualisation and contribution to society.**

It must be said that this category was in the minority in comparison with the preceding two, however quite a few of the students had more altruistic motivations for undertaking the program. These students spoke of wanting to acquire knowledge; becoming enlightened and seeking self-actualisation, taking time out for reflection and ‘looking from
a different point of view [which] will help me think better’ [46:1:91-100]. Several of these people were also in community groups (predominantly religious or ‘uniform groups’ such as boys/girls’ brigade) and wanted to ‘be a better person…help other people…it’s more like a vocation’ [74:1:149-151]. Others were seeking ways to pass on their years of knowledge and experience to others in society; ‘I still have another sixteen to twenty years of my life I can contribute’ [35:1:26]. It was also this group of respondents who were more likely to refer to their learning as enjoyable; ‘you feel good about it’ [74:1:120].

Some, although relatively few, of the respondents spoke of a desire to continue on with studies after the BET program. They spoke of Masters studies and PhD studies in terms of ‘a dream’. At the time of the research some students were just beginning to consider further study, often to their own surprise.

**Choice of program**

Given the previous discussion about streaming in compulsory education leading to lack of choice in study topics and therefore career, it is perhaps not surprising that a pervading reason for the choice of the BET program was that the students were actually interested in most of the subjects. Despite (as one student observed) the fact that students were in a buyers’ market, where they could potentially chose any number of business related courses for a significantly lower financial outlay, the subjects that made up the BET were seen by many as directly relevant to their current and future work lives and therefore interesting. Moreover the nature of the course content, which was perceived as easily transferable between global organisations was seen as a positive, as is beautifully illustrated by the following, typically Singaporean, food analogy:

*The subjects I could use for any industry...it doesn’t mean the chopsticks can’t be used for noodles and rice only, you can use for anything, barbeque too!* [35:1:176-181]

**Why ‘The University’?**

Students related a range of reasons for choosing ‘The University’, most of which would doubtless disappoint the university’s marketing department. Whilst some (in fact a minority) of the students researched the course via the university’s website, the most popular sources of information were (in ranked order); friends, previous students, and Singaporean government departments (as predicted by a Senior manager of IDP, and reported in chapter three). Students did have concerns about whether the course would be recognised in Singapore. The previously mentioned ‘phantom’ approved universities list (chapter three) was sought out, and friends in the civil service had been approached
Very few respondents related that the decision making process actually rested on the fact that the course was at ‘The University’. Those that did were of the opinion that ‘The University’ was a ‘reputable’ or ‘very credible’ institution; one mentioned that it was ‘one of the top ten I think’ (this information had in fact been presented during orientation [BET3:1:116]). However, where prestige was a consideration, others clearly would have preferred to have attended a Singaporean university if they had had the chance; ‘of course, if you are NUS or NTU student [level of prestige and recognition] is different’ [8:1:188]. Several respondents thought that the BET program was the only HRD degree available in Singapore. In fact this was not correct, as there was one other program that I was able to identify. Only one respondent said he had considered that program and he did eventually choose to enrol with ‘The University’ because it was ‘more prestigious’ [35:1:186]).

Of note however, is the position of the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) in the decision-making process. The fact that SIM was the partner institution was mentioned favourably by around half the respondents and for many ‘SIM obviously is my first choice’ [4:1:99]. The students had faith that ‘SIM is a recognised body, so they couldn’t just collaborate with any a,b,c university, it would reflect back on them’ [20:1:382]. Students were of the opinion that in the partnership between the university and SIM, SIM would be the arbiters of quality, to ‘ensure the standard must be there’ [8:1:121]. In fact some students relied solely on this, placing their faith in SIM because; ‘I am not sure what is a good Uni, so I just chance SIM’ [44:1:378]. Still others were diploma graduates of SIM and ‘just carried on with them’[66:1:411].

Other factors that informed the selection of the university included; pacing of the course, match with lifestyle, ability to commit time and money to the course, articulation to Masters level and, finally, ‘this seemed to be the easiest one to acquire’ [22:1:227].

Discussion of normative experiences

It would seem then, that for the BET students, whilst the Singaporean economic focus is posing challenges to the much-discussed ‘Asian family values’, nevertheless family bonds
remain strong and, as forecast in chapter five, the possibility that education could break through social barriers and provide status to the entire family was a key motivator. For many of the student respondents who came from ‘migrant stock’ (chapter three, page 39) socio-economic constraints and class barriers initially posed significant disincentives to the quest for further learning. Such difficulties, however, were not seen as insurmountable and, even if many years passed before the opportunity arose, the chance to gain a tertiary education and possibly improve the family’s economic and social situation was taken if it was at all feasible.

Frequently however, the students’ compulsory and foundational learning experiences had resulted in learned passivity, which in adulthood and the workplace they had come to resent. Similarly, many of the students had left formal schooling with a very negative impression of the role of the teacher and as an unsurprising outcome of the combination of these factors was that they often discounted academic learning as constricting, uncreative and a hardship that must be suffered along with other pressures in life. In light of this discussion it may be surprising to the outside observer that the students enrolled in the BET program at all. However it is important to the author that the difficulties discussed in the preceding paragraphs should not be read as a litany of complaints from the students. These stories were simply interpolated in the interviews along with the positive and the bland. The students seemed to just ‘get on with it’, no matter what the potential cost and whether the learning experience was likely to be pleasant or otherwise.

Although students were predominantly pragmatically focused on the betterment of their socio-economic status and the immediate application of their learning and degree-holder status to their working lives, the students nevertheless enrolled in the program with a mix of motivations. Whilst a host of factors played a role in selection of a university, in this aspect the BET students behaved in a manner that could be predicted for a collectivist society, relying predominantly on the opinions of those close to them. Prestige was a factor for some, however the local institutions were in fact seen as the most prestigious – although unattainable – options, and therefore local institutions were relied upon as arbiters of quality.

Once enrolled, students sometimes found that the program validated their current practice and prior learning. This gave them increased confidence, which in turn enabled them to establish greater credibility in the workplace and reciprocally reinforced their higher status. Therefore, for the majority of students, aims in attending the program were at least partially realised. This did not mean, however, that they were entirely satisfied
with the learning as a process, nor that they could not make excellent suggestions for improvements to the program. These points will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

**Epistemic beliefs**

**The nature of learning**

When considering the students’ epistemologies, it is worthwhile noting that they were actually enrolled in a course which taught about different epistemological and pedagogical approaches, and that in most cases this content was taught by lecturers who modelled constructivist, ‘adult learning’ behaviours. Therefore learning was occurring on several levels and a change in epistemic perception during the program would be expected; as one student explained ‘[I was] learning new things…and I also learned a different style and mode of learning’ [26:1:18-20]. Certainly some students moved more towards favouring a more constructivist paradigm during the program, whilst others remained more comfortable with their familiar learning experiences.

The past experiences of many students still acutely affected their thoughts about learning. The words ‘hard’ and ‘hardship’ were used several times to describe the journey to acquisition of knowledge, which could be expected to involve ‘some sacrifice’ [4:1:35] and ‘very hard work’ [33:1:376]. For some respondents, those who learned were perceived altruistically as a ‘better person’ and were ‘holders of wisdom…[which] money cannot buy…you have something that is going to bring you on the next journey of your life’ [26:1:526].

In undertaking this learning journey, typical BET students eagerly sought new knowledge, which it seems that the majority viewed as something that was essentially received: either transmitted by the lecturer, through the literature or other formal means. This initial ‘reception’ was very important to most students and, for them, an understanding of foundational knowledge was seen a crucial step to be undertaken prior to the later development of deep and critical learning. For many, only once knowledge was received and digested could it be checked against students’ own experiences to see ‘whether it makes sense or not’ [22:1:9-10]. This finding supports the work of Pratt et al. (1999) and will be revisited in the concluding chapter.

The students’ epistemologies were very clear in relation to the interplay between knowledge creation and application. Once foundational knowledge was received from
experts, a process of understanding and contextualisation seemed to culminate in application. In short, for the majority of the students, without application, learning was not highly valued; ‘we are after some value add. We are after something that we can apply in the workplace. It’s praxis actually’ [28:1:456-465]. Typical comments supporting this view include that learning was made ‘real’ and interesting by application and that you do not ‘really learn’ until you have applied knowledge. Indeed, the teacher who could provide ‘real life examples that he or she has experience with’ [35:1:568-569] was valued as a translator of learning. A minority of students discussed application in a more holistic context; ‘learning should be applicable to our life…not just work work work’ [46:1:18-20].

Several students spoke of the importance of reflection and valued the opportunity to examine their own world view in relation to those of others (particularly ‘experts’). In fact, people typically described learning as an opportunity to access different perspectives; ‘looking beyond what I have in capacity just by me’[26:1:5]. Vision-related analogies were used to describe changes in perspective through the acquisition of knowledge, for example; ‘eye opening’ [44:1:10], ‘seeing things in a different light’ [19:1:16] and ‘a new view’ [28:1:28]. In this context, learning was perceived as something that was always going on, ‘never static’ [28:1:9] where one ‘consciously tries to learn every day’ [74:1:12].

**Locus of responsibility**

As recounted in the previous chapter, students were initially resistant to self-directed learning strategies. The interviews recurrently indicate that students came to the program with expectations that the teacher would be the central source of learning. Moreover, it was the teacher who would motivate the students, ‘make it easy for us to be interested’ [40:1:792-793], reduce ambiguity and ‘make me think’ [20:1:635]. Provision of literature in the form of subject readings and in-class handouts was also viewed as the responsibility of the lecturer, who was expected to supply; ‘a bag of references….don’t send us searching for it…you have taken your years to look at certain authors and say go for them’ [40:1:796-797]. Furthermore, it was viewed as the lecturers’ responsibility to ensure that references from the literature were linked to classroom discussion and ultimately to requirements for exams. The following comment illustrates the thinking behind this: ‘bring relevant readings in, then it makes sense, this reading belongs here and for this reading I can extend my thought…[if the teacher] just tell the framework and ask us to read…sometimes we don’t see the connection’ [30:1:198-200]. Ultimately, apart from the need to follow directions and ‘work hard’, the responsibility of the student was notable for its almost total lack of discussion. In short, this component of the interviews
certainly supports the stereotype of the ‘passive Asian student’, at least at commencement of study. This issue will be further considered later in this chapter.

**What is the ‘right answer’?**

**Reduction of ambiguity**

Given the students’ previous discussion of early learning experiences, it is unsurprising that they reported high levels of discomfort with ambiguity. For example; ‘where there is too much diversity of opinion…if the readings are all different and they disagree with each other…I felt was it overwhelming…for my background this is not good’ [22:1:70-87]. After all, the students were used to ‘being told how to draw an apple’ (page 179). Consequently many expected that the role of the lecturers was to make the ‘right answer’ clear, and certainly not to exacerbate ambiguity by introducing conflicting theories, confusion and argument. As one student said, it; ‘turns me off when you have something that is very ambiguous…worst off if it’s the lecturer can’t explain to you thoroughly’ [35:1:32-35]. Another spoke of the stifling confusion she felt when faced with her inability to reconcile conflicting concepts and theories; ‘in one subject [mimes a huge pile of papers] pages, still you don’t know where it goes…I really cannot!’ [66:1:306-308].

**Authorised knowledge**

*My diploma is closed book [exams]….Ok so we memorise a lot of concepts.... At first I felt like, oh good with the open book [exams] you can find the answers, but that assumption is wrong! Because it is more on your thinking ability and how you apply it…so I find this thing is hard.* [70:1:143].

The above quote illustrates the watershed realisation of one student that ‘the right answers’ may not exist. For students who had a teacher-centred locus of responsibility; who believed that knowledge was received as something external to oneself; who lived in a society where government monitored public critique; and who sought a thorough foundational knowledge of a topic prior to analysis or application, the following comments are not surprising:

*Take this view, there are certain considerations…take the other view… If there are so many of this views then you had better watch your idea… we are really new to this learning! For example, when discussing sensitive things…we are also being very cautious, so we will not dare to pick one so-called strong views about it and try it on unless it has been proven and has been shown…other people, you start to evaluate from their mistake.* [22:1:74-87]

*I actually find I am correct according to the book…by reading the book I find solace in that.* [76:1:134-136]
I would rather if the lecturer says very specifically this is the necessary background that we need, what we can draw the conclusion…these are the theories you must know, go and read about it…[40:1:279-282]

These quotes demonstrate aspects of the same previously reported phenomena: students were cautious about their own thought processes and tentative in forming opinions. They seemed to seek ‘authorised knowledge’ and to have their thoughts legitimised by the lecturer. As another respondent explains; ‘With exams, the threat of ‘right or wrong’ needs to be removed, then I am free to argue my case’ [30:1:470-71]. Clearly, this epistemological stance is inextricably linked to assessment and will also be revisited later in this chapter (please see page 200).

**Epistemology: discussion**

In summary, knowledge was viewed by the students as something that had the capacity to be transformational: to make one a ‘better person’. However it was not something that was gained easily or without sacrifice. Whilst foundational knowledge could be gained from exposure to different perspectives, interviews suggest that, at least initially, students sought knowledge in an instrumental form; efficiently transferred from the storehouses of ‘the experts’. Learning then needed to be internalised before ‘real’ understanding and subsequent critique could take place, and the ultimate proof of understanding and mastery was application.

Apart from the need to follow directions and ‘work hard’, the responsibility of the student was notable for its almost total lack of discussion. In short, this aspect of these interviews, including the observations of the students themselves, support the stereotype of the ‘passive Asian student’, at least at commencement of the program. Many students sought to reconcile and find harmony in the opposing viewpoints. Indeed it came as a revelation to many that there was, in fact, frequently no ‘one right answer’ that lecturers were seeking, and it is likely that some never actually realised that.

Thus it would seem that students were influenced by their normative experiences and it stands to reason that, in general, they were tentative about forming opinions. They preferred knowledge to be presented in a clear and unambiguous manner and it seems likely that they would have preferred an ‘efficient transferral’ mode of learning if such a thing were available. However they were about to embark on a new learning journey delivered by people who, in many respects, held quite different epistemological and pedagogical assumptions. Hence, both parties were entering new cultural territory.
**Pedagogy**

*Program design and cohesion*

It is appropriate to discuss students’ comments about the overall design of the BET program at this juncture, as this directly relates to their responses to pedagogies.

Programs equivalent to the BET in Australia offered twenty-four contact hours per subject. However the offshore programs’ contact time had been compacted from an initial eighteen hours to approximately fifteen hours per subject (the difference was supposed to be made up in individual reading time). However, as one student highlighted; ‘if the class starts ten minutes late, we break for half an hour and finish ten minutes early, we only have two and quarter hours of class…at the end of the day it is actually only twelve hours or so’ [30:1:216-222]. In addition, other administrative and evaluative tasks predictably took time. As a consequence, the majority of the students would agree with their classmates who said that whilst subject classroom time was sufficient to pass an assignment, it was definitely insufficient for ‘total understanding…[which would] take much longer.[22:1:204-213] nor ‘to ever be able to internalise in such a short space of time’ [28:1:1151-1160]. In fact, there were a significant number of comments about the course being ‘…just surface…just run through theory…not much in depth’ [66:1:295-298]. The following quote from a student interview illustrates one respondent’s thought processes and resulting concerns about the depth of learning:

> In lecturer A’s assignment I had to use some of lecturer B’s work… So I had to go in and pick up his notes and then look at it again…so there had been no internalising. And I thought…you didn’t teach me, you know? And I stopped and asked myself; ‘am I on the right track’? [35:1:144-154]

This was not an isolated comment. Others expressed similar concerns, e.g. ‘sometimes I am not too sure, are we learning?’ [8:1:250-254] and ‘I am supposed to know a lot of things, but in reality, no’ [76:1:432-473]. This concern about lack of depth and opportunities for internalisation was almost always mentioned in the context of the compacted nature of the program. Another frequently-mentioned issue was the break between subjects. This break period was about two weeks on average, and several students commented this was insufficient to allow them to ‘retire and reflect’ [19:1:36] before commencing allocated reading for the next subject. In reality, many had overdue assignments backed up and were trying to read for the next subject before completing the previous one, so subjects were ‘really one after another…really at the end of the day, do you think we can possibly think?’ [30:1:411-422].
Finally several students also commented that they did not understand the ‘big picture’ of how the subjects should link together. They wanted to know ‘this is what we are going to share with you...how it will fit in relationship to your organisation and...how it is going to be driven’ [22:1:376-379] and as one observed; ‘I am trying to link this module to other modules but I haven’t been able to until today’ [3:1:108-112]. Respondents (correctly in my view) highlighted that some foundational subjects seemed to be scheduled after more advanced subjects, and that subjects that should naturally follow each other would have an unrelated topic inserted in between, hence the entirety of the course had no logical consistency and ‘you forget and you’re totally lost’ [14:1:195]. However, the students recognised that all these comments were made with the benefit of hindsight. They recognised that they had been their own worst enemies and talked about marketing education in Singapore as a nightmare. In their own words:

At first we thought, oh better, even faster [completion]....I think now all of us regret that. [14:1:186-187]

So now I’m saying that we would like things to be compact but we are not ready for a compact program. It’s conflicting demands. And I’m very sure if the program was four years we would say; ‘Can you shorten it’? [76:1:423-430]

Preferred pedagogical processes

Consequently we enter discussion of students’ responses to pedagogies in the context of the preceding discussion of normative experiences, the epistemological stances they had developed as a result of their life experiences and the program’s compacted design. As would be expected each had a different impact on each individual, and as with any group of students in any country, responses to questions about preferred teaching and learning styles were varied. The style of one lecturer would be admired and idealised by one student, yet disliked by another. Certainly, as one student observed, and many of their classmates agreed; ‘different styles suit different groups and different content’ [30:1:401]. Nevertheless, there were significant patterns of agreement in the students’ pedagogical preferences, as the following paragraphs will relate.

In commencing discussion of preferred pedagogies it is worthwhile remembering that the respondents to this research are probably an atypical group of ‘Asian’ students, in that they were either professional corporate trainers themselves or aspired to be so. As such, in their workplaces they had practised and/or been exposed to a broad range of pedagogies and learning technologies. Indeed, Singapore’s globalised work force and economic focus meant that quite a few of the students, especially those who worked for
multinational companies, had experienced an impressive array of contemporary HRD methods from around the world. The following ‘dot point list’ is extracted from interviews and is not exhaustive but representative of the breadth of students’ work-related learning experiences:

- on-the-job learning;
- outdoor adventure learning;
- mentoring;
- training and assessment centres;
- interactive ‘games’;
- traditional classrooms in the workplace;
- computer based learning of various levels of sophistication;
- Japanese learning technologies (e.g. morning ‘stand-up meetings’, and ‘JUKU – a Japanese term that translates to ‘extracurricular school’ (Russell, 1997));
- role play;
- focus groups;
- Toastmasters;
- residential programs; and
- video feedback.

Possibly as a result of students’ resistance to their early learning experiences, quite a few had embraced many of the above-mentioned contemporary ‘Western’ HRD methods and spoke of favouring experiential type activities. However there was some tension between the methodologies they said they appreciated as trainers, and the way they reacted to constructivist and self-directed pedagogies as students.

BET students typically spoke of wanting to escape the restrictive learning of their past, yet aspects of that background remained evident when they discussed their preferred pedagogies as students. Several respondents were well aware of this contradiction. As one reflected; ‘Singaporeans among ourselves we like to say, that we’re very open…and then when people observe us the answer is that actually it is not true. So I think it is a different standard…a different yardstick’[49:1:340-343]. It does seem possible however, that the BET group may have commenced the program more acculturated to Western learning paradigms than any other randomly selected group of adult students. As one of
the students suggested; ‘let’s say if you were teaching accountancy for example, they would be less participative’ [68:1:230].

Therefore, whilst students accepted that teacher-centred pedagogies were entirely suitable in some circumstances e.g. ‘there are times when you need to be didactic…’ [35:1:268-272], by the time they commenced the BET program they generally disliked what they considered overly theoretical and didactic pedagogies, which they considered ‘boring’[23:1:287]. The following examples illustrate:

- I personally don’t like lecturers who focus on PowerPoint…and especially lecturers who read from the text. Of course it still depends on how you solicit the process. But reading out I don’t like because I would rather read the book myself. [51:1:33-35];
- To do a very theoretical or very lecture based…can be quiet effective…but is quite boring. [3:1186-188]; and
- One who just stand at the rostrum and talk about it, ak, ak, ak, heh…then you are just listening and after that you will just slump. [20:1:329-330]

The students thought it fundamental for a lecturer to; ‘engage with the students…there must be communication’ [20:1:337-340], and this was a key motivator for attending classes rather than taking on-line learning. Especially because classes were quite late at night, after work, and on Saturdays, students preferred lecturers who were able to ‘ask questions that make me want to respond and get you alive’[74:1:68-69] otherwise ‘it’s so easy to loose track of what’s going on and just daydream. And you just like, listen zombified and you are thinking; “what is he talking about?”’ [14:1:73-75]. Engagement with the lecturer and other students was seen to provide a higher quality learning experience. Increased understanding was seen as a benefit of experiential technologies; ‘experiential you can definitely remember better because you are participating and experiencing and nothing can replace that…the “aha”’[74:1:17-20].

Small group processes

By the students’ own accounts then, engagement was crucial to learning. Correspondingly, small-group exchange and the processing of learning was consistently recommended as a pedagogical tool for a variety of reasons: it encouraged engagement; it had the capacity to break through after-work boredom; it enabled sharing of experiences; and, if used judiciously, was viewed as a means to help with the problem of lack of time for reflection and reading, for example:
• …listening to the lecturer is one thing, but I am very sure with my needs I have got to read it at least three times to get a feel for what is happening [23:1:320-322]; and

• … you go away and do a little bit of class discussion and presentation – that’s good… everybody reads an article, that’s also a good thing because we can never read everything. [40:1:819-824]

The sharing of views in small groups was described as ‘providing insight’ [46, 34], and was consequently valued and considered important. However such sharing of experience was clearly not perceived as being ‘real learning’ if it was independent of lecturer input and immediate feedback, as the following comments attest; ‘don’t do it all the time just with groups, because if you don’t point us the way and come back…you must go and find out the answers’ [40:1:810-812], and ‘he wasted our time, wasted the whole module! Every lesson break into groups and discuss. Discuss what?!…’ [20:1:778-781].

It also seems very likely that many students experienced frustration when syndicate work lead to what they perceived as an ambiguous outcome. This seems related to the preceding epistemological discussions of authorised knowledge. Students apparently believed that the transfer of learning would be improved if immediate critical feedback (as to whether the group’s response was ‘correct’) was more forthcoming from lecturers. In fact several spoke of a desire for negative feedback, rather than ‘polite’ interactions from the lecturer; ‘then I will be able to tell whether OK you guys are weak in this, all I need to focus more on this’ [23:1:161-165], and; ‘…right or wrong, steer us you know? We may be fifty percent wrong but we still learn’[40:1:288-289]. However, it must be said that in at least one case (e.g. refer to case discussed on page 170) this claim was not supported by group behaviours and consequently it would seem that in fact, constructive criticism, whilst possibly appreciated, would need to be delivered with great sensitivity, especially in a group situation.

Perhaps paradoxically, despite the perceived importance of small-group work, it is noteworthy that the majority of students did not desire a predominance of small-group methodologies, especially not to the exclusion of lecturer input ‘contact time’. By way of illustration, several respondents commented that they did not want to spend time that they considered ‘wasted’ on preparation for group presentations in class:

…contact with the teacher is precious, our contact time is only limited hours, really what we need is a contact with [the lecturer] more than the process among ourselves. Three hours of contact time in class just to do preparation
is a waste of time. Because lecturer contact time is meaningful…it really makes you think. [20:1:624-627, 635-643]

Evidently therefore, students wanted lecturers to use stimulating methods that would maintain their interest. They sought the opportunity to share, compare and validate work/life experiences with classmates, as well as the learning that emerged from that process, but at the same time they were anxious for the lecturer to provide sufficient cognitive input to enable them to develop understanding and subsequently get them successfully through the upcoming assessment tasks. Consequently, while they valued small-group interaction, they valued interaction with the lecturer even more. It seems likely that the apparent paradox found in students’ respect for small-group learning, contrasted with a desire for less of it, is explained by the combination of pressurised time frames and the previously-mentioned need for access to ‘authorised knowledge’.

However, there was one aspect of small-group work which most of the students would agree was crucial: the majority of respondents reported that they were significantly more likely to actively participate when in small groups rather than in the combined class. Moreover, most participants agreed that individual participation was important and at the same time, difficult to obtain, in the ‘Asian’ classroom. Many also struggled with their own frustrations over this, as the following citations reveal:

- Nobody says anything because everybody is so afraid to give a wrong answer…whenever the lecturer asks a question I don’t respond because…I am not sure…I may be misleading my fellow course mates. [14:1:600-603]
- Oh, better not speak because people might laugh at me, I might say the wrong thing. [68:1:234]
- It’s either he doesn’t know so he doesn’t get involved, or he knows but he can’t manage an argument, so he doesn’t get involved. So in that silence is a win-win situation. [49:1:372-374]
- I just hang there and think; ‘if someone says something I can carry on with that’. I piggyback sometimes, unless you direct a question to me…if nobody says anything everyone just keeps quiet. [14:1:604-608]
- If you do not know, you don’t say so, then nobody knows you are incompetent. [49:1:360-362]
- [During small group work] I will step in and give a lot of my questions then… [14:1:611]
Consequently it seems that small-group work provided an opportunity for otherwise silent students to discuss their learning in a ‘safe environment’ and several respondents reported that they saved their questions for small-group opportunities. This ‘saving of questions’ also correlates with the desire for lecturer validation of small-group work. In seeking immediate lecturer feedback, answers to questions could be sought in an anonymous manner, which would ameliorate issues of embarrassment and ‘face’ saving.

‘Linking’ and structure

Related to the importance of feedback from lecturers was the fact that a significant number of respondents believed a key responsibility of the lecturer was to validate or ‘link’ classroom discussion to ‘authorised knowledge’. Furthermore, many respondents also thought the lecturer should explicitly link classroom process and subject content to upcoming assessment tasks, for example:

- It is very important for the lecturer to complete everything and I can get the full picture…if I am given drips of the picture I cannot give you my opinion because I have got no picture… [14:1:609-613]
- Start with an intent and purpose…what are we doing here in the first place?…I would be very uncomfortable in a learning setting that does not tell you why you are here, what are you learning for. [22:1:286-298]

Another form of linking that was highly valued was to ‘real life’ or the workplace:

- It’s all about how you link it to theory and the workplace. [49:1:368];
- If you can see an immediate application I find that the most rewarding. [36:1:156]; and
- Singaporeans are looking for things…that they can relate to…they want to take away something really useful…so you have got to ensure that that happens. [35:1:551-555]

It seems likely that both types of ‘linking’ are related to a desire for clarity and understanding that is accessed through structure (hence reduction of ambiguity), authorised knowledge, and application. Students notably appreciated lecturers who could discuss theory, explain complex concepts in clear and uncomplicated terms, link theory and course content to real life examples, and point out whereabouts in the literature further authorised knowledge could be found. Students in fact noted that whilst they considered some lecturers ‘poor’ at delivering such structure at first, individual lecturers
‘improved’ and were able to provide more appropriate structure as the lecturer’s familiarity with students’ needs increased.

**The responsibilities of teacher and student: self-directed learning**

_We would have appreciated self-directed more if we have more time._  
[19:1:661]

Whether or not the time constraint issues so frequently mentioned by students are valid in the context of comparison with students in other nations (and some lecturers suggested that Singaporeans may not be any more pressured than mature-aged students in Australia), the above quotation summarises perfectly the response of the group to self-directed learning strategies. Students observed that lecturers came to Singapore; ‘using methods they used in Australia and thinking that adults all should be self-directed’, but as another respondent highlighted, ‘not everybody is. It requires time for us to go through that mode’ [20:1:681-682]. Evidently, in the Singapore context, time constraints were a defensible factor in two ways: it took time for students (and lecturers) to adjust to the new learning culture, and it also took time to undertake the tasks that self-directed learning requires (such as independent reading, reflection and research, particularly when English was not the students’ mother tongue, and academic English was all the more foreign).

By their own description, students were used to being ‘spoon fed’ when it came to the issue of access to literature. In their view, they had paid a large sum of money for the course and consequently expected each subject to be preceded by the arrival of a comprehensive kit of readings and preferably learning aids that would help them to translate key concepts in the literature, because; ‘We are working adults, we do not sit in front of computer. We need those notes to read while travelling, while working, you know…’[10:1:237-239]. The concept of self-directed research was relatively alien to them, and whilst some students purchased and avidly read recommended texts (and many had read the latest ‘management guru’ best sellers) it is doubtful that the majority of students spent any significant time in the library, although there are notable exceptions to this observation. However the latter point is not something that is peculiar to Singaporean undergraduate students and whilst individual self-directed study may have often been alien and challenging, notably many of the BET students organised after class study groups entirely independently, some of which were highly valued by their participants.

In relation to individual self-directed study, there was initially a great deal of resistance to requirements to conduct on-line literature searches. There seemed to be two pragmatic reasons for this. In the first instance on-line access was interpreted as computer based
learning (which was considered a less valuable learning alternative and not what students had paid ‘top dollar’ for). Secondly, many students reported having technological difficulty accessing the university’s website and downloading the materials. The following comments explain:

…we want to put our valuable time to read…[encouraging self-direction through online research and downloading articles] doesn’t really work…we have to rely on one of our best friends who has done all the hard work for eleven hours [downloading and printing]. [20:1:90-108]

I think it is a load of crap…to me I don’t buy that [students should know how to download literature due to copyright restrictions]...we were very perturbed with that approach by a well established university to come and tell us to do it on the web…don’t get us wrong…I have done a lot of [computer based learning]...but I have got to go there and tackle a slow modem… [28:1:139-234]

As can be seen in the first quote above, students found a way around the intention that they learn how to find an article in on-line journals; they simply arranged for one class member to do it and then everyone photocopied the articles: perhaps another collectivist solution to an individualist problem.

However, whilst there is no doubt in my mind (having witnessed the difficulties first hand) that internet speed and the failings of the university’s website to load in a realistic time frame in Singapore were real issues, it is also likely that some of the resistance to self-directed methodologies was a result of a Singaporean predilection for everything to be provided in a quickly and easily accessible format. This issue caused much angst between the class and lecturers and has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis (see pages 91, 151, 198), however in terms of self-directed learning, it demonstrates rather well the extent to which misinterpretation of motives based on cultural assumptions (in this case, ‘the way things are done’ and the role of teacher and student) can sully the waters of well intentioned pedagogies. Ultimately, many students did learn to conduct independent literature searches and recognise that this was a valuable academic and professional skill, but it took time.

Inductive versus deductive learning

Another strong pattern of preference from the student interviews indicates that the majority of respondents had a preference for inductive rather than deductive pedagogies. This finding seems logical in the light of the earlier suggestion that the students generally thought of knowledge as external to the self and sought a transferral of foundational
knowledge from experts. Interviews are replete with quotations that suggest such a preference, as the following dot point list demonstrates:

- *I must understand the formula in order to apply it.* [23:1:78];
- *You would expect a lot of info first, a lot of notes…* [19:1:607-615];
- *Give a little of the theory…after that have experiential time.* [49:1:365-369];
- *Give a solution, right, don’t just leave them alone and in the lurch.* [64:1:187];
- *I have to really understand the subjects through and through before I can make any comment or may any sense of it.* [23:1:65-66]; and
- *In terms of problem-based facilitation…if the learners don’t have time to go and get their base knowledge and do the necessary research it is going to be back to square one, and be very lecturer-driven.* [49:1:286-288]

**Building relationships and credibility**

Student interview transcripts regularly suggest that lecturers needed to understand participants and that students appreciated lecturers who made the effort to get to know group members and consequently understood their work roles and learning needs. This was a frequently-mentioned expectation and was intrinsically related to lecturers’ ability to customise pedagogy; ‘*You have to know the kind of class you have, you have to adapt it to the needs of the group*’ [19:1:569-572]. Students reported that this enabled lecturers to provide examples that would illustrate complex concepts and translate them to a student’s ‘real world’ at the personal level. Consequently relationships were considered important, both within and external to the classroom, as the following quotations demonstrate;

You should catch up with your students before your course starts…meet up with them, that will help, and say this is what we are going to do. [14:1:540-542]

[Lecturer] is teaching…he doesn’t really relate…I don’t think he has time to find out what we do. [Another lecturer] does relate, and try to find out what we do. He will start a new point and say; ‘for example in your company…’ and you will start to relate. That’s where I see the light. [64:205-213,225-227]

We need examples we can relate to. It’s very important because examples are the most important when you learn difficult concepts…if we cannot relate then we cannot understand it.[68:1:258-261]

Reciprocally students also wanted to know about the lecturers’ work lives. Whilst this desire was in large part due to the students’ genuine and generous hospitality,
friendliness and curiosity, it also extended beyond the formation of friendships to a more practical level. In the classroom, the provision of examples via the relation of the lecturer’s professional work-life experience to the subject matter was considered fundamental to interesting and high-quality learning. In essence, the lecturers’ ability to relate illustrative ‘stories’ from personal work experiences increased student comprehension of complex concepts. Several respondents spoke of the desire for lecturers to; ‘bring your experience and tell from your learning and examples’ and reacted badly when it was not available; ‘oh go to this website and check this out, go to that website…it’s like, I don’t want a directory, I want personal experience’ [10:1:83-84]. The ability to meet this need provided certain lecturers with increased credibility and respect. Unfortunately, where this capacity was lacking, it was definitely noted by students; ‘I think the lecturers do not have enough experience outside the educational environment…the whole idea of adult learning has to be relevant to what they are doing. Unfortunately some lecturers failed to do that’ [34:1:53-62].

Unfortunately, the latter statement about lack of relevant experience was consistently reinforced by students’ negative appraisal of several lecturers’ presentation skills. This point was mentioned frequently and should be considered from the perspective that many of the students were trainers whose daily life involved effective presentation skills. Consequently lecturers who ‘broke all the rules of presentation’ [22:1:312-329] lost credibility. According to students (and I also noticed this during classroom observation), skills as basic as the ability to use overhead transparencies with readable content and place them on the projector confidently, were sometimes lacking and this seemed incongruous to many of the participants. As one commented; ‘I hate to attend those training whereby they are teaching trainer how to be a good trainer and they themselves don’t practise it’ [66:1:261-262].

**Assessment**

Contrary to the advice lecturers received prior to leaving Australia, examinations were not a comfortable assessment milieu for the majority of BET students, even though (or perhaps because), they had been so frequently exposed to them during compulsory education. Several students agreed that; ‘if you took the exams away I don’t think [our learning] would be any worse for it and we would be quite happy’ [74:1:308-310]. However, as previously mentioned, Singaporeans society still considered that assessment was not really meaningful without exams. Whatever the format, however,
assessment was fraught with challenges for students, as indicated in the following paragraphs.

Time constraints were also raised as a problem by students in relation to exams and assignments. Time frames for exams were set at the behest of the lecturer. Exams usually occurred a week after the final class of each subject and ran for either two or three hours. Several students complained that the two-hour time frame was unreasonable. This does not seem to be merely a predictable complaint about exams, as none of the students complained about the three-hour time frame. The two-hour exams caused students significant difficulty and several questioned the pedagogical reasoning behind the shorter time frame:

> Very very rushed...are they trying to test your speedwriting? I am very very disturbed by this. I can’t finish the last question and I am not sure what is the purpose of this giving such a short time. Because you need to first think through, second to express, third to make sure you phrase it correctly...

As is obvious in the preceding quotation, learning was not the only thing being tested during exams: the concomitant requirements for English language translation and cross-cultural interpretation of concepts evidently hampered some students’ capacity to excel, particularly in the shorter exams. For many the prospect of an upcoming examination raised anxiety to a level of ‘panic’, which as one respondent reported, resulted in ‘inability to know what we are thinking about’ [3:1:299]. Assignments were also sources of anxiety, although not to the same extent as exams. Assignments were due after the conclusion of each subject and one subject rapidly followed another. Therefore, as another student reflected, the program’s assessment focus was contrary to reflective learning and resulted in him taking a pragmatic, narrow view of topics; ‘for my assignment I must just focus on that particular topic...the rest that is related, I won’t consider. It is very natural...I just need a degree’ [3:1:173-175].

Again, it seems likely that students’ assessment-related anxiety was at least partly due to the previously-discussed search for a ‘correct answer’ or correct interpretation of authorised knowledge. Whilst it could easily be argued that any student facing assessment is likely to be anxious about interpretation, a major difference was that the BET students’ search for a correct response was undertaken in the context of cross-cultural assessment. Indeed it is at the point of assessment that students most frequently mentioned cultural difference, which then became a matter of intense concern. It was as though assessment brought students face-to-face with the requirement to interpret the
‘alien’ thought patterns of the lecturers and they consistently spoke about struggling to understand what the lecturers expected.

This struggle for understanding may explain why some students believed that increased exposure to local examples and case studies would have been helpful. One student explained that he wanted to see examples of how somebody had implemented the issue at hand in Singapore, e.g. did the theory work in his context? Without such contextualisation, for some students assessment became somewhat of a guessing game. For example; ‘I will try to write it to suit your culture, not to suit my culture…but to write an assignment for the culture of Australia you will be crippled’ [33:1:279] and ‘it is very difficult for me to convert my experiences to your way of looking at things. It is completely different way…so when I interpret is very difficult’ [26:1:448-450].

It would seem likely that this issue of cultural transferability further undermined the pedagogical foundations and learning goals of assessment and reinforced a myopic focus. Consequently, as a result of either their own perceived lack of capacity to implement theories introduced in the course, or a disbelief that concepts or theories would actually work in the Singaporean context, several students confessed that their assignments were fictionalised accounts of workplace experiences, which simply reflected what they thought the lecturers wanted to read.

Cultural issues were also raised in relation to questions and case studies in examinations. The following comment (from a student in relation to a case study which the student considered to be culturally biased) reinforces the need for those setting questions across cultural boundaries to be particularly vigilant to assumptions about understanding; ‘I need to imagine and presume they do that…I am not really understanding the background, what she is doing in the case study…therefore I don’t really know how to explain’ [4:1:299-304].

Another finding from student interviews is related to the issue of freedom of choice and flexibility in assessment (examples include ‘open questions’, ‘open book exams’ and individual interpretation). Whilst the lecturers may have been thinking that some flexibility in terms of assessment options would allow students the capacity to provide a range of interpretations and thereby reduce anxiety, it would seem that paradoxically, it confused and perplexed some of the students:

Teaching material and examination must have a link…it’s an open question you know, I can write anything I want. [The lecturer] must look at which angle [he is] talking about… [26:1:486,489]
The questions asked are very, wah, very wide and I’m trying to think what should I write and what should I not write? [8:275-291]

As already discussed, some students sought examples of direct links between subject content or likely exam or assessment topic content from lecturers. In terms of assessment this was explained as an anxiety reduction strategy which actually allowed creativity: ‘we want examples which will remove the ‘threat of right or wrong’ and allow [us] to focus more on arguing a case. People would be much freer to think then’ [30:1:472-475]. However this also reinforces the view that students still assumed that their assessment task was reproduction of ‘right or wrong’ authorised knowledge according to what they imagined the assessor wanted.

At the same time, other students recognised that the pedagogical reasoning behind the assessment methodologies had the capacity to maximise learning and as such was notably different from the old Singaporean system; ‘in terms of problem-solving…you cannot just memorise’ [19:1:148-15], and ‘it’s a valid process; they will ask you why you do. If you can answer and support your argument you get points. There is no right and wrong answer. You have to support what you say’ [33:1:137]. Of note however, is the observation that an understanding of the requirements of the assessment system seemed to come from the students who then expressed the most self-doubt. They made observations such as; ‘The Australian system is based on a lot of thinking capabilities, which, might be lacking [in me]’ [23:1:64-65], or ‘the open book concept is more on application and you must be very fast thinking…I am weak at it…’ [70:1:111-121].

Student/lecturer interaction as a result of assessment

Such lack of confidence brings us to a discussion of sharing amongst students, and ultimately to a discussion of ‘plagiarism’ (I place the world plagiarism in inverted commas because there was disagreement amongst lecturers about what constituted plagiarism). In response to such confusion, students reported that ‘within the class we share notes, we share results, we share a disaster’ [40:1:879-881]. However this sharing was related to examples of what did or did not constitute ‘valid process’, and was reported as occurring ‘after the fact’ of assessment. Confusion on the issue of plagiarism continued throughout the program, despite the fact that, as one student pointed out ‘three separate teachers did teach us how to do referencing…we just don’t have a very good memory about that’ [28:1:405].

Perhaps the students ‘lack of memory’ (or confusion) is not despite the fact that three separate lecturers taught the students about academic presentation, but because of the
fact that every lecturer had different expectations. The volume of references to this issue throughout the interviews is very significant, but in summary, issues related to what constituted appropriate academic writing, and in particular referencing and citations (and therefore plagiarism), caused a great deal of angst. The following quotations represent three slightly differing student perspectives on the issue:

Many of [the students] until today doesn't know correct referencing because every lecturer sets a different standard… better if everyone learns together, the standard will be the same. [Some lecturers are] looking at very minor, minor things, which I think shouldn’t be the case. Look at the content of the essay itself, is that there or not there? …[26:1:388,395]

Different standards in marking, so my concern is it’s a very different kind of perspective where the lecturer says, “this is good”, another guy says “this is not very good”… the amount of effort I put in, for all the lecturers, all assignments more or less very equal…and if the grading is very close, I can accept you know, but if it’s H1 and H3 it’s a world of difference. [10:1:131-137]

And [the lecturer] says our grammar is suspect…this is not what adult learning is all about. We want you to come and tell us, be frank, I mean if we are no good in English fine, we will improve on grammar and all those, but don’t harp on the point…we want value added, tell us substance. We may not be as articulate as Americans or as Australians to give you strong bombastic words, but this is not a literature class…[28:1:456-465]

The above citations explicate the issue at hand eloquently enough to eliminate the need for any further labouring of the point. It must also be stressed that students were not entirely unrealistic about the issue. They generally accepted that; ‘yes, you must teach us some academic style…some orderliness in presenting a paper that is universally recognised…’ [28:1:1052-1054], and ‘if I am going to be a good graduate I should follow standards’, however they simply believed that ‘[the lecturer] has to little bit give way too’ [26:1:543-546].

**Discussion: preferred pedagogies**

Many respondents found that when they were in the role of undergraduate student they struggled to shed the norms they had internalised as a result of their early learning experiences. A case in point is the issue of engagement: students frequently spoke of wanting to be engaged during class, however when in the role of student many did not feel sufficiently comfortable to be able to vocalise questions or actively participate in the main class. Correspondingly, small-group work emerged as a favoured pedagogy, but not to the exclusion of direct lecturer input. This suggests that the BET students experienced
a tension between the two pedagogical ‘worlds’, which impacted on their preferred pedagogies.

Despite acculturation to constructivist methodologies, didactic milieus were still valued because they were seen as a method for providing clarity and understanding that is accessed through structure (hence reduction of ambiguity), authorised knowledge, and application. This reinforces the notion that the students were seeking foundational knowledge and relied on the lecturers as interpreters of theory and concepts. Inductive methodologies were therefore preferred and lecturers who had relevant industry experience were valued for their ability to illustrate complexities through stories. In the view of the students, some lecturers were lacking sufficient ‘real world’ experience, which consequently meant they were unable to make such translations.

Like most mature-aged students, the Singaporean students struggled with the competing pressures of tight time frames and busy lives, but this was compounded by unfamiliarity with independent learning strategies, and in many cases difficulty with English, particularly academic English. Moreover many of the students were initially resistant to self-directed learning. It would seem that, at least initially, many did not comprehend the pedagogical motives behind self-directed strategies and interpreted these as an ‘easy option’ for lecturers and the university. Consideration of these reactions suggests that independent learning strategies, which inherently require critical and creative thinking, may be somewhat antithetic to previous Singaporean educational norms and some students responded to self-directed pedagogies by relying on the resources of the collective. Despite the obvious challenges, it would be untrue to say that all students shared these concerns, and many who did nevertheless eventually came to recognise at least some of the benefits of independence.

As is entirely evident, assessment was an enormous concern for students and was the most obviously problematic pedagogical process encountered during the BET program. Students were grappling with a range of valid issues, and in my view were not incorrect in their perception that the program’s assessment pedagogies encouraged a narrow focus and limited learning. Lack of intercultural sensitivity, flexibility and hegemonic thinking were more obvious during discussions of assessment than at any other time in the program. The anxiety brought about by students’ inability to reconcile different lecturers’ idiosyncrasies undermined the capacity for applied learning. As a result, where genuine transfer of learning could have been maximised through assessment, it was instead subsumed in a mire of misunderstanding that resulted in fictitious projects and guessing
games. The university lost credibility in this area of the program more than any other. This could have been ameliorated by some standardisation amongst lecturers, and by – as one student suggested – a ‘subject zero…that teaches us a lot of things that the university needs us to practise’ [26:1:386-387]. Such recommendations will be revisited in the final chapter, however for the iterations of the program that were the subject of the research, in light of this discussion it is perhaps not surprising that some students resorted to desperate measures: ‘…the internet, I love it so much. I just key in one keyword…’ [66:1:335-336], and; ‘If you’ve got no idea what the person wants then you just copy passages’ [30:1:477-478].

Negotiating new terrain: student suggestions for lecturers

Explain it just like raw meat…. you must cook; make sure it is very nice and delicious for them. They will accept it because you have changed it. [26:1:276-279]

This section is replete with student quotations rather than paraphrases, as their voices explain this issue so eloquently. The students had a range of suggestions for Australian lecturers, whom they acknowledged as facing a significant challenge teaching in an unfamiliar cultural environment. Notably, the pre-eminent suggestion was that lecturers should realise that even for locals teaching in Asia; ‘you have to find how to penetrate the Asians’ way of thinking, and it is very difficult’ [26:1:276279], ‘so as a person coming in I think you must be ready to accept that’ [71:1:428].

Many of the respondents recognised that culture played a central role in translation of both practice and content. Students recommended that the Australian lecturers should first understand the background of the students, subsequently acknowledge that the learning environment would certainly be different and probably challenging, and that consequently lecturers should be flexible in terms of their expectations of themselves and the class. The following quotes exemplify this thinking:

- So if I understand they come from a perspective of rote learning, they come from spoon feeding and so on, that tells me to manage my expectations of them and their expectations of me. [30:1:454-457];

- I think it is Asian culture. When Australian lecturers come, don’t expect us…it takes us a bit of time to warm up. And then you will find that, yes, we are able to. [74:1:378]; and
• We Asians are very conservative and we are not very open... We are very quiet and it is difficult to see whether they have learned or not... So sometimes methods don't click. They wish to have all, a one-week, you teach me, that's it. [26:1:249-254].

The students were themselves experienced presenters and quite a few had taught in other countries in the region (e.g. China) where they been faced with similar challenges to the lecturers. There was general agreement on the points that; ‘there is no best way [to teach] ... it depends on your participants and the content’ [4:1:163-175], [30:1:401], [35:1:255]; ‘it's really situational... you need to be flexible and you really need to be a subject matter expert’ [35:1:272]; and, similarly; ‘...you must be very knowledgeable... and come up with some kind of combination... you cannot focus on one style of teaching’ [70:1:210-212]. Therefore flexibility, knowledge of the audience, and technical expertise, were highly recommended attributes.

The specifics of ‘flexibility’ related to cultural sensitivity and consequently, adaptation. However there was no indication that students thought lecturers’ preferred pedagogies should not be employed, simply that participants needed to be given time to adapt; ‘I would still try to do experiential learning, but I would do it a different way... it comes down to their culture and look at their interests...’ [68:1:251-253]. Students recommended micro-skills which would be useful in any environment but which also had the capacity to improve cross-cultural pedagogies. Examples included the following, some of which illustrate the difficulties that students themselves had experienced in their roles as educators:

You must actually prompt [students] to open up. Say; 'yes what do you think about it'... you don't ask that they would just keep quiet and close their books, go home. That is normally what Singaporeans... definitely there are some of them that are much more open that like to voice up their views... but the majority of Asians they would just keep quiet unless you tell them to open their mouth' [66:1:469-474];

Seek eye contact... but then let them pause for a while and mentally prepare. [66:1:480-481];

You need to be sensitive to face. Don't show that he doesn't know.... ask him what we should do. I will put it as if I do not know, but actually I do know. [26:1:368];

If you use words that they don't understand then obviously they won't know what you're teaching'. [4:1:173-174];

I guess at least for a start you need to adopt a bit more conservative style until you know the students.... Because being Asians people are always a
bit uptight, especially getting them to open up and share the point of view, then you can use some new methods...Because even for me as a trainer I always face that challenge. [71:1:426-432]; and

If the technique doesn’t work, change it...but it can be applied in Singapore I am not saying no...then only thing we have to change is the dimension, you have to make sure the correct words are used so that people will not misinterpret, they will know what is this theory for me and they will learn from that. [26:1:231-234]

In terms of ‘knowledge of the audience’, students’ recommendations were refreshingly straightforward:

You need to know something about the local environment and learning habits of the people here...understand what inhibits them...their perceptions...it’s important or else everything will become very artificial. [49:1:406-411];

If you come into class and say something in local dialect, this is very good. You will get the whole class even if you can speak just one word, like “Alamak” (“a general and popular exclamation of dismay”(Choo, 2002)), then you will break the ice. [51:1:322-325]; and

Before you go to any country...experience it...learn about it, pick up the characteristics that Singaporeans do, how they congregate, how they talk, pick up the language a bit so when you come you’ve already passed the main barriers... And as you teach, ask them to relate back to experiences and working life.... because if you are going to come to Singapore without any knowledge about how things are done you might get a bit shell shocked’. [14:1:535-545]

Students also had some quite logical suggestions as to how such knowledge might realistically be accessed:

You can ask Singaporean lecturers to come to ‘The University’ to have a talk. What is this environment, the culture, what is students’ behaviour, what is the do’s and don’ts? So the lecturers’ will get first hand information. In class they will not use the words that are going to be insulting...or wrong. That’s one thing that should be done before lecturers come. [26:1:437-445];

Western lecturers might misconstrue the underlying cultural stuff...it would be very helpful for those lecturers to attend a workshop on our culture. [68:1:249];

...would be good if [Australian] lecturers could co-facilitate with a local then they might understand the local context. [36:1:289]; and

Let the lecturers stay here for a year, do an exchange program with the National University of Singapore, why not?... NUS is recognised in the international community. [51:1:333-335]
Therefore it is obvious that students were recommending lecturers be provided with some type of cross-cultural briefing and/or mentored experience before teaching in Singapore or another country. This is predicated on an overt acceptance that culture makes a difference in teaching and that Singaporeans were aware of, and acutely affected by, the difference between Australian culture/s and their own:

*There is a lot of difference between Singapore and Australia...a lot of difference.* [14:1:559];

*Even with the different races, we still have our own culture. You can't hide away from that. A lecturer who thinks that, OK, that you can just come here and just teach us the way you teach Australians, it may not work. Especially for older students...* [49:1:509-512]; and

*Some racially-based issues are very sensitive...so the lecturer has to be very aware in what he is going to mention...just like right now if you mention about these [Islamic] things after September 11th ...dress codes...male and female, you know? The lecturer must be very aware of this, not only if he uses as illustration, even as the lecturer talks with the group. It's very sensitive, so like find out about the culture.* [49:1:468-485]

Interestingly, and contrary to my expectations and the concerns of some lecturers, many of the students thought that the program content was ‘rather applicable in most countries’ [4:1:193], although certainly some were concerned when they realised that; ‘to my horror...a lot of good ideas...but when it comes to applications in my particular organisation it is not working’ [74:1:241-243]. In response to issues of trans-cultural transferability, students sought to learn through exposure to other country’s theories and practices and then make adaptations to suit their context which is something that, as one participant highlighted; ‘Singapore has done well, looking at other country’s positive experiences’ [64:1:271-273]. Indeed it would seem that the students were experienced at translating cultural content and were ‘conscious that [theories, methods] are all American, European...definitely you cannot follow, but at least you can understand why they arrive at these things and then you can put in your own context...I think you should be able to relate’ [19:1:518-520]. In fact many said things like; ‘we will improve it to make it localised...you can’t apply wholesale’ [28:1:665-687].

Some students did point out that ‘the readings we receive are all basically more Australian system...it is important to know the Singapore system and compare it’ [3:1:288-295], and consequently ‘what needs to change is the examples. Using examples of local situations is much better.... local names or local case studies would certainly help’ [68:1:204-205]. However others acknowledged that ‘some of the Australian lecturers have done quite a bit of work’ [on researching and providing local examples] [23:1:243].
and ‘it is quite difficult for lecturers to come to know everything about Singapore within a certain period of time…very difficult’ [26:1:460-463].

Ultimately, many students empathised with the lecturers, and certainly most genuinely liked them. One asked, ‘Are they overworked are they Lyn? You can tell yeah?’ [10:1:207]. And another observed;

   I think they have done a fantastic job…it’s really nice to see a totally different approach that they have taken in educating us and in running the program…they have been very concerned and some of them are really aware… [71:1:446-453]

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has attempted to report and partially interpret the views and experiences of the student participants in the BET program. We have seen that they came to the BET program despite significant disincentives in many cases, and that they were successful despite significant challenges. Like the lecturers, the students were navigating uncharted cultural territory. The fact that all the respondents to this research eventually passed the course and gained their degree, is something for which they and their lecturers are to be congratulated. They are also to be congratulated on the level of goodwill that exists to this day between the two groups despite, as this chapter has demonstrated, ample opportunity for misunderstanding and negative feeling.

The next and penultimate chapter will bring a third perspective to data reporting: that of classroom observations. Data in the following chapter will be interpolated with analysis of the data reported in this and the preceding chapter, and will underpin the final discussion and recommendations in chapter nine.
Chapter Eight: Observations; a third perspective

Introduction

As forecast in chapter four (methodology) this chapter adds a third, observational perspective to the research, from the standpoint of ‘observer as participant’ (Merriam, 1998; Walsh, 1998). It draws upon observations that were carried out as per the schedule on page 81 of the methodology chapter and relies on field notes which, as Walsh (1998) advises, required that some selection be made at the time of writing: thus it does not masquerade as a verbatim record of interactions. This chapter reports and analyses aspects of classroom interactions, and in doing so aims to corroborate or supplement the previously reported respondents’ reflections. Behaviours that contributed to, or distracted from, effective teaching and learning are also identified as a result of this analysis. Thereafter, the chapter concludes with a discussion of preliminary findings, specifically those that are directly related to interactions within a transnational classroom.

Elements of lesson structure

Punctuality and timing

Perhaps counter-stereotypically, it could not be said that Singaporean students were punctual, although there were, of course, some students who were always at class early. Field notes record that most classes commenced ten to fifteen minutes late. For example, the orientation program for the new BET 3 students was scheduled to start at 6.45 pm. By 6.40 pm only half the members of the group were present and the remainder were (on average) more than half an hour late. This pattern was repeated on the first day of the second subject for BET 3, when only nine of the fifteen students were present at the time that teaching was due to commence. Fifteen minutes into the lesson, thirteen out of the expected fifteen students had arrived. On the second day of teaching, fewer people arrived on time and the class commenced fifteen minutes late. This became a relatively established pattern. Indeed it was regularly observed that lecturers had to provide an overview of the session to students who arrived up to half an hour or more after the lesson had begun.

A tea break was provided during each session, which generally took a little longer than the scheduled twenty minutes. Predictably, therefore, some classes ran past the scheduled conclusion time (10:00 pm) as the following excerpt from field notes illustrates:
10.00pm  No one is answering [lecturer's] questions and people are packing up, but nobody leaves.

10.10 pm.  Students are talking and fidgeting.

10.15 pm.  An OHT describing the first assignment is shown. People copy down the content.

10.20pm  All [lecturer's] classes have gone far over time, people are really making a lot of noise. 'Cognitive resource allocation theory' at this time of night…no hope of people taking this in.

10.20pm  One person walks out.

10.25pm  Lecturer: 'I am sorry I am running a bit over time…'.

10.30pm  No statement from [lecturer] that class is finished, but people are just getting up and going. [Lecturer] still talking … ‘just give me two minutes…’.

10.35 pm  Class members make eye contact (roll eyes, look at watches) with class president. It looks like class president is about to say something when lecturer says class is finished. Most students leave hurriedly [C1:347-389].

In contrast, another lecturer ran significantly over time, but he was more overt about it, asking students’ permission to do so prior to ten o’clock. In that instance, students were still paying attention at 10.25pm, until a SIM staff member announced that they were locking the building. The lecturer then said he would leave another complex theory ‘until next time’ (it therefore seems possible that he had been considering covering that, at 10.30 pm).

One general pattern from classroom observations was that lecturers who used a greater degree of interactive small-group work had a tendency to run late, predominantly because they would often have to extend the time allowed in order to complete group activities, and the subsequent debriefing could bring up unexpected issues. However this tendency was not restricted to those lecturers and it would be fair to say that it appeared that more often than not lesson structure and content was bartered against available time. As a result, one can only wonder how much ‘learning’ was taking place at 10.30 pm, after a crammed lesson and a full day’s work.
Learning spaces

Physical location

The Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) is located in an obviously costly, marble-clad, light-filled building of five floors surrounding two atria containing koi ponds. In other words the architecture and facilities of the SIM location reinforce Chinese heritage cultural symbols indicating prestige and status. It has a clean, modern, corporate feel with modern, comfortable classrooms and lecture theatres replete with the latest audio visual technology. Learning spaces are sizeable and air-conditioned (with temperature seemingly set to ‘freeze’ which certainly encouraged wakefulness).

Seating arrangements

With the exception of the orientation program, the Australian lecturers all used classrooms rather than lecture theatres. Two of the Australian lecturers left the rooms as they found them, with desks and seats in rows facing the front. One moved the tables and chairs into a ‘U’ shape along the walls of the room and another organised the room in ‘café’ style with chairs and tables in clusters. Most of the lecturers stood beside or behind a table or overhead projection unit at the front of the room when teaching, but also moved around the room. At various stages of the class, most lecturers sat or leant casually on the teacher’s desk. Nobody sat behind the desk while actually engaged in teaching, although some did so when students were working in groups. In fact, the lecturer who used the ‘U’ shape, at one point sat in the ‘U’ as a member of the group (which brought looks of consternation from students who appeared uncomfortable and tried to maintain eye contact with him).

There was an obvious relationship between room set-up and teaching style. Those lecturers who favoured traditional classroom configurations also used more didactic styles and/or guided discussion and less group-work than those who favoured the more interactive configurations. The space within the room/s was used to full advantage by those lecturers employing small-group techniques. Syndicate work required students to move themselves and their furniture. Students were sometimes slow to move, particularly in the case of the BET 3 group, which was new to the program. From students’ facial expressions one could extrapolate that syndicate work was initially slightly worrisome to them and, in order to encourage the group to get to know one another and experience syndicate work, one lecturer eventually resorted to quite directive requests e.g. ‘could you partner up with someone you don’t know [nobody moved]…you’ll have to get up and move around the room...’ [A4:68]. Even with such directions, during that first class only
two people actually moved. In contrast, those in the larger BET 2 group were obviously used to breaking into groups as they moved quickly, easily and relatively noisily into groups.

Students in the smaller BET 3 had a tendency to sit in the same places in the classroom. Again, this may have been because it was early in the course and students therefore did not know each other well. The majority of that intake was of Chinese heritage, consequently one would not expect any obvious groupings based on ethnicity (nor were there any based on gender). In the BET 2 group students tended to choose seating fairly randomly, seemingly based more on when they arrived than any other factor. Of course, those who arrived early sat in groups with people who had become friends and some arrived together. With this intake I observed a tendency for some ethnicity-based grouping (e.g. Malay women, some Chinese-speaking male cliques) but this was not the norm and there were clearly (for example) Indian-heritage people whose closest friendships were with Chinese-heritage people, Malay with Chinese, etc. Again, there was little obvious grouping based on gender or work role.

**Use of audio visual aids**

**Whiteboard**

The whiteboard was used as a sequencing tool by several lecturers in order to list potential discussion topics. One lecturer reported that this was a procedure he had developed specifically for classes in Singapore as a direct response to students’ desire for structure. This whiteboard ‘agenda’, would be written prior to students’ arrival. Another lecturer created a ‘bulletin board’ on one side of the whiteboard, which was used as a self-prompt and to highlight current issues for students. Typical contents included administrative issues that needed to be addressed prior to students’ departure (e.g. change of due-dates for assignments). The whiteboard ‘agenda’ seemed to be more a ‘wish list’ than an achievable list of topics to be covered in a 2.5-hour class. For example, on one evening, eight relatively weighty theoretical issues were listed as intended for discussion, plus a session on academic writing. Of course some lecturers regularly and purposefully adhered quite closely to the proposed lesson structure, whilst others just as purposefully deviated from a proposed session according to the way group discussion flowed. Nevertheless, lecturers were quite frequently apparently unable to cover the intended subject-content.
One lecturer frequently used the board to underscore important points from readings, for example ‘key words’ or ‘key concepts’. Another used it when debriefing group work or for guided discussion. During classes the students copied whatever was on the board. Students noted the presence of the agenda and bulletin board lists and, when points were not covered during the evening, some asked when and if they would be covered.

**Overhead projection: ‘PowerPoint’/ Data-show**

The observations highlighted some common issues: data-show units had one clear advantage over the old-style overhead projector, but two disadvantages. The advantage was that they seemingly forced some lecturers to use better quality slides than might otherwise have been the case. The first disadvantage was that some lecturers struggled with the technology, wasting time in class and eventually giving up in favour of more readily available technologies (e.g. turning to study guides). This unintended change of teaching method could have lead to a loss of key learning points and wasted time. The second disadvantage was the capacity for an excessive use of *Microsoft PowerPoint* which has been said to encourage a ‘transmission mode of teaching’ and thereby reduce a class to maximum passivity (Biggs and Watkins, 2001a). I found this to be the case in the classes I attended which were facilitated by the local lecturer. He had been provided with a significant number of *PowerPoint* slides by one of the Melbourne lecturers (who was later to mark the students’ assignments). In an attempt to customise the presentation, the lecturer had exacerbated the problem by supplementing the presentation with his own slides. Consequently, the capacity of visual aids images to maximise learning was undermined by their sheer volume. As a participant I felt that the slides were being shown ‘for showing’s sake’: content was skimmed over, read out and very frequently not explained – students could have achieved this end by individual reading, as one of them pointed out during an interview. To illustrate, my field notes state that; ‘[lecturer] flicks over an OHT that lists five complex management theories’, and ‘some people are writing but most look bored…’ [C1:223].

**Overhead transparencies**

The skill level employed in the use of acetate overhead transparencies (OHTs) varied greatly. Like whiteboards, OHTs were used as a sequencing aid. They also supported classroom discussion and explained and simplified content when they were used well. For example, excerpts from allocated texts were shown to the group on OHTs, and guided-discussion followed; ‘[lecturer refers to overhead text] …one of you was talking about soft skills…so this might be an example’ [A3: 30-33].
However, by contrast, in some cases OHTs were apparently prepared with no proper consideration of the reason visual aids are used (e.g. to enhance the approximately eighty percent of our learning that is taken in visually (Foxon, 1992)). Examples of misuse included very small text photocopied from a journal that could have been provided as a handout (e.g. Foxon, 1992). These ‘audio-visual aids’ were essentially unreadable and seemed to add no value to the learning experience. It was unsurprising that so many students complained about this, and also considered it particularly paradoxical in light of the fact that the course should have modelled ‘best practice’ in adult learning.

Despite these problems however, when a lecturer pointed out that the content of an OHT was not to be found in the students' workbook or readings, students started writing immediately. This may have been a conscious pedagogical intention on behalf of the lecturer, in that the act of taking notes from overheads may have encouraged students' internalisation. However, considering time constraints and available technologies, this may not have been the most efficient pedagogical choice because copying took a lot of time: in fact field notes recorded that one lecturer allowed ‘a great deal of time’ and that ‘people must have been writing word for word’ [A1:3:56].

In summary, in several instances audio visual aids were employed clumsily and over-used. Given that lecturers wanted to encourage class participation in a country where students were considered too passive, this was problematic. Some lecturers did use the aids to encourage and support participation, but others could have potentially improved group dynamics and enhanced their credibility as facilitators through a more professional and pedagogically sound use of audio visual aids.

Study Guides and Readings

Prior to each subject, students were sent a set of allocated readings and a study guide/workbook. In some cases, the subject readings included copies of the PowerPoint presentations that were to be used in the class (and I observed these being used by students to record notes as the PowerPoint slides were shown and discussed). Some lecturers referred to study guides more than others; however lecturers referred to the allocated readings frequently.

As discussed in the previous chapter, by the time I was observing the BET 2 intake, many students were running behind with several assessment tasks and were struggling to manage the expected pre-subject reading, despite an expressed desire for familiarity with ‘expert knowledge’ and the motivation that came from an anxiety that they might be
‘tested’ on the content of the readings. There was a notable difference between my observations of the (at that stage) new students of BET 3 who almost all indicated they had read the pre-course work for their second subject, and the BET 2 group. In the case of the latter, when asked by the local lecturer on the first evening of a subject ‘who has read article x’, no hands went up.

Discussion: lesson structure

Observations of the elements of lesson structure revealed that, despite their reported ‘shared culture of adult learning’ (chapter six) lecturers’ teaching styles differed quite significantly. Indeed, the diversity of classroom practices exposed students to a range of learning experiences within an overarching adult learning milieu: from the relatively didactic lecturer to the non-interventionist facilitator.

Group dynamics

Lecturer introductions

All lecturers introduced themselves on a first name basis. This is acceptable practice in Singapore, although I noted that when students in Singapore referred to their lecturers they often used honorific titles (‘doctor’ and often [inappropriately] ‘professor’). Male lecturers were more likely to shake hands with students as they entered the room. Only two of the lecturers presented information about their work or personal lives at the start of the class: the Singaporean recounted his career and an Australian lecturer introduced himself in a more personal manner. In contrast, most lecturers started their first class by asking the participants to introduce themselves.

Male lecturers in particular dressed more formally than they might when lecturing in Australia, most favouring a business suit (at least for the first evening). These observations point to the possibility that introductions were important to lecturers, and that they sought a ‘professional’ (relatively impersonal) relationship that, at the same time, had elements of Australian egalitarianism. Students responded with a friendly handshake when it was proffered but generally made few comments at first, waiting for the ‘general round’ of introductions. They then readily shared information about their work roles, positions, etc. As anywhere, student introductions ran the gamut from modest and self-effacing, to status seeking (never female), but in both groups there was a tendency toward the former.
**General level of verbal interaction**

Verbal interactions in the classroom reflect the theoretical predictions discussed in chapter five: classrooms did *initially* appear formal and teacher-centred and students appeared to be comfortable with a passive learning style. The words ‘quiet’ and ‘silent’ appear in my field notes relatively frequently. Rather than something that was not happening and escaped my notice, ‘quietness’ was something that was ‘different’ enough to be noticeable to me as an outsider. Examples include:

- [lecturer] explains an exercise, it is also written on the board…group appears to be actively listening and very silent [B2:51];
- [lecturer]: ‘can you bring your discussions to a close?’ Immediate silence as response [A4:145];
- when lecturer is speaking, using board etc. groups are very quiet but body language would indicate they are actively listening [D2:168];
- [new class, new group, day one] – very quiet, you could hear a pin drop [A1:63];
- two hours into class, not one question has been asked [A1:198];
- outstanding feature of orientation session is that students are quiet, despite numerous prods from the presenter [01:194].

Several of the above comments are from observations of the smaller and newer third intake group – which one could expect to be quieter - but not all. In the larger BET 2 group I overheard the following conversation from two students sitting nearby when they were more than halfway through the course:

[Student A]: You are very quiet.

[Student B]: I better stay quiet than say something stupid. [B2:72]

It is perhaps noteworthy that the classes I observed in the lecture-theatre were no less interactive than other classes. A Singaporean lecturer facilitated these classes, in which there tended to be a lot more ‘background’ discussion amongst students that was not facilitated via the lecturer. Whilst this had the potential to be distracting, the lecturer did not ‘lose control’ of the group, and was skilled at drawing responses. I did not hear any Australian lecturers actually confront the group about quietness, however the local lecturer was overt about it:

*I would like to hear some voices that we have not heard…so can we give the floor to some silent ones…* [C4:220] and;
Subsequently, the lecturer carried through his promise. In the Monday class he selected people who had previously been quiet and solicited input from them. Alternately he would select a group member to respond, e.g. ‘attribution theory...let’s get someone to give us the key points’ [nobody does]...[lecturer selects a student by name]...‘do you want to have a go?’ [C2:115]. This lecturer would also choose students who had been quiet to read aloud from workbooks. In addition, it seems likely that the ability of the local lecturer to discuss Singaporean contextual issues had the effect of eliciting more discussion in the large group about topics that were familiar to students. He was able to draw examples from the group with relative ease, as he was aware of their work backgrounds, and joked with the class using Singaporean examples and colloquialisms.

Verbal interactions were not necessarily dependant on group size or progress in the course. The BET 3 group became more interactive as people built relationships, and conversely there were numerous occasions in which the larger BET2 group was very quiet. Similarly, background conversation was not isolated to the local lecturer. Indeed, one of the Australian lecturers exclaimed to the class; ‘it’s very difficult to talk when everyone is talking’ [B1:144].

Whilst I did not hear some individual students utter a single word in whole-class sessions during six months of observation, the modal class dynamic could be described as reticent at first; predominantly quieter than you might find in a ‘Western classroom’, but quickly acculturating and prepared to participate verbally when in a low risk environment.

Questions

As Ng and colleagues (2001:144) propose; ‘questioning is perhaps the most distinctive feature of classroom discourse’. The following paragraphs provide an insight into the questioning behaviours of both students and lecturers and illustrate the efficacy of questioning patterns in a transnational environment.  

2 In their observations of Hong Kong students, Ng et al. (2001:146) propose that teachers ‘ask questions for a number of reasons: for comprehension checking, knowledge checking, for focusing attention, classroom management purposes and so on.’ Questions can be classified into several types, however two common examples are; ‘open’ questions (to which a range of possible answers exist) and ‘closed’ questions (for which there is only one acceptable answer). Open questions provide the potential for increased learning because the student has to formulate a response that makes sense to both himself and the class. In doing so, the students clarify their own thinking and understanding. Closed questions provided a limited choice for students and that therefore ‘the cognitive challenge is minimal’ (Ng et al.; 2001:146).
Questions to the lecturer

Observations revealed that student questions (or comments for that matter) were probably not as frequent as one might observe in a ‘Western’ classroom of adult students, despite the efforts of lecturers to elicit them. As previously discussed, field notes were not intended as a verbatim record of every interaction. However another reason why they could never have been so, was because I was often unable to hear the questions that were posed by students. Indeed quite a few students posed questions in a ‘quiet’ and/or hesitant tone of voice. This was particularly problematic and noticeable to me in the lecture theatre, in which I frequently struggled to hear student questions or comments. Whilst accents and ‘Singlish’ were potentially reasons for my inability to hear in the first classes, by the time I left Singapore I was not consciously struggling with the local accents or patois at all and in fact was enjoying my own ‘Singlish’ vocabulary. I am certain that the tone and volume of the questions contributed to the problem. Ultimately, if the lecturer did not repeat or paraphrase the student’s question before providing a response, I can only assume that other group members also failed to hear the question. This would have resulted in the group struggling to contextualise and engage with the lecturer’s response, therefore opportunities to increase knowledge and understanding would be lost. Indeed, on several occasions I pondered the likelihood that the students were not very interested in hearing each other’s questions, responses or interactions with the lecturer. One of my field notes records that; ‘student asks a question of lecturer, nobody listens’ [B3:87]. This was a repeated observation and also occurred with small-group work where students were reporting back to the main group. This will be discussed again later in this chapter during consideration of small-group work, but was sufficiently noticeable for me to consider it ‘rude’ from my own socio-cultural context.

Some students did not ask any questions at all during observations, whereas others did so frequently and confidently. When questions were asked, they fell into categories that one might find in any classroom around the globe, such as seeking clarification or increased depth of comprehension, looking for ways to aid application and contextualisation, or much less frequently, politely challenging what the lecturer was saying. Examples of challenges include:

- [Student] notes that a reference on a slide is from 1965 and asks if it’s still the same now [C4:9];
• [Student, day three of subject]: ‘why then, based on the fact that the previous presentation tended to show that exams and rote learning encourage shallow learning, do we have exams in this program?’ [A3:81];

Questions that were common in the Singaporean classroom but which may not occur so frequently in a monocultural classroom included clarification of terminology, foreign concepts, and new English words. Examples include:

• ‘when you say discretion, do you mean it’s up to the person?’[B3:4];
• ‘what is the difference between ‘rule’ and ‘policy’ [B1:6]’
• ‘what is Gestalt?’ [A2:203]; and
• ‘what is casting stone’ [had misunderstood the term ‘cast in stone’] [C3:167].

Another frequent questioning pattern was related to assessment tasks, and this will be revisited later in this chapter.

**Questions from lecturers**

Like Ng et al. (2001), I observed that different types of ‘overhead questions’ asked by lecturers (to which anyone could potentially respond) elicited responses from students that differed predictably. Lecturers needed to employ skilled sequencing of questions to gain the response they sought (e.g. confirmation of student comprehension) or indeed, to elicit any response at all. Four main questioning categories were observed; ‘hands up’ questions; ‘closed’ questions; ‘open’ questions, and what, for want of a better name, I have called ‘general-interaction-seeking’ (e.g. ‘any questions’) questions. These question types could be placed on a notional continuum of likelihood to elicit a response, with ‘hands up’ questions being the most effective, and - at the other extreme - ‘any questions’ the least.

**‘Hands up’ questions**

Despite the seeming simplicity of the technique, ‘hands up’ questions could be used either very productively or redundantly with the Singaporean students. This type of question was predictably dysfunctional when it was asked about something that could potentially be embarrassing or ‘threatening’ to the respondent. For example, on the first evening of a new subject a lecturer asked as a general question to the class; ‘hands up who has read [assigned journal article x]’ [C1:15]. Nobody put their hand up. This could possibly have been because nobody had read the article, but equally possibly it could be culturally weighted: people were for one reason or the other too embarrassed to respond
(either they had read it and did not want to stand out from the group, or they had not and were embarrassed about losing face). Another example was: ‘who is unfamiliar with academic reading?’ [A2:32]. In that case only two hands were raised out of a potential fifteen, however when the same question was repeated in a different format it emerged that ninety percent of the group had very little confidence about academic reading. Therefore it seems that to raise one’s hand in response to the latter question was to confirm that one had not read academic articles and therefore potentially appear less sophisticated.

On other occasions ‘hands up’ questions were used to encourage participation and thus to gauge comprehension and engagement. Some lecturers employed this technique skilfully, as the following exchange illustrates:

[lecturer]: Asks for a show of hands from ‘those who think that training can change attitudes’.

[group]: At least half the group raise their hand.

[lecturer]: OK then, let’s hear an example of each… [C2:133].

In the above scenario, those who had responded were in a position where they clearly had an opinion on the issue, and were then encouraged to further illustrate their experience. These examples suggest that the posing of any type of question, even something as non-confrontational as a ‘hands ups’ question, requires consideration of the potential for loss of face in the Singaporean context.

Closed Questions

The closed questions I observed in use were of two main types – those that elicited ‘yes/no’ answers and those that sought a specific response. An example of the former is:

[Lecturer]: We are all familiar with four principles of adult learning and andragogy, are you familiar with Kolb?’

[Group]: chorus ‘yes’. [C2:395]

And the latter:

[Lecturer referring to OHT]: So what is groupthink?

[Group]: general consensus on the answer. [C2:290]

Obviously closed questions that sought a specific answer, such as the instance directly above, were unlikely to draw a response unless someone in the group actually knew the
answer and was confident enough to vocalise it. In the above case, the answer was very well known to the group and so was non-threatening.

Closed questions were also employed as a technique to gain comments on the content of PowerPoint slides (e.g. [lecturer asks the group about a statement on a slide] ‘what does this mean…?’). This was sometimes an effective technique that had the potential to trigger verbal interaction. However there was a tendency on the part of some lecturers to use it without any variation, in which case the lesson became a something of a game of ‘second guess what the lecturer is thinking’ and participants ceased responding. In fact one participant commented that this was a ‘…lazy style that doesn’t wash with a group of HRD professionals’ [40:2:28-29].

Open Questions

Open questions usually sought responses for which there was more than one correct answer as well as an element of personal opinion e.g. [lecturer] ‘how do we learn, how do we absorb knowledge…?’ or [lecturer] ‘what do you think of that?’ [C2:398]. Alternatively the lecturer could be seeking a response to a question for which a correct answer was presumably anticipated, e.g. ‘What is the key message in Herzberg’s theory?’ [C2:40]. A further reason for asking open questions was that the lecturers were actually unsure of the answer themselves, e.g. ‘what do you call assessment here in Singapore?’ [D1:16].

Such ‘overhead’ questions were used most frequently when lecturers appeared to be seeking to gauge comprehension, or levels of engagement. Of significant note, however, is the fact that all of the preceding examples elicited no verbal response when posed in an ‘overhead’ manner to the entire class. Indeed, this technique so rarely elicited a verbal response that it could be almost completely pointless were it not for the fact that if students may have been considering the answer but not verbalising it, or that the lack of response combined with students' body language may have informed the lecturer that students were not engaged. If lecturers were asking ‘overhead open questions’ in order to gauge comprehension, then this questioning technique was predictably unproductive.

‘Any Questions?’

In short, when a lecturer asked ‘are there any questions’, the likelihood was that nobody would respond. I am assuming that lecturers actually expected questions from the group when they asked this, and that they found the lack of response frustrating, because they continued to use this questioning technique. This lack of response to ‘any questions’ is a consistent pattern. No doubt my observations did not catch every instance, however
there are more than twenty-five occasions on which I have noted; ‘overhead question: ‘any questions’, no response’. Moreover, it did not seem to matter how a request was prefaced, or in what context it was asked, as all of the following examples elicited no response:

- [lecturer]: ‘It’s Important for me to understand where you are coming from. I appreciate sharing. Does anyone have any comments or questions at this point in time’ [C1:171] - no response.
- [lecturer] ‘Are there any questions so far? Has anything I have said contradicted [the previous lecturer]?’ [A4:93] – no response.

The noticeable exception to this pattern was when ‘any questions’ was related to assessment or exams, in which case there would predictably be a lot of questions. The number of assessment-related questions had a direct correlation with the reputation of the lecturer (whether they were a ‘hard-marker’). Questioners sought to ascertain how much writing was expected; the format of exams; allocation of marks; recommended time for each question; requirement for academic referencing; number of citations expected, and so on.

**Discussion: successful questioning techniques**

The preceding observations of questioning techniques support the conjecture that lecturers were experiencing culture learning ‘on the job’. I noted their frustrations through their facial expressions and body language, and witnessed their efforts to gain verbal responses in different ways. Sometimes they would just let an unproductive question go by, and move on. Often however, they would use one questioning technique, receive no response, and then reword and rephrase the question. Despite these efforts, at times the question still did not generate the required response. For some lecturers, the only course of action was to change the group dynamic completely and move into small-group or syndicate work (which is discussed elsewhere in this chapter). However, on occasions I observed that the rephrasing of a question would bring a response. For example, in the previously mentioned case in which the lecturer asked who was familiar with academic reading, a rephrasing such as the following (which spelled out the negative consequences of silence), brought an overwhelming response:

[Lecturer]: Well I won’t go over this if you don’t need it. But just to check, again how many don’t regularly read this type of article?

[Group]: Everybody puts their hand up.
[Lecturer]: OK then, well would you like me to go over hints for academic reading?

[Group]' Strong 'yes'. [A2:36]

The above scenario illustrates the skill of the lecturer, and also his on-the-job culture learning. It seemed that he realised during the action of asking the question and getting the response, that asking who had read the article was potentially embarrassing, however asking who regularly read academic articles was an entirely different question, and one that most non-academics would answer in the negative. By asking who wanted to understand more about academic reading, he gained class commitment to the task at hand, the ensuing session was interactive and students appeared highly engaged.

On other occasions, lecturers continued to ask the same question and this sometimes brought a response when students realised that silence was an unsuccessful gambit. Another potential strategy was for the lecturer to wait out a silence for a longer period of time than might occur in Australia. Such silences presumably allowed students (as they reported) to formulate an answer, find the correct language, overcome anxiety, and ultimately create a void into which somebody felt they must inject some verbal interaction (or any combination of the preceding). An example was the lecturer who followed one students’ response with; ‘would anybody else like to share?’ [A1:91] and then waited a considerable time until somebody did. Another successful pattern of questioning was the following of an open question which drew no response with a closed question that was more focused, and which allowed less capacity for error.

Of course, silence in class can exist for a range of reasons, and another response from lecturers was to overtly ask the group about the reason behind it, as the following example illustrates:

[Lecturer]: What is learning?

[Group]: Very long silence… nobody making eye contact, people looking down at desks.

[Lecturer]: Are you tired?

[Group]: Nods and murmured agreement. [A1:206]

As illustrated above and discussed in interviews, most lecturers were observed to be sensitive to the facilitation of a supportive and non-threatening learning environment in which the knowledge of the students was sought and validated. This seemed a key to the encouragement of interaction. Examples include:
[in response to student workplace example] …that’s a really nice example…[B2:24];

We know you are experts in your field…[A1:44];

We have a lot of expertise in this room….[A1:147];

Ask questions here, no matter how dumb you might think you sound. I need to feel comfortable about asking questions too. [A2:22]

However, despite the desire to create a non-threatening environment, lecturers needed to correct incorrect statements or respond to student questions that revealed a lack of comprehension, as illustrated below:

[Student]: x is a useful technique

[Lecturer]: x isn’t a technique, it’s more about … x is more of a process…You may want to go back to that article by (author), to reread, to help you understand. [D3:42]

The above corrects the student’s incorrect statement in a tactful manner, whilst at the same time also providing direction.

Of course, all of the preceding discussion about questioning is predicated on the epistemologically and culturally based assumption that verbal interaction is highly desirable in a class of adult students. With that assumption acknowledged, the results of these observations suggest that an open question asked in whole-group discussion would be quite unlikely to generate increased conversation, which is problematic when questions are being asked for comprehension checking purposes (although it is acknowledged that individual reflection was likely to be triggered, and it is therefore entirely possible that the question was effective in encouraging deeper learning, despite the silence). If a lecturer believed that increased conversation would lead to increased learning, then an appropriate approach would be to progress from less threatening questioning techniques (such as ‘show of hands’ or closed questions) to more challenging techniques such as open questions. Such sequencing of questioning could increase the opportunity for deep learning as proposed by Ng et al. (2001).

**Small Group Activities**

In light of the previous discussion it is easy to see why group work was favoured by lecturers: it reliably raised levels of interaction and, importantly, the requirement for small-groups to report back to the entire class facilitated the lecturers’ ability to ask questions and thereby assess comprehension. Indeed, in a significant contrast to the responses
lecturers obtained to whole-class questioning techniques, field notes report that ‘in debriefing small-group work [lecturer] asks questions of syndicates and has no trouble eliciting answers’ [D3.89]

**Student interaction in small-groups**

Once students had adapted to the frequent use of syndicate work, the general pattern was that they moved quickly into groups and thence rapidly began to address the task at hand. Wherever I was positioned in the room, I was able to closely observe the interactions of at least one small-group, and more generally observe the entire group. I overheard small-group participants sincerely discussing issues, asking questions of classmates, and challenging each other. Polite turn taking was the norm, with syndicate participants on occasion inviting quieter members to become more involved, although, as might be expected, some group members were more dominating than others. Observations of small groups revealed student questions that were not asked in front of the entire class. This was particularly the case with the clarification of English and in relation to the clarification of ‘academic’ words. During small-group discussion there was some conversation in Chinese dialects and much in ‘Singlish’. For example one student described a journal article as ‘cheem’ (‘a Singlish/Hokkien word meaning something is written in an intellectual fashion, such that it is completely incomprehensible’ (Choo, 2002)) and asked classmates to translate several words and phrases into plain English.

During small-group work, the challenging of classmates’ opinions was managed with consideration of ‘face’; for example dissenting views would be introduced with the ubiquitous Singaporean disclaimer; ‘this is only my opinion but…’. Group members also seemed to monitor interaction and kept each other on task. Tangential or non topic-related conversations were tolerated briefly, however usually someone would chasten the group and return focus to the task at hand. For example, one student said to another in a ‘tongue-in-cheek’ tone (but with enough force to be taken seriously); ‘hey, pay attention to your task!’ [B2:36].

The volume of verbal interaction in the classroom varied during small-group work, as would be expected. However there was certainly a high level of involved ‘hubbub’, lots of friendly banter, and sometimes loud laughter; in other words a generally relaxed atmosphere which contrasted with lecturer-centred pedagogies.
Types of small-group activities

Lecturers employed small-group activities in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. One of the most popular uses was small-group analysis of an allocated text, the purpose of which was to help students gain in-depth understanding of one ascribed reading, and an overview of the readings allocated to the other groups when they reported back. Two lecturers used similar activities in which small-groups were given the task of presenting a text back to the class. One lecturer asked the syndicates to list the ten most important points raised by the author and both activities required the group to summarise the reading on a flipchart. Field notes in relation to this activity record that:

...students seem to be really into this, much discussion, everyone taking part, people referring to their notes and sharing the construction of the flip chart...the room is buzzing. [A4:140-142]

Another example demonstrates the lecturer’s capacity to transfer learning and to provide students with real experience; in this instance the application of policies from students’ workplaces. Groups were asked to deconstruct and analyse the policies, then report back on ‘what level the policy is and have a reason why’ [B3:65]. This exercise also seemed appreciated by students; it immediately linked subject content to the Singaporean context and students gained the added benefit of comparing their own organisations’ policies against those of their classmates.

The small-group activities were usually clearly linked to subject content. To illustrate: one creative activity required small-groups to write an exam question for a reading based on each level of Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of learning objectives. This activity provided multiple levels of learning: analysis of the reading, knowledge and application of Bloom’s taxonomy, and exam preparation.

A final interesting example, chosen from many, required the students to practice writing learning objectives onto flipcharts. The groups then swapped flipcharts and critiqued another group’s work. They were asked to respond to the authoring group by giving ticks for quality objectives or by trying to rewrite and improve the objective. Students did not seem to have any discomfort with correcting another group’s work. The edited flipcharts were then put on the classroom walls and students moved around the room while the lecturer debriefed about the changes that had been made. This provided both knowledge and skill development and at the same time provided feedback by demonstrating that - despite considerable thought - learning objectives could still be undesirably vague and consequently unmeasurable.
Outcomes of group activities

The content of the flipchart responses presented by the syndicates were usually very impressive and showed clear evidence of comprehension. There was also a high level of creativity evident, both on the part of the lecturer in designing the task, and in student responses. The following example from field notes illustrates:

A lecturer had asked groups to report back with drawn icons illustrating aspects of theories from the readings. One group presented a drawing of a hand with five fingers and palm, with each finger representing a particular theory. The group explained their icon thus:

- pointer finger for behaviourist because we point and say 'behave';
- tallest finger for constructivist as in tall construction;
- ring finger for humanist;
- little finger for cognitivist because we use the smallest part of our brains;
- the palm for social learning because we use it for shaking hands; and
- the thumb was not allocated to anything specific because it can move across all the types of learning just as we need to. [A3:156]

The above example demonstrates an instance in which comprehension, learning and exam preparation were clear outcomes of syndicate group activity.

The presentation skills of students who reported back to the main group varied, and I overheard a good deal of negotiation within the small-groups about who would present the report. I noted that in the larger BET 2 group, certain individuals had fallen into the role of ‘reporter’ and were regular spokespersons. In the smaller BET 3 group, such roles had not yet been identified and some of those who reported back were clearly very anxious and struggled with academic English. Students could also be critical of their classmates, but I noted that any constructive criticism would again be prefaced with phrases intended to ‘give face’, such as; ‘I know they are quite difficult, but…’ [D2:40].

The role of the lecturer: monitoring and debriefing

During group activities some lecturers were more interventionist than others. Some were ‘hands off’; monitoring small-group work from a distance unless directly asked a question. Others were more likely to join a group’s discussion; ‘visiting’ small-groups and providing feedback, encouragement and suggestions for further consideration.
At the conclusion of group activities, lecturers would debrief according to their preferred styles. Observations indicate that some lecturers debriefed more effectively than others. To support this conjecture, on one occasion several confused students spoke to me during the tea break, saying that they had not understood the purpose or application of the exercise in which they had just participated. This would seem to indicate that the opportunity for learning from that activity had been largely lost. However I also witnessed skilful debriefing sessions, which clearly summarised the learning from the activity and linked it to the subject content and readings. Examples included a lecturer drawing a whiteboard mind map summarising group responses, followed by class voting for the most important points.

Importantly, debriefing maintained the higher levels of interactivity that contrasted whole-class sessions. Lecturers who were (in my view) skilled in using small-group work could bring a debriefing discussion to a close and seamlessly move back to a lecturer-centred approach, tying in the preceding exercise, which potentially kept energy levels higher than would otherwise have been the case.

Problems with small-group work

Whilst it is clear that small-group work was an effective pedagogy of choice, its implementation was not problem free. For example, on one occasion I observed that a class had been separated into groups to discuss and report on allocated texts. Two-thirds of the small group which I was observing immediately set to the task of reading, and no discussion was taking place. Clearly some students had not read the article whilst others (whose notes were marked with highlighter pen) had read the article and appeared frustrated (as was reported by a student respondent (see page 193)). Some group members who had highlighted their articles still reread without commenting to the group (presumably being too polite to complain, or taking the chance to reread). This is one, relatively common, example of how group discussion and analysis could be delayed, causing the group to fail to complete the task in the allotted time frame.

There were also several occasions when groups did not grasp the task at hand. Monitoring by lecturers usually identified and corrected these problems, but it was challenging for the lecturer if more than one group required assistance. Lecturers also needed to manage the previously discussed issue of students apparently not fully

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3 Debriefing is recognised as a pivotal step in generating learning from group activities. Thematic discussion, data analysis, provision of feedback and the production of generalisations contextualises the activity to the everyday life of the students and allows the lecturer to introduce or reintroduce theoretical findings to augment the learning (Pfeiffer, 1992).
attending to classmates who reported back to the main group. Time constraints and the students' desire to present well-considered reports exacerbated this problem and meant that syndicates would often be working on their flipchart during another group's presentation. Finally, debriefing could bring up unexpected issues, which led to valuable interactions: ‘aha’ moments, or moments when a discussion revealed confusion on the part of the students and which provided an opportunity for lecturer clarification. Such rich learning situations facilitated valuable feedback to both students and lecturers; however these were also constrained by time schedules.

**Discussion: group dynamics**

Lecturers' behaviours, proxemics, and movements suggest that they sought to create a professional but casual environment in the classroom and thus develop a friendly but not a close personal relationship with students. Classroom observations also demonstrated pedagogies that were congruent with lecturers' stated values of student-centredness. From the perspective of an Australian observer, the class environment was often relatively quiet. Whilst lecturers recalled that students were participative, observations reveal that Australian lecturers had to be flexible and adapt their techniques in order to elicit questions or comments from students. The sequencing of questioning styles appeared to be an effective method to encourage interaction. Whilst it may have been easier for lecturers to revert to a didactic, one-way transmission model of teaching, it seems likely that epistemological beliefs motivated most of them to put a lot of energy into translating their preferred pedagogies into a foreign context.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to revisit the fact that BET students were also educators who, during interview, expressed an epistemological preference for experiential and interactive activities. Yet in the role of ‘student’, to a varied extent, they reverted to their socialised experiences of how a student behaves: reliant on the teacher to make links and complete learning cycles; with personal silence providing a safe strategy for many. Thus, in summary, observations support the lecturers’ and students' opinions that small-group techniques were more likely to encourage verbal participation than whole-group discussion.

Students gradually overcame initial hesitation and participated enthusiastically, showing significant creativity. They appeared most comfortable and engaged when working on group activities that involved either 'authorised knowledge' (such as analysing a reading) or application of theoretical knowledge to the 'real world' of their workplaces. Thus
syndicate pedagogies could be regarded as highly desirable in the Singaporean context. However a blanket recommendation for ‘more small group work in the BET’ would be naïve because, paradoxically, whilst students valued small-group work and respected the pedagogical reasons behind it, chapter seven reported that they wanted less group-work and more lecturer input, mainly due to time constraints. There is also the concern that students did not appear to attend to the input of classmates to the same extent as they did to input from the lecturer. Whilst the latter difference may simply stem from students’ self reported socialisation to ‘pay attention to the teacher’, these concerns remain important for two reasons:

3. students’ behaviours in the classroom did not obviously indicate dissatisfaction. As discussed in chapter six, only one lecturer reported a concern that students might consider group work to be a ‘bit of fun and not real learning’ [80:2:145-151]. Whilst interviews showed that students would generally respect and protect the ‘face’ of the teacher, there were times when they did not feel they gained anything tangible from activities (as illustrated by the times when they asked me to translate the activity for them). Thus lecturers could not rely on overt feedback to gauge whether students were valuing or even understanding an activity; and

4. observations support a conclusion that, whilst students came to recognise the value of their classmates’ views, became less tentative about forming and discussing their own opinions, and developed their capacity for self-directed learning; they nevertheless continued to place a higher value on inductive and transmission modes of learning from external ‘expert’ sources (e.g. the literature and the lecturer).

**Language and terminology**

Observations support students’ reports (pages 188 and 194) that they did not feel confident to seek clarification of words and terminology in front of the whole class. Students were observed to clarify words when in small groups. Moreover, several students quietly asked me what words meant (e.g. ‘constructivist’). In chapter six, lecturers reported that they were conscious of the significant amount of time spent explaining English and discipline-specific words, sometimes to the detriment of proposed program content, and observations support that this happened frequently. I observed that most lecturers were careful to explain words which they thought may have been unfamiliar. Examples include; ‘abstraction’, ‘holistic’, ‘didactic’ and ‘affect’. Occasionally students did ask for clarification of words during whole group discussion or a lecturer’s
presentation. Examples of this include ‘locus’, ‘problem-solving’ and ‘discretion’. Scrutiny of the words that required explanation reveals that whilst some may have been predictable (e.g. ‘affect’ used in the psychological sense), others clearly came as somewhat of a surprise to the lecturer and were noticeable to me. It seems possible, for example, that the group’s lack of understanding of the word ‘discretion’ and ‘discretionary’ might have a Singaporean cultural bias, as discretionary choices in Singaporean workplaces and general lives are not the norm.

Yet another realm of terminological confusion came from the words and jargon related to what have become globally known HRD methodologies being reinterpreted or relabelled in different national settings. An example of this is ‘action learning’. As described in the previous chapter, Singaporeans were very familiar with methodologies such as outdoor adventure learning (as it would be described in Australia). However during class one student referred to an outdoor learning exercise (the widely known ‘spider web trust exercise’) as ‘action learning’. The lecturer corrected with the observation that; ‘it might not be action learning if people are organised into it’ [A4:166].

Terminological and linguistic confusion was not restricted to students however. ‘Singlish’, strong accents, fast speech and quiet voices combined to challenge lecturers. For example, the word ‘can’ is ubiquitous in ‘Singlish’. It is used as a ‘monosyllabic answer denoting one’s ability to fulfil a request’ (Choo, 2002). Thus a student reporting back from syndicate work said to the lecturer:

There are six authors and I will wait for [lecturer] to tell you what is good out of this. Can? [A4:154]

The lecturer clearly had no idea what he had just been asked and looked blankly at the student, who (subjected to the laughs of the class) rephrased the question.

The students were very concerned to ensure that their understanding of terminology was correct. This is illustrated by the fact that I observed three separate occasions on which different students over two separate evenings asked a lecturer to clarify the difference between ‘HRM’ and ‘HRD’. This repetition seemed to irritate the lecturer, but the class president pointed out that the group was; ‘wanting to be sure in case it was asked in exam’ [C3:85]. Another reason behind this might be the students’ self-reported aim (as discussed in the previous chapter, see page 182) to be able to use ‘correct language’ in order to be accepted, gain status, and/or increase credibility in the workplace, which brings us to observations of application of learning.
Application of learning

Observations revealed that when classroom discussion was linked to participants’ workplaces it raised attention levels and encouraged dialogue. For example, students would ask a question or discuss a concept from the perspective of their work experience and, in response, the lecturer would contextualise the explanation to the students’ workplace context (e.g. factory, gymnasium, school). In this manner, small-group work allowed for comparison of workplaces and simultaneous linking to the local context. Furthermore, when there was evident confusion about processes in the Australian versus the Singaporean context, lecturers would ask for examples of local practice (e.g. ‘do you have the right of appeal?’ [D2:78]). Whilst this might occur in any facilitated discussion, it was particularly important in the case of lecturers new to Singapore, as they were learning at the same time as the students; indeed both parties were translating program content and working out how theories and knowledge could be applied in the students’ world.

Chapter seven reported that any learning activities that involved application (such as the activity that deconstructed students’ workplace policies) were received with enthusiasm. In that instance the lecturer spent forty-five minutes re-explaining a concept through the lens of the students’ group work, and students’ body language indicated that they were highly engaged with what might otherwise have been quite tedious content. This positive reception of application reflects the students’ stated strong preferences as summarised by the student comment: ‘...it’s always best if you can relate concepts to your actual workplace’ [A3:59-61].

Program cohesiveness

Instances of lecturers linking the content material of the subject they were teaching with content of other subjects were most notable for their almost total absence. Indeed it would be fair to say that to an uninformed observer it would appear that lecturers did not know each other and did not work together on a daily basis. Of course, as reported in chapter six, this was far from the case: lecturers were discussing Singaporean classes, but tended to do so more from the point of view of the pedagogical challenges they faced and the struggles of individual students. However, from my perspective as an observer, most developed and presented their subject content in a stand-alone manner. The only topic that was regularly revisited was academic writing styles, probably mainly as a response to student anxiety.
As reported in chapter six, several lecturers reported that they desired more collaborative working relationships. Observations support the notion that increased collaboration could potentially have ameliorated the seclusion brought about by professional specialisation and the individualism inherent in the university culture.

Assessment

Whilst the BET did not provide capacity for observation of actual assessment, discussion of assessment was quite ubiquitous. As a partial ‘insider’ I knew that one of the new students who repeatedly asked questions about assessment had become worried since discussing the reputation of one lecturer with students from the previous intake. However, this was not an isolated issue of anxiety amongst new students, as I observed that the same type of questions were being asked by BET 2 students, who by that stage had completed eleven subjects.

Other assessment-related questions that students asked lecturers ranged from the expansive, e.g. ‘how can you help me if I want to prepare for this exam? [B4:187]’, to the prosaic, ‘will we be penalised for writing too much? [A4:256]’. Observations revealed a predictable pattern in which, at the end of the evening of the last class for each subject, lecturers were asked a barrage of questions about assessment tasks. This would occur whether or not the lecturer had addressed the topic of the assessment task during the class, no matter who was teaching, although some lecturers apparently generated a higher level of anxiety than others.

Some lecturers were particularly careful to stress important assessment related points; even going so far as to say ‘this is a hint for the exam…’, whereupon they would write a point on the board, which always resulted in a flurry of note taking. In general, observations support the view that students sought a clear, even formulaic, process for success in assessment tasks and continuously exhibited high levels of anxiety about assessment. They clearly sought to understand key aspects of a subject's content and were particularly alert when a lecture or guided discussion was linked to assessment tasks. They were also at pains to encourage the lecturer to reveal any idiosyncratic preferences they might have when grading assignments: in other words they sought to understand valid process.
Cultural sensitivity and adjustment

Partial insider status allowed me to develop a depth of sensitivity to local issues that became more obvious to me as my field work elapsed: when I realised the social blunders I had made during early days, or was finally allowed access to discussion of taboo issues. Thus, from my own developing perspective, I was able to observe that lecturers came to class with elements of the same naivety I had had at first. Whilst all the lecturers demonstrated cultural sensitivity during individual interviews, they nevertheless faced a range of challenges concerning culturally appropriate behaviour and it naturally eventuated that some were more aware or more sensitive about selected issues than others. Some had possibly decided that they wanted to behave according to their own cultural and/or epistemological perspective and thus ignored the cultural consequences. No doubt all were simultaneously developing new perspectives, before, during, and after, the observations.

In terms of cultural sensitivity, it was interesting to observe that issues of concern to lecturers were sometimes not matters of concern to Singaporeans, and vice versa. For example, as discussed in chapter three, Singapore does not experience gender equity and respect for women in the workplace in the same way that Australia does. This was a sensitive issue for one lecturer who (rather than tackling the issue head on) hinted:

*You might then have to think and talk a great deal more when you look at things like equity…*[B2:25]

One of the students then asked; ‘Would that be about women in the workforce?’ [B2:26], to which the lecturer replied; ‘Well they are certainly part of the workforce and the economy…’[B2:27]. Thus the topic of gender equity was raised, but then – as no discussion was forthcoming from the group – it was dropped again until some small group work brought about the following interchange;

*student*…alright, who’s the lady here? Take notes.

*group*: Woooooh!

*lecturer*: …remember what we said, women are people…*[B2:20]

In this instance, the lecturer was seeking to inculcate a serious attitude towards an Australian gender-equity paradigm, however the group simply did not pick it up. Another lecturer also reported that he ‘didn't get anywhere with those [gender] aspects of the topic’ [40:2:327-328]. Lecturers also trod generally unproductive and relatively dangerous ground discussing issues such as human rights. In light of the ‘Lingle’ case discussed in
chapter three, such discussions could potentially leave foreign lecturers in Singapore open to serious consequences, and the BET lecturers may have been naïve to these possibilities. The following shows a lecturer indirectly addressing a politically sensitive topic, without specifically mentioning Singapore:

*...then there is the issue of ethics. If some countries apply a blockage because country x doesn’t have fair human rights, then what is the impact?*…[B2:29]

It is unclear whether the lecturer was referring to Singapore in the above quotation (but then Lingle never referred to Singapore specifically either), however there were times during that class when it would have been reasonable to assume that he was. Another made the statement (which I thought perfectly reasonable, but somewhat naïve in the Singaporean context) that; ‘education must be morally unobjectionable’ [A1:201]. Such interchanges gave me pause to write in my field notes; ‘I wonder how I would feel as a Singaporean hearing about all these ‘wonderful’ things that, to one extent or another, my country doesn’t have’ [B2:78]. When I later asked students what they thought and how they *did* feel, I was told things like ‘they were used to it’, and ‘things take a long time to change in Singapore’; but at the same time I was issued with a list of grievances about specifics such as non-Chinese not being able to access the job market and women being the brunt of sexist jokes in the workplace. In other words, the students who discussed such issues with me seemed to sit anywhere on a continuum of ‘frustrated’ to ‘nonchalant’, however most also seemed rather accepting of the status quo and, I imputed, felt powerless to do anything about it. Thus lecturers needed to be aware of social and political sensitivities; both for their own welfare and in order to engage student discussion in a truly dialogic rather than a doctrinal manner. Lecturers were possibly not fully cognisant of the fact that aspects of their own pedagogies were intrinsically Western and therefore not easily culturally translated, and thus there was a clash between the ‘Western’ epistemological culture of interrogation and critique, and Singaporean cultural sensitivities.

At a more obvious level, some lecturers seemed a little ignorant of local social and religious issues. For example, one used the example of ‘a Muslim woman’s clothing that might exclude her from the workplace’ [A1:173]. This was a particularly sensitive topic in Singapore at the time (due to the September 11th and Bali bombings, Jemaah Islamiyah ‘cells’ in neighbouring Johor Bharu, the resulting alienation of Muslims in Singapore, and the Singaporean government banning of the ‘Tudung’ (headscarf) in schools). Unfortunately the example was introduced without preface with the result that it
engendered no verbal response from the group and students avoided eye contact with the lecturer and one another. This instance lead me to note; ‘am I the only one who feels uncomfortable with this question?’ [A1:173]. After class, a student confided with me that Singaporeans only discuss such issues with family or closest friends; ‘…this is very sensitive here…so when they are teaching…there might be some subjects, sensitive issues like ahh,…Muslim, or male and female you know…they might not be able to touch’ [49:472]. Another more obvious potential cultural faux pas included newly arrived male lecturers proffering a handshake with class members (this did not bring about any problems, but it potentially could have due to the fact that it was Ramadan at the time) and female lecturers standing behind male students and touching their shoulders during debriefing.

Although the preceding reads as a litany of well-intentioned cultural faux pas on behalf of the Australians, it was interesting to me that the local lecturer used words that Australian lecturers would have considered culturally and professionally inappropriate, for example; ‘top down management model…the shit drops to what level…’ [C4:17] (which drew no negative response from the group but made me cringe), thus further underlining the fact that what is appropriate in one country is not in another.

To their credit, lecturers were observed to expend huge efforts to protect the ‘face’ and dignity of students, as the following diary note recalls:

[Lecturer] really works with student who clearly has no idea how to answer a question…puts a lot of effort into stating and restating and coaching to help him avoid appearing ignorant in front of class. [A3:78]

As the program progressed, individual lecturers also began to include a lot of local examples in course content, building bridges to understanding and taking full advantage of the possibility of conducting ‘little comparative studies’ [83:2:269] between Singapore and Australia.

Thus classroom observation reinforced the contention that students were tolerant of lecturers’ cultural naivety and appreciative of their efforts to adapt. As has already been discussed at length in the preceding chapters, students typically thought that lecturers should accept that cultural difference does matter and, notably, that they should avoid discussion of sensitive issues. Both parties became more aware that cultural difference had an impact on the program as it progressed.

In summary, the ‘third perspective’ provided by classroom observations has:
5. Reinforced Hofstede’s (1980; 1994a; 2005) contention that cultural values are learned early in life and often held subconsciously. This, combined with ‘Asian’ respect for educators means it is highly unlikely that lecturers will be told when they have made a cultural faux pas (e.g. the ‘death-of-the-parent-still-means-no-extension’ case discussed on page 175, in which the lecturer will likely remain forever ignorant of the amount of discomfort they caused);

6. Demonstrated that professional development including a cross-cultural briefing prior to teaching in Singapore could potentially have helped lecturers; and

7. Shown that lecturers should have the opportunity to decide whether or not to adapt their pedagogies and tinker with their epistemological beliefs based on a full understanding of the likelihood of outcomes in a foreign culture.

Chapter conclusion

The classroom observations reported in this chapter have added a ‘third perspective’ which has facilitated a deeper consideration of the data from lecturer and student interviews as reported in chapters six and seven. The chapter has added depth to interview data and has commenced identification of practices that could potentially contribute to the understanding and improvement of transnational programs. The following and final chapter reviews and consolidates the research and concludes with recommendations for program improvement and future research.
Chapter Nine: Findings, recommendations and conclusion

Introduction

This research commenced with the hypothesis that cultural phenomena would have a profound impact on participants’ experiences of transnational education programs and that this likelihood would be substantially unrecognised. A clear finding is that cultural differences have consistently influenced and transformed human action at every level of the program; a probability which was frequently disregarded and/or unexplored, particularly early in the program.

The preceding chapters have discussed the differing cultural contexts of Australia and Singapore; examined contemporary transnational education in those countries; conducted a review of the literature pertaining to cultural phenomena as they effect pedagogy (particularly within Asia); explored the foundational learning experiences of the Singaporean students and their Australian educators; and examined the experiences of both students and educators in the transnational context. The penultimate chapter (observations) also identified practices that could potentially contribute to effective teaching and learning in multicultural and/or transnational programs.

This final chapter will review previous chapters, consolidating and clarifying findings, and where appropriate, highlight opportunities for improvement in similar programs. The following discussion focuses on findings that are of interest at the broader program level, particularly those concerning quality assurance (as introduced in chapter two). The significance of findings for transnational teaching and learning are then examined. The chapter concludes with discussion of the limitations of this research and recommendations for further study.

Australian transnational education: a pioneer condemned?

Chapter two proposed that transnational education operates within a complex environment, in which economic aims can overshadow social ideals and transform human action in ways that are still not fully understood. New programs like the BET operate at the frontier of this complexity. Within such programs, the values that underpin education are being reinterpreted; entangled in the veiled agendas of globalisation and internationalisation.
It appears likely that the cumulative effect of:

- the plans by South East Asian governments to establish regional educational hubs (building on lessons learned from Australia);
- the upgrading to university status of local colleges in Singapore and other South East Asian counties (page 59);
- a preference by South East Asian students to study at home if academically respectable degrees are more accessible and affordable (page 55); and
- perceptions of the media, employers and students in South East Asia that ‘distance education’ is a poor cousin to face-to-face learning (pages 21 and 132);

will ensure that there are fewer Australian transnational education programs in the region in the near future. It would be too broad a conclusion to draw from this research that this is occurring as a direct or partial result of any perceived or actual lack of quality assurance on behalf of Australian transnational programs. However this research has demonstrated that cultural difference is an important factor directly related to ‘quality’ educational provision. Thus, if cultural factors have been overlooked in the provision of transnational programs, then the quality of Australian programs has been undermined by this oversight. Particularly in light of the above ‘dot point’ list, Australian transnational programs should be careful to avoid any perception of culture-related deficits which could enhance the likelihood of rejection by the region.

**Internationalisation; by any other name...**

One of the ways in which it is possible to determine the manner in which Australian universities conceptualise the idea of internationalised curriculum is to look at their professional development programs, designed to enable staff to explore the issues of diversity and intercultural relations. (Rizvi and Walsh, 1998:10)

If we ask the questions implicit in the quotation from Rizvi and Walsh (above), it would appear that for the BET provider university (and others), internationalisation is an intellectual one-way street with paramount economic objectives. In the tension between economic aims and social ideals, the economic/trade side of the transnational education equation is rarely, if ever, overlooked whilst culturally sensitive internationalised curriculum and pedagogy are left to chance. This stands in clear contrast to the AVCC’s (2003c) fact sheet on internationalisation which stated that; ‘Australia’s place in the world, and in particular our engagement with the Asia Pacific Region, depends on first hand knowledge of, and experience in, other countries’.
Key to the discussion of internationalisation in transnational education is the debate surrounding the homogenisation of education, more specifically; charges of educational imperialism and Western epistemological hegemony (as discussed on page 9). It seems reasonable to propose that overt educational imperialism would be a clumsy, insensitive undertaking in this twenty-first century and most of the lecturer respondents to this research personally disavowed such motivations (and, in the main, their actions supported their espoused views). However, it seems equally reasonable to propose that when governments and universities undertake the ‘selling’ of education with the ethnocentric view that foreign and unadapted epistemologies, program content and pedagogies are acceptable, charges of intellectual hegemony are invited. Such ethnocentricity is rarely intended or conscious (Bennett, 1993b; Ward et al., 2001). However, the combination of a lack of consideration of issues pertaining to cultural difference together with the evident lack of resourcing to transnational programs, could be argued to be the organisational equivalent. This research provided examples that illustrate such unconscious hegemony, imperialism or even epistemological arrogance: when busy lecturers do not have sufficient time to research and rewrite a program to suit a foreign context, or highly anxious lecturers (page 168) are sent overseas to teach in a different culture with no pre-departure briefing. Clearly, these realities stand in contrast to the rhetoric of internationalisation. Thus, unfortunately, this research has added weight to Altbach’s (2000:2) proposal that so far transnational education has not really contributed to true internationalisation; ‘knowledge products are being sold across borders, but there is little mutual exchange of ideas, or knowledge, of students or faculty. They are not collaborative in the sense that internationalisation would require’. Without such mutual learning and feedback, it could be concluded that there is little opportunity to identify culture-based assumptions which may impact on transnational program delivery, and as a consequence there is a greatly reduced opportunity to implement positive changes to ‘internationalised’ and/or transnational programs.

One world?

Whilst the Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee is encouraging Australian universities to engage with and understand our Asian neighbours, it was revealed in chapter three that many Western sojourners view Singapore as merely an outpost of ‘The West’ within Asia, and consequently expect to experience little cultural difference there. These expectations are based on visitors’ initial observations of Singapore’s ‘Western’ city architecture, apparently individualist endeavours, and the fact that similarities in language may obscure differences (Ward et al., 2001). Chapter two posited that such a view is
symptomatic of the ‘one world’, hybridisation forecasts of globalisation. The same chapter cited the work of Bennett (1993b) who proposed that such views are potentially naïve, ethnocentric and a luxury of dominant groups. Hofstede’s (2005) work (discussed in chapter five) further observed that these cultural artefacts are components of the superficial, more easily changed, manifestations of culture. Thus the experiences reported in this research are explained by the intercultural literature: despite the expected homogenising aspects of globalisation, there were significant cultural differences between the players in the BET program that were not initially recognised because of superficial similarities. The three preceding chapters amply demonstrate that while individuals from Australia and Singapore may share many characteristics, and be simultaneously moving toward a new cultural definition of the self (in part brought about by globalisation and by their experiences in the classroom), their basic experiences, values and beliefs remain deeply and resolutely disparate. This is important for transnational education because whilst the multiple objectives behind the delivery of such programs may be realisable, again, this research has demonstrated that one of those objectives must be the recognition of, adaptation to and valorisation of, cultural difference.

**Truncated programs: questioning the rationale**

In chapter two it was reported that the Australian Universities Quality Agency prophesised that many truncated transnational programs would not allow sufficient time for reflection. This research strongly supports that statement and, moreover, clearly demonstrates that truncated programs are unable to deliver the same content and learning outcomes as Australian programs (despite universities’ assurances that they do).

This research has revealed that lecturers thought the truncated nature of the program pedagogically unsound from the outset. They later found that most, if not all, aspects of teaching took longer in Singapore due to cultural and linguistic translation difficulties and that they were unable to deliver course content as planned. We have seen that small group pedagogies were very effective in the Singaporean transnational classroom, although they took longer in a context where time was at a premium. Thus, lecturers experienced a significant dissonance: some resorted to more didactic pedagogical practices, at the same time believing that this was the least desirable way to teach.

Students, as we have heard, reported concerns that they had not retained knowledge from previous subjects and that they were not ‘truly’ learning. Clearly the combination of lecturers’ inability to cover sufficient content, students’ incapacity to read sufficient material in the timeframe allocated and to reflect on learning, are mutually reinforcing
concerns. Thus the evidence points to the conclusion that, if long-term learning is the goal of transnational education, the balance between marketing concerns and quality pedagogy must be tipped in favour of pedagogy by providing more face-to-face student contact hours and longer periods between intensive teaching sessions (subjects).

Related to the discussion of overall program design is the finding that students thought the program had ‘no logical consistency’ (page 191) and considered that this undermined their learning experience. The BET subjects; ‘Introduction to Teaching and Learning’, ‘Advanced Teaching and Learning’ and ‘Praxis’ had to be provided in sequence, however other subjects were somewhat randomly interspersed between these three. Frequently, the capacity for a lecturer to be in Singapore for a week or longer determined subject rotation, rather than any conscious structuring of subjects from the foundational to the more intellectually challenging. This is another way in which transnational programs can be less pedagogically sound than their Australian counterparts. Thus another recommendation from this research is that transnational programs should scaffold and link subjects in such a way so as to build a curriculum that reinforces previous learning, and that appropriate lecturers should be engaged in advance to ensure that this can happen.

Implicit in the latter recommendation is the suggestion that staffing levels need to be sufficient for the university to strategically plan offshore programs without simultaneously undermining Australian provision. The lecturers in this study already had full workloads before they were asked to teach overseas. They found (and students noticed) that cultural differences increased workloads over and above what would have been the case had the lecturers simply commenced the teaching of another subject in Australia. This, and the fact that these experienced lecturers' Australian classes were backfilled by sessional staff, had a negative impact on quality of program delivery and lecturer work-life balance in both Australia and Singapore.

The cultural and marketing significance of student choice

This research has shown that culture also plays a role in students’ choice of university. ‘Power Distance’ and collectivism dimensions (e.g. House et al. 2004; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) of national culture would predict that, within South East Asia, status symbols as well as friends’ and family members’ opinions would be important in the choice of a university. The BET students’ responses partially supported those predictions. Education was perceived as a means of ascending through the hierarchy of social class and therefore a person’s status as a degree holder in both the workplace and society was
an important factor in their choice of institution. However the ‘prestige’ often assumed to be inherent in a ‘Western’ education in general, and the sandstone university in particular, was notable for its scarcity in student response. In contrast, the perceived prestige of the local partner institution was a crucial deciding factor. The relevance of collectivism to choice of university was apparent from two perspectives: the opinions of friends and family were definitely important, as was the capacity to contribute to society as a ‘learned person’.

The great majority of students also sought knowledge that was practical, and perceived that learning which culminates in application was the most valuable. Transferability of program content across national and industrial boundaries was a further motivating factor. In short, the research supports Olsen (2001:23) who found that ‘Asian’ students demanded ‘practical, relevant qualifications delivered in a manner that takes account of competing time and energy demands’. Thus this research reveals that there is a tension between the perceptions held by some university staff about what students wanted, and what the students themselves sought.

Therefore, aspects of this research may be particularly significant for university marketing departments. This study has shown that the opinions of an individual’s family and friends are at least as important as the opinions of the person making the choice of a university. In programs that were most appropriate for adult practitioners, practical, contemporary and internationally transferable knowledge was sought. Notably, the selection of a twinning partner has been shown to be a crucial decision for any Australian university: selection of the wrong partner can reduce a university’s credibility and prestige, whereas choosing the correct partner can significantly increase both prestige and intake. On their part, lecturers need not necessarily change their epistemological values and approaches, but, as advised by Hulmes (1989:5), should at least ‘recognise and respect different values and approaches to the acquisition of qualifications’.

**Representatives: the role of lecturers in Quality Assurance.**

The motivations of the various players responsible for the provision of transnational education are multi-layered and conflicted. Within one university, motivations can be both economic and idealistic; aid and trade; acknowledged and unspoken; espoused and enacted; operating at both organisational and individual levels.

The most visible responsibility for educational ‘quality’ lies with the travelling lecturers, whose actions reflect on their university and Australian transnational education in general.
However lecturers do not operate in a vacuum: their role is affected by the actions of others at all levels of the system; from the global stage to the minutiae of university administration. They are challenged with having to adapt their individual styles to satisfy both national and global criteria (Evans and Tregenza, 2001). If this was not a significant enough undertaking, the BET lecturers’ experiences magnified the sometimes-profound difference between the attitudes of those who establish a transnational contract and those who eventually deliver it. While they were struggling with pedagogical and curricular challenges, lecturers also experienced role-conflict, frequently taking on emergent project management tasks for which they were not prepared or experienced. It was often they who were left trying to stitch a ‘silk purse’ educational experience out of the erstwhile ‘sow’s ears’ left by corporate/university negotiators who apparently did not have pedagogical quality as their primary area of expertise or concern.

It is no wonder then that academics are becoming less inclined to travel and are seeing transnational projects as the ‘province of particular specialists who have specific interests in the area’ (Milton-Smith, 2001:8). Analysis of this program has demonstrated that, culture-related learning aside, in addition to a truly international perspective on their area of specialisation, transnational lecturers also require extensive teaching experience, a full repertoire of facilitative skills, and the preparedness and capacity to embrace constant challenge, change and ambiguity. Indeed the extensive experience of the Vice-chancellor of the Open University in the United Kingdom, has taught him that; ‘it is relatively easy to start a program by getting faculty to travel, [but] very difficult to sustain once the novelty has worn off’ (Daniel, 1999b:4).

Thus the BET has demonstrated the conflicting motivations and lack of responsibility, shared vision and, ultimately, undermining of quality provision that can occur when organisational structures separate those who market programs from those who have to deliver ‘the goods’. Should this situation be mirrored in other institutions and left to continue, it would be to the detriment of the Australian Higher Education system as a whole. In a competitive international market for top-quality staff, Australian universities are already becoming increasingly uncompetitive (Karmel, 2000:4). It appears from this research that at least one Australian university has not heeded the advice of Daniel (1999b:3), that universities ‘need to create the proper structures to support transnational programs’.
Staff development for transnational teaching

The need to create an opportunity for conscious development of cultural awareness by travelling staff would seem so obvious a requirement as to go without saying. Yet in the BET program, formal opportunities for the development of cultural competence were most obvious for their absence. This research has suggested that the individualist academic culture and the broader formal university system also did not encourage or provide tangible support for the BET lecturers in terms of developing accurate historical/sociological; pedagogical, and cultural awareness prior to transnational placements. It would seem that the BET university is not alone in this oversight. The lecturers’ experiences mirrored published case studies which reveal that few formal or systematic cross cultural training and/or development programs are currently being made available, let alone compulsory, and there is a general assumption of cultural competency on the part of academic staff (Hacket and Nowak, 1999; Clark and Clark, 2000; Hawthorne, 2001; Dixon and Scott, 2003; Gribble and Zigarus, 2003; Hawthorne et al., 2004).

Perhaps this failure to maximise professional development opportunities is the most glaring example of missed opportunity in the BET program. As Rizvi and Walsh propose (page 241), this failure provides clues to the conceptualisation of internationalisation by universities, and also contributes to the self-defeating downward spiral of their apparent short-term economic focus. Thus an obvious recommendation to emerge from this research is that universities which provide a quality transnational experience for staff and students should ensure that they allocate resources (expertise and time) to support development activities.

A wealth of literature exists to inform the design, development and delivery of formal and informal intercultural awareness training and development interventions, including pre-departure programs (e.g. Bennett, 1986, 1993a; Brislin and Yoshida, 1994; Bhawuk and Triandis, 1996; Paige and Martin, 1996; Berry, 2004; Pusch, 2004; Ward, 2004). This literature reinforces the fact that appropriate development activities should be customised to suit the audience and purpose. Customised interventions can be culture-general and/or culture-specific and should include pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning in a range of domains (e.g. skills-based, feedback, mentoring, self-directed activities (Holmes, 2004).
The BET lecturers received no formal pre-departure briefing ('not even how to get from the airport', page 144). Clearly their preparation was impoverished, but the majority of pre-departure development opportunities provided by other universities to the BET lecturers' more fortunate sojourning compatriots tends to be limited to that which is historical/sociological in nature (Bennett, 1993b:57; Gribble and Zigarus, 2003). Desirable historical/sociological development opportunities could include access to self-paced materials at appropriate levels: country-specific travel knowledge (of the travel guide variety), deeper knowledge of the receiving country's history, information on contemporary challenges and educational system/s, and consequently the opportunity to reconsider curriculum in the socio-political context of the receiving country. The provision of such learning opportunities is an important recommendation, however alone it is certainly insufficient to ensure cultural competence.

Analysis of the BET program does provide strong evidence that lecturers were developing cultural competence during on-the-job learning. They recognised that they had learned a considerable amount from their sojourns and this was supported by classroom observations of their acculturation. Awareness of ‘the game’ (of acculturation, page 168), aided both individual and program development, whilst naivety in relation to the extent of cultural difference blocked communication and exacerbated misunderstandings. In the case of the lecturers, ‘game learning’ was demonstrated in the classroom through adaptations to question sequencing, elucidation techniques, reactions to different communication styles (including silence and proxemics), and adaptations to the structure of classes. Outside the classroom, relationships with students including responses to their learning problems, hospitality and gift-giving also provided new challenges and opportunities for the development of cultural competence. In other words, lecturers were coming to recognise and adapt their culturally-embedded reference points: they were acculturating. Lecturers also needed to spend a significant amount of time and effort supporting students through their transition to a new learning culture. The student respondents to this study were similar to those reported in Ward et al. (2001) from the work of McCargar (1993); they came to be enthusiastic about active learning and the ability to express themselves. In fact, they adapted relatively quickly to new pedagogies at the surface level. Typically, however, interviews and observations revealed that maximal contact with ‘the lecturer and the literature’ remained many of the students’ most highly valued pedagogy. Thus this research supports the proposal (as per Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) that while practices can be changed relatively easily, they are the most superficial layers of culture: values are more entrenched and much more difficult to
change (if it is realistic and/or appropriate to attempt to change them at all). Therefore
one predictor of a successful transnational program would be the recognition that
acculturation is a predictable challenge that will face both lecturers and students. This
aspect of ‘learning the game’ should be consciously taken into account by those
designing and teaching transnational programs.

As reported in chapter six, lecturers’ cultural learning was directly applied in their
Australian university environment (e.g. through an awareness of globalisation; the
capacity to present transnational case studies, an increased confidence to work with
overseas students etc.). Thus involvement in transnational education provided a clear
benefit to the university in terms of organisational knowledge and ability. However often
lecturers learned the hard way; ‘through transgression’ - as a result of varying levels of
culture shock (Bochner, 1986). Conscious and systematic organisationally sponsored
learning need not be so painful, nor so conspicuous. Gribble and Ziguras (2003) suggest
that informal information sharing and mentoring are both appropriate and that these
practices currently occur in Australian Universities. Whilst this research supports the
proposal that sharing and mentoring between sojourning academics is to be encouraged,
a caveat is important. Cultural sensitivity would be a more likely outcome of mentoring if it
were to occur through an organisationally sponsored program utilising the skills and
knowledge of bi-cultural people who have knowledge of the receiving country as well as
general cultural competency. This research has clearly demonstrated that accepting
advice from fellow academics who have, for example, taught in a South East Asian
country, on occasions only reinforces student-deficiency stereotypes and provides
inaccurate and unhelpful (mis)-information (page 144). Informally selected potential
mentors may be fellow lecturers who have begun to develop cultural awareness, but who
are ‘accidentally bicultural’ (Bennett, 1993b). Such individuals may be partially familiar
with a particular culture but not generally skilled in adapting to difference, and
consequently they may be unable to use their cultural knowledge to guide others. Bennett
(1993b) proposes that ‘accidental bi-culturality’ tends to occur when people undertake
overseas assignments without preparation or previous experience with development of
cultural sensitivity. Obviously, given the lack of pre-departure development in the BET
university, there would be a strong likelihood that potential mentors may be ‘accidentally
bicultural’, thus informal mentoring could reinforce a student-deficit culture within the
university.

Apart from mentoring, this research has reported recommendations made by students for
the development of intercultural sensitivity: that Australian lecturers (and their universities)
embrace the learning that could be gained from; longer sojourns; liaisons with offshore universities; Australians team-teaching with locals, and networking with fellow academics in the host country. Such collaboration would imply allowance of time for mutuality of learning.

In summary, this research recommends that in order to engage effectively in any of the preceding developmental activities, when working in transnational programs, lecturers should consider their epistemological stances and choices of pedagogy from a position of informed awareness of the result of predictable cultural differences. Epistemologically, lecturers should consider questions such as:

- What do I value?
- Why do I value that?
- How might my culture have contributed to that value?
- How does x (whatever I am considering) translate into another cultural context?
- In awareness of the preceding; what can, or should, I do differently?

Building on such epistemological self-awareness, the following pedagogical questions could be considered:

- How can I adapt my:
  - expectations of students;
  - questioning techniques;
  - group process; and
  - flexibility, and my understanding of what flexibility means?
- What can I do to ensure that I remain in a state of awareness of my own cultural biases and those of the students?
- What is a culturally reasonable (e.g. realistic, ethical, unburdened by my own socialisation) expectation in terms of ‘genuine dialogue’?
- How can I encourage my students to consciously join with me in such a journey of self and intercultural discovery?

Considerations such as these may enable lecturers to communicate more effectively with students across the barriers presented by the mutually foreign terrain of the transnational classroom.
Contextualisation: curriculum and content

Innumerable commentators (e.g. Nicholson and Stephina, 1998; Ofori-Dankwa and Reddy, 1999; Ricks, 1999; Clark and Clark, 2000; Daniel, 2000; Watkins, 2000; Bates, 2001; Pearson and Entrekin, 2001) indicate that Australian and other ‘Western’ educational curricula, concepts, models and processes should not be assumed to be automatically transferable to other countries. As discussed later in this chapter (page 259), Northedge (2003) highlights the concern that the cognitive dissonance that is potentially brought about through exposure to foreign values could set up conflict with students’ daily life roles. Examples we have seen in this research include the consideration of policies that would not be culturally appropriate in Singapore, or models that encourage more autonomous behaviour than is currently accepted in Singaporean businesses. However delivery of un-contextualised curriculum is what has occurred in transnational education since the Colombo Plan, when the most commonly cited reason for students not using their newly acquired knowledge and skills was that ‘the content of the training was unsuitable for local conditions’ (Cannon, 1999: 16-17, citing Keats, 1969). Davis et al. (2000b) found that, thirty years on, curriculum was adapted significantly in only twenty-five percent of programs.

Despite the preceding research, this study has demonstrated the complexity that exists in the transnational classroom and the dangers of making any indiscriminate recommendations in relation to curriculum contextualisation. The majority of the BET students had the desire and the capacity to learn from overseas models; to evaluate the experiences of other countries; and to discard what they considered culturally or practically inappropriate. This may be reflective of their socialisation, as Singapore has succeeded due to its ability to do likewise (as discussed in chapter three). Quite a few student respondents supported the suggestion that lecturers should incorporate Singaporean case studies, journal publications etc. in their teaching, and felt that this would help to contextualise and reinforce learning. However most students also appeared to, almost unconsciously, adapt curriculum content during class and during consideration of workplace application. For them, immediate transfer of learning - ‘value add’ as one of them called it (page 187) - was important, and could not occur without this cultural translation. Despite this apparent ease with adaptation, however, the students struggled to translate their translated learning outcomes into something that they thought Australian assessors would recognise and judge as acceptable. On their part, lecturers learned as the program progressed that the inclusion of Singaporean examples aided cultural translation in the classroom. Thus lecturers consciously made efforts to increase their
repertoire of local content during classroom discussion (another example of mutuality of learning). Some lecturers also recognised the students’ ability to translate content across cultures, and maximised their own capacity to do so by ‘conducting little comparative studies’ (page 163) between Singapore and Australia during class.

In light of this discussion of translation of content, this research supports suggestions (e.g. Kelly and Ha, 1998; Daniel, 1999b; Ziguras, 1999; Banham and Wong, 2001; Bates, 2001) that Australian universities need to recognise that curricula should not be transplanted independently of social and cultural context. Clearly the BET students were not unaware of Western bias. Whilst some may have consciously or unconsciously sought a degree that included aspects of ‘Western educational values’, as a general pattern BET students did not uncritically accept ‘Western’ values; they wanted to learn from overseas experiences and in the process of cultural translation they consciously ‘sifted’ inappropriate values and content. Thus, the incorporation of host-country case studies and literature were considered desirable and were commended by both students and lecturers to those seeking to increase the likelihood of transfer of learning.

**Contextualisation: pedagogy and process**

It is a foregone conclusion that transnational education brings teachers and students from culturally different backgrounds together in an unfamiliar environment. This research has clearly demonstrated that within this environment, participants’ roles and pedagogies differ dramatically from their normative experiences. These roles are socially constructed and culturally weighted, and therefore it should be expected that they will need to be reinterpreted in the global arena.

Chapter five predicted that, as a group, students in Singapore would be: ‘prototypically collectivist’, conservative, unused to autonomy, and that they would place a high importance on moral values. As a general pattern (to which there were notable exceptions), the BET students’ reports and observed behaviours were in alignment with these dimensions of national culture. There was certainly a noticeable level of what could be called conservatism; in responses to assignments as well as in moral values. The students were also unused to autonomy, and this probably had a direct impact on their learning styles and could have contributed to the initial difficulty they had in adapting to self-directed learning. In terms of collectivist behaviours, many BET students freely shared their time to help others in study groups; in fact in some cases this was clearly to their own detriment. They certainly were accepting and even deferential to the expressed views of others, at least in terms of the way they prefaced comments in order for others to
‘save face’. Generally speaking, there was a feeling of concern for the group, which is said to exemplify collectivism. However it could also be argued that much of this behaviour had, at its core, a means to achieve individual goals (success in assessment). There is clearly some tension between an image of ‘concerned collectivism’ and students’ observed lack of interest in their colleagues’ interactions with the lecturer during class. Perhaps, however, this is explained in the literature by the notion of ‘in-groups’ (as discussed in chapter five, page 103). By way of example, individual class members cared for members of their self-established study groups, but less so for the rest of the class. Therefore, this study provides some evidence to support the proposal that Singaporean students will exhibit collectivist behaviours, and that educators could expect that this will have an impact on pedagogy. The caveat is that the ‘pattern’ of collectivism is continually being reinterpreted through the dynamism of global cultural adaptation. An example of this is provided by the changing Singaporean education system which, as discussed in chapter three, is competitive and highly individualistic.

In terms of Uncertainty Avoidance, as discussed in chapter five, the behaviours and beliefs of the Singaporean students were completely at odds with Hofstede’s (1994a) proposal that they would be comfortable with ambiguity. In the main, the students sought clear and unambiguous predictability and rules. The predictions of the Globe study (House et al., 2004) were much more accurate: students sought feedback avidly, goal achievement was a clear motivation, ego protection was important, and students were generally ready to accept and enforce standardised rules. Again, there were exceptions to the pattern: as several lecturers observed, Singaporean students were quite prepared to challenge and bend the rules if it was in their best interest!

As would be expected, this research found no stereotypical ‘Singaporean learner’ and therefore no stereotypically appropriate pedagogy for teaching in Singapore. Whilst stereotypes are somewhat ‘taboo’ in contemporary sociology, Bond (1986) proposes that they can include constructive elements and have a legitimate role to play in the maintenance of harmonious intercultural contact: in other words they may contain ‘a kernel of truth’ that accurately mirrors significant differences. Certainly some of the traits that earlier empirical intercultural education research (reported in chapter five) predicted would be present in ‘Asian’ classrooms were identified in this study: i.e.; self-initiated group learning, cue seeking in relation to assessment, face-saving behaviours; a preference for face-to-face interaction and correspondent devaluing of computer-based learning; an appreciation of ‘handouts’; and students seeking out-of-classroom interactions with lecturers on friendly terms.
Many of the student respondents to this study were possibly atypical Singaporeans in that they were very familiar with contemporary facilitative HRD pedagogies. They took time to become self-directed and a paradoxical finding is that despite their burgeoning appreciation of constructivist and/or experiential learning, many still sought a structured, unambiguous learning environment that provided ‘authorised knowledge’. Thus, the culmination of their learning journey is probably less self-directed than one might find in an average Australian student group. It appears that, even though the lecturer might have been employing ‘student-centred’ methods, the locus of control from the majority of students’ perspectives was external. For the students, the lecturers remained the centre of the learning experience: it was the lecturers’ role to ensure that the ‘right’ learning emerged from class sessions. The majority of the students did not seem to come to the realisation that constructivist learning might have greater depth and longevity than ‘authorised knowledge’, and – as will be discussed later - in relation to assessment this might well have been an appropriate conclusion to draw.

For students, ‘authorised knowledge’ was linked to application of learning; exemplified through a desire for ‘credibility’ in the workplace and the seeking of ‘real experience stories’ from lecturers. In the classroom, ‘authorised’ or ‘expert’ knowledge was applied and analysed in light of case studies or real-life experiences and thus proven to be workable (or not). In this way knowledge became internalised. Therefore, as Biggs and Watkins (1996) pointed out, it is also very likely that students were, in fact, working towards a depth of understanding in a way that was simply different to the lecturers’ expectations. Interestingly, group-work responses and eventual assessment tasks (e.g. the workplace based project [page 161]) actually demonstrated that the Singaporean students were capable of translating learning across both pedagogical ‘worlds’; they were creative and at the same time were also skilled at using repetition to aid depth of understanding.

Cummins and Smith’s (1999:50) findings from work with experienced transnational educators has been strongly supported by this study. Cummins and Smith (1999) agree that successful transnational teaching requires flexibility. We have seen that the teaching practices that best meet student needs (at least initially, while program sequencing introduced new methodologies) may require a flexibility that is counter-cultural to educators’ assessment of what constitutes contemporary ‘best practice’. Educators may ‘have to adopt more structured methods which they have come to believe to be outdated in their own society’ (Hofstede, 1986:316). However, the formidable challenge facing respondents is also reflected in Ziguras’ (1999:6) observation that despite educators’ best
efforts, even ‘being flexible may encounter resistance from students as the desire for flexibility is itself culturally weighted…[it] would require accepting that not everyone wants to be flexible’. It is important therefore, particularly in a program such as the BET - in which educators should be modelling the teaching skills that students seek to develop - that teachers in transnational programs are able to explain the rationale behind the teaching and learning styles that will be favoured during the program (Ziguras, 1999). This requires sensitivity to, and an appraisal of, current practice by lecturers who are conscious of their own inherent cultural bias. It also adds weight to the recommendation for a transition subject for students.

By way of summary in relation to the contextualisation of pedagogy, this research has significance in its capacity to provide recommendations for those who are involved in similar transnational programs or in teaching classes that include students from diverse backgrounds. These include that:

- Less ‘threatening’ (e.g. likely to cause embarrassment) processes should be used early in a program – educators should progress from employing formal modalities to student-directed, facilitative learning.

- Subject delivery should incorporate clear structure and scaffolding; students like to know what to expect, when content will be covered, and how content will be linked to assessment (this is linked to the following point).

- Inductive pedagogies are preferred.

- Student comments and questions may not be as forthcoming in the whole-class environment. Small-group processes are more likely to encourage discussion and allow students to seek clarification. Moreover, student responses to small-group work allow the educator to assess student comprehension.

- Lecturers should be prepared to share a little about themselves, to ‘show heart’, to discuss their relevant work-life experiences. In the process they will build credibility.

- Lecturers should not take evaluation feedback at face value; whilst behaviours are changing, the Singaporean cultural respect for the educator combined with face saving behaviours still make it relatively unlikely that negative evaluative responses will be obvious to educators. Only the building of long-term relationships is likely to garner suggestions for improvement, and even then
responses are likely to be less direct than one would expect in a low-context ‘Western’ environment.

At a more ‘micro’ level, the following recommendations should ensure effective pedagogical practice in transnational classrooms, in Singapore in particular:

Small-group and syndicate processes are highly effective because they:

- allow students to ask questions and make comments that they would not raise in whole-class context;
- allow students to contextualise content;
- encourage dynamic conversation, allowing for linguistic and conceptual translation and turn-taking;
- encourage students to generate knowledge; and
- allow the lecturer to revert to a plenary session while maintaining an increased level of group energy and student input.

When introducing small-group pedagogies, educators should:

- explain the pedagogical rationale and cognitive goals for each session;
- be aware that in collectivist cultures status plays an important role in who speaks and when;
- allow time for status relationships to be sorted out, particularly early in a program;
- require different students to take on key roles (e.g. reporter, leader);
- debrief effectively, adding their own relevant experiences to the reflective cycle;
- provide immediate feedback and constructive criticism in relation to group work outcomes; and
- complete the learning cycle by linking group work outcomes to any assessment tasks.

Assessment

‘How far in practice can it be acknowledged that cultural diversity also means different approaches to knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge? It may not be desirable or reasonable to compromise the established methods of critical inquiry in education out of deference to minority views, but teachers should know what the cultural bases of these minority views are’. (Hulmes, 1989:5)
This research is also significant because it supports the emerging literature (discussed in chapter five) that recognises the socio-culturally bound nature of assessment and forecasts that the basic tenets - genre conventions, ‘structure’, ‘explicitness’, argument and critique (Andrews, 2003) - of ‘Western’ assessment will disadvantage those for whom they are unfamiliar.

The BET students are the product of an educational system that is quite foreign to the constructivist adult learning preferences espoused by their lecturers. As we have seen, students’ normative educational experiences were the result of some of the least desirable aspects of the ‘old’ Singaporean education system. Even in Singapore this system is now considered to have left a legacy that discourages independence, argument, and creativity: the foundations of the Western academic. Moreover, the students were socialised in a high ‘Power Distance’ and low ‘Uncertainty Avoidance’, Confucian-heritage culture which encouraged respect for authority, tradition, and authorised knowledge (Pratt, 1992; House and Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program, 2004; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Given that the normative educational and workplace experiences of most lecturers were completely different to those of students, when assessment is considered from a trans-cultural perspective, it is unsurprising that there were unpleasant surprises in store for both groups. For lecturers, there was the disappointing perception that students often reproduced ‘authorised knowledge’ and provided overly conservative and pragmatic responses despite lecturers’ efforts to encourage creativity and independence. On their part, students found much of the assessment milieu vexing and many remained confused about academic conventions at the completion of their course.

This research supports that which was discussed in chapter five (e.g. Gow et. Al 1996, Hawthorne 2004, etc.), which suggests that, in the student ‘panic’ (page 201) that accompanies exams, the requirement to reproduce ‘valid process’ can subjugate deep learning. The lack of sufficiently sophisticated English compounded the BET students’ struggle to provide evidence of critical thinking and encouraged reversion to memorisation. The students needed time to translate their language, both conceptually and grammatically (in the classroom as well as in assessment). In short, examinations in particular, but also the short time between subjects, made it difficult for students to move beyond surface learning strategies and, it could be argued, actually encouraged the instrumental learning that lecturers disavowed.
‘Plagiarism’ was a particularly fraught component of ‘valid process’ in the program. We have seen that:

- lecturers held differing beliefs and values in relation to the conceptualisation of ‘plagiarism’ and associated penalties;
- some lecturers taught ‘valid process’;
- some students worked together in self-defined study groups to ‘come to terms with requirements’, however assignments were usually written independently;
- students recognised that they were ‘forgetful’ (page 203) about ‘valid process’; and
- ‘after the fact’ comparison of assessment results and feedback amongst students was frequent.

This study has demonstrated that both lecturers and students were attempting to translate assessment culture. Indeed, the notions of power and culture, in particular individualism and collectivism, seem to be key factors in any consideration of the cultural relativity of assessment. Taking a loose conceptualisation of ‘plagiarism’ as an example, in the transnational classroom students from a culture that encourages the sharing of resources and reproduction of authorised knowledge were exposed to an often-new paradigm in which they find that concepts, constructs and ideas are owned; the separation and isolation of the individual’s work is sacrosanct. Many of the BET students seemed to misjudge the importance of academic conventions and in particular the notion of individual work, almost to the point where their response seemed to some lecturers like obstinate resistance. It remains an open question as to why this might be the case. Certainly they seemed perplexed by the importance that (some) lecturers ascribed to the process. Cultural considerations suggest the possibility that the individualist concept of the ownership of knowledge versus the sharing that is predominant in collectivist culture; a cultural predilection to revere and reproduce expert knowledge; the high context nature of Singaporean business practice; and the pragmatic motivations that many students had for enrolling in the program, conspired to make academic conventions seem quite irrelevant to students.

Most lecturers were concerned with the possible diminution of academic standards when they encountered responses that were different to those with which they were familiar. ‘Valid process’ was a more important issue for some lecturers than others. But as Andrews (2003:120) also pondered, sometimes there was possibly a ‘focus [by
assessors] on surface features at the expense of...real attention...to the structuring and expression of ideas'. Unfortunately the differences of expectations amongst lecturers resulted in the acceptance of a range of styles which ‘unwittingly forced the students into a guessing game of what form and format was expected’, as also found by Andrews (2003:120). Therefore, this research supports the findings of research undertaken overseas (Gow et al., 1996; Tan and Snell, 2002; Andrews, 2003) and suggests that culturally-based differences established a self-perpetuating pattern of conservative, and possibly instrumental, responses to assessment. This research has identified two further complexities which add to previous writers’ disquiet in relation to transnational assessment.

The first of these complexities is in relation to the cultural translation of concepts for the purpose of assessment. In response to assessment, BET students reported fabricating workplace scenarios (page 202). Based on ‘Western’ academic expectations, a critiqued and argued case for cultural inapplicability of a theory or concept should be a successful response to an assessment task. However the students in this program chose what they considered to be the ‘safer’ path of writing for what they perceived to be the lecturers’ culture-bound expectations. Assessment tasks often required a creative solution to a case study, based on the students’ own thoughts and experiences. It has been noted that that students diagnose answers to case study assessment tasks along predictable cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1994a). Thus, expectations of the nature of a ‘correct’ answer may be culturally determined for both student and assessor. Considering Hofstede’s Power/Distance indices and the differences therein between ‘Asian’ and ‘Western’ societies: it seems quite unlikely that the response to a business case study scenario would be ‘correct’ in both a Singaporean and an Australian workplace (not to mention the considerable cultural differences in what might be considered ethically acceptable (Tan and Snell, 2002)). Northedge (2003:27) reminds us that:

‘Workers are expected to accept dominant views as obvious and right...yet an essay that presents only one view and no criticism does not get a good mark...to be asked to adopt a worldview that embraces new ideas and values is more than an intellectual challenge; it sets up conflict with the roles through which the student accomplishes daily life’.

Northedge was referring to British adult learners, new to academia. How much greater the role conflict for mature-age learners in high Power/Distance, paternalistic Singapore? Thus, in light of the experiences in the BET program and the work of other researchers, the efficacy of assessment tasks that might implicitly require students to interpret and respond according to foreign cultural paradigms is obviously brought into question.
The second complexity facing transnational assessors is related to facilitated learning versus ‘structure’; in the tension between valid process and valid content. Chapter six revealed that most lecturers in the program considered their teaching style to be student-centred, facilitative, and constructivist. Thus, in the classroom, students learned that there was not necessarily ‘one right answer’: that application of knowledge was relative and that their own experience was valued. In that context it does not seem surprising that the students struggled with an apparently opposing assessment milieu which imposed a foreign presentation style (argument, critique), where their own opinion was not valued unless it was supported by somebody else’s, strict genre conventions and, in some cases, grammatically correct academic English. In fact, it seems reasonable that the students reverted to the belief that there actually was a ‘right answer’ when it came to assessment, if only they could find out what the lecturer wanted. If that were the case, assessment processes reduced the programs erstwhile adult learning environment to a mere masquerade of flexibility. In other words, there was a tension between ‘valid process’ and ‘valid knowledge’: students’ experiences mattered, but in assessment they only mattered if they were related according to the power structures of the assessment process.

The preceding questions underscore the quandary facing the lecturers: whether they should adapt their expectations in relation to assessment: whether they should reinterpret critical inquiry, academic conventions, ‘valid process’, and use of the English language? This contentious topic is enmeshed in the discourse of internationalisation of universities, globalisation, ‘educational imperialism’ etc. Perhaps it is not too far a leap to label ‘valid process’ as intellectual hegemony? It could certainly be argued that the BET program did, probably unconsciously, contain ‘colonial’ aspects of teaching “them” to be like ‘us’ and, therefore, not like themselves” (Tsolidis, 2001:103), and that this was most obvious in consideration of assessment. Consequently, ‘The University’ and others like it could be charged with paying lip service to internationalisation and culturally sensitive learning processes.

As a result of the previous discussion, this research suggests recommendations in relation to culturally sensitive assessment:

- Assessment would seem more accessible and relevant for students if local knowledge were valorised (this does not imply the exclusion of international or provider-country knowledge, merely a more balanced presentation).
observation applies both to the setting of assessment tasks and in relation to the assessment of student responses.

- Assessors and lecturers should be encouraged to recognise cultural difference: between themselves and their students, and in their acculturation processes. As a part of that process, they should be vigilant in examining their assumptions about students' understandings.

- Lecturers should consciously make links between in-class discussion and assessment tasks.

- It should be noted that it could be confusing and even appear hypocritical to encourage freedom of thought during class only to constrain it by rigorous application of ‘valid process’ during assessment.

- Again, longer periods of overseas teaching and/or staff exchange for academics would encourage the development of bi-culturality and allow for development of culture-specific assessment tools.

**Student Support**

International students frequently require a great deal of support. Pastoral care, English language support, and learning skill support require resourcing at levels above that provided for local students. Whilst all Australian universities employ specialist international student support units (Back et al., 1996), frequently students at offshore or partner campuses do not have access to these mainstream services. This unequal state of affairs may possibly result from a; ‘fear that this would appear to be publicly funded cross-subsidisation of commercial activity’ (Cummins and Smith, 1999:50), and a concern that ‘without care, the costs of providing the service can exceed the income’ (Jeans, 1995). Whatever the reason, the outcomes of this lack of provision were very evident in this research. The impact on teaching staff was significant. Often their private time in Singapore was spent counselling students, resulting in teaching staff working almost all of their substantial waking hours. The Open University of the UK, which provides all its teaching by distance education, has reported that close personal support to each student by faculty with special training in working with adults is required to overcome these problems. The proposed solution, which would clearly be a challenge to Australian universities given the tight costing models involved, is to allocate an associate faculty member to every twenty students (Daniel, 2000:3).
A ‘subject zero’, as suggested by BET students (page 206) (and recommended by other authors, e.g. Altbach, 2000; Bates, 2001), could prepare students for cultural differences in teaching and learning styles by explaining ‘Western’ university culture - including provision of historical and contextual background information about Western epistemologies and pedagogies, and explanations as to why certain processes are valued - and what successful responses to assessment tasks might look like. Such a subject could be taught in intensive mode prior to the commencement of the program by an educator skilled in working cross-culturally, with adults who are returning to study. Of course, the messages delivered by such a program would need to be congruent with lecturers’ assessment expectations. Therefore, the design of any transition program would need to be predicated on an agreement as to the appropriate standard acceptable by academics working in the subsequent offshore program.

**Significance and limitations**

The intent of this research was to provide an ethnographic view of a transnational education program, from the perspective of ‘observer as participant’. It does seem that this research is unique because, up until the date of submission, an ongoing review of relevant literature has not found any other studies that have adopted a similar methodology; wherein an ‘outsider’ researcher has observed a transnational program through a significant period of time ‘in-country’. Therefore it is hoped that this research will contribute to the field of knowledge or at least raise questions and provide a new perspective for those who have an interest in transnational education and/or the relationship between culture and education.

Despite any claim to ‘new knowledge’, it is acknowledged that this research is but one small component of a global mosaic. Thus it does not seek to generalise findings to all transnational programs; nor to all programs taught in Singapore. In fact, as stated in chapter four (methodology), this study does not even aim to provide a complete picture of the culture within a transnational program, but merely to form part of a collection. It is hoped, however, that in contributing to the growing knowledge about transnational education this description of the cultural implications of one program might have resonance for those involved with similar programs, and that the recommendations provided herein might be parsimonious for the development and enrichment of programs that share similarities with the BET.
Recommendations for further research

Chapter four (methodology) proposed that an ethnographic evaluation can often raise more questions than it answers, and this research is no exception. This study has rich potential for those who may seek to further explore culture, education, and transnational education. Whilst there appears to be a lack of research which focuses on the experiences of students in one country, Ward et al. (2001) have also highlighted that little research exists which compares the experiences of students experiencing cultural transition with host-country students. In line with Ward et al.’s (2001) observation, it would be of interest to examine a program similar to the BET that is run concurrently in Australia and offshore, and compare responses of the students from both countries. It would also be worthwhile to conduct similar studies in countries other than Singapore and to compare the findings with those that were identified by this study. Such comparisons may enable, for example, more grounded generalisations to be made about the experiences of ‘Asian’ students, or even ‘South East Asian’ students, and also about transnational education as a global phenomenon. Similarly, the comparison of several similar programs in Singapore would provide more useful generalisations about provision of transnational programs in that country. Yet another valuable approach would be to conduct a similar study with a younger group of Singaporean students, which might confirm the assumption of the Singaporean students and their Ministry of Education herein; that normative learning experiences and resulting learning styles represented by the BET cohort will not be replicated in Singapore’s future generations of graduates.

If the researcher ever had the time, the money, and the support to do so, she would very much like to make this thesis the starting point for a longitudinal study. Given the concerns this thesis has raised about truncated and late night programs, it would be worthwhile to conduct an evaluation of the level of transfer of learning that has actually occurred as a result of the BET, through revisiting the respondents to this research some years after their 2004 graduation.

Finally, Australian universities seem to continue to be somewhat blasé about market niche and reputation. Not only are student numbers from South East Asia dropping, but simultaneously Singapore and its neighbours are learning from Australia’s mistakes and emerging as significant competitors in transnational education in their own right. Thus a tangential recommendation for further research would involve critiquing and analysing the reasons behind this shift and investigating its evolution, from the perspective of the ‘locals’.
Conclusion

In concluding this thesis, a comment from one of the lecturer respondents continually resonates with the author: that is that ‘...you’re going to have to be humble enough to let the students show you…’. [82:2:361-368] This study has demonstrated willingness on the part of both the students and the lecturers to 'show us'; to reveal their values and beliefs, and to provide explanations and recommendations. Clearly the culture of the university has changed as a result of transnational teaching, but the questions remain; is ‘The University’ able to make longer term gains? Are Australian universities humble enough to ‘see’?
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Appendices

Attachment A: Plain Language Statement - Lecturers

Who am I?

I am a 42-year-old mature-age PhD candidate in the Education Faculty Department of Education Policy and Management. Until very recently my job was as Manager, Leadership and Management Development in the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment. This Human Resource Development (HRD) management role involved me in the design, development and delivery of a range of staff training and development programmes in a government organisation of 4000+ staff members across 200+ locations. I am very keen to continue to work in HRD, and I am currently seeking to expand my knowledge by completing my PhD. I was fortunate enough to receive an APA, which has allowed me to take study leave. Outside of work and study, I live in a Seddon with my partner and my cat. I love travel and good food!

What am I doing?

My PhD research will focus on the differences that may exist when people from different cultural backgrounds participate in adult education and HRD experiences that were designed in a foreign culture. My Masters research found that significant differences in perception exist between Anglo-background trainers and their participants from different cultures. That research suggested changes to HRD practice which should ensure that training and development programmes are more cross-culturally appropriate and inclusive. However, that was a relatively small thesis, which necessarily lacked the depth of a PhD. I want my PhD to extend my research base and investigate cross-cultural interactions within a more complex teaching and learning environment. Essentially I want to use the B.E.T. programme to analyse which aspects of this international HRD course may be affected positively or negatively by differences in culture.

Why have I chosen this research topic?

Of course, I want to learn a lot more about different cultures, HRD and to gain research experience. But I am also doing it because I have been a workplace trainer for quite a few years now and I know that “Western” designed training techniques and programme content don’t suit everybody. I think that we, in Australia (one of the most multicultural nations on earth), should attempt to ensure that our training techniques are accessible for everybody; both within Australia and within the programmes we export to other countries.

How were the study site and participants selected?

As you know, I am a student and sessional lecturer at Melbourne. I was searching for a research site that met my needs; relevant to HRD, cross-cultural communication, multicultural environment, outside Australia but within Asia and, of course, adult learning. The B.E.T. programme is a perfect match for my needs. Participants will be people who are currently enrolled in the B.E.T., or who are Alumni from the programme, lecturers at CHRDT who teach in the program, and others who inform the context for the research such as SIM staff and Singapore Government policy makers (hopefully!).

What will happen if you take part?

I intend to first interview people one to one, and possibly also in a Focus group. The one to one interviews will take place at a time and place that is convenient to you. The first interview will take place early in the research and in Melbourne. I am going to Singapore on exchange from July to December and if possible I would like to interview you a second time whilst you are there if you teach during that period. A final interview will take place about one year into the programme and will be back in Melbourne. I expect the interviews to take about forty-five minutes to one hour each. A Focus group may be substituted for one interview session, depending on the nature of the discussions in the one-to-one interviews.

Other Important information: Risks, benefits, confidentiality and anonymity.

There should not be any substantial risk, as you will only need to disclose information that you chose to disclose. As you know, the B.E.T. teachers’ group is small but to preserve anonymity I intend to use coding to identify lecturers and will not identify anyone by linking them to a particular subject in the write-up where that would threaten anonymity. I will want to tape record the interviews and focus groups to enable me to analyse the conversation at a later date. Interview tapes will only ever be heard by me and will be destroyed once my thesis is completed. While I am writing up the research, the tapes and word processed data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home or at my location in Singapore, or on my password protected computer.
Attachment B: Plain Language Statement- Students

What is this research about?
This research will focus on the differences that may exist when people from different cultural backgrounds participate in adult education experiences that were designed in a foreign culture. My Masters research found that significant differences in perception exist between Anglo-background trainers and their participants from different cultures. That research suggested changes to HRD practice which should ensure that training and development programmes are more cross-culturally appropriate and inclusive. Through interviews with participants in the B.E.T. programme I aim to analyse which aspects of this international HRD course may be affected positively or negatively by differences in culture.

Who am I?
I am an Australian mature-age student working towards her PhD in Education. My full time job is Manager, Leadership and Management Development in a Government Department. This Human Resource Development management role involved me in the design, development and delivery of a range of staff training and development programmes in an organisation of 4000+ staff members across 200+ locations. I was most fortunate in that I received a scholarship from the ['The University'], which has allowed me to take three years leave from my work to undertake this study. Outside of work and study, I live in a small house with my husband and my cat. I love travel and good food!

Why am I doing it?
Of course, I am undertaking this research with the hope of attaining my PhD and in the process learning a lot more about different cultures, HRD and how to do research. But I am also doing it because I have been a workplace trainer for quite a few years now and I know that “Western” designed training techniques and programme content don’t suit everybody. I think that we, in Australia (one of the most multicultural nations on earth), should attempt to ensure that our training techniques are appropriate for everybody; both within Australia and within the programmes we export to other countries.

How were the study site and participants selected?
I was searching for a research site that met my needs and the B.E.T. programme is a perfect match. Participants will be people who are currently enrolled in the B.E.T., or who are Alumni from the programme and who are listed in the database of ['The University']. All previous and current participants will be contacted and asked to fill in the attached questionnaire. Hopefully I will get enough positive responses to enable me to choose a research group that represents a broad range of views.

What will happen if you take part?
I intend to first interview people one-to-one, and possibly also in a Focus group. The one-to-one interviews will take place at a time and place that is convenient to you (I will be in Singapore for six months). The first interview will take place within the first three months of the research, and a second interview mid way (about six months). A final interview will take place about one year into the programme. I expect the interviews to take about one hour each. For the focus group interview, I will make every effort to ensure that people are able to be there at the same time (maybe before or after a B.E.T. teaching session).

Other Important information: Risks, benefits, confidentiality and anonymity.
There should not be any risk involved in taking part in this research, as you will only need to disclose information that you chose to disclose. When I report the findings of the study, participant’s details will be changed to preserve confidentiality and anonymity. Nobody involved with running the B.E.T. programme will ever see the data in it’s ‘raw’ state, therefore you will never be individually identifiable. I will want to tape record the interviews and focus groups to enable me to analyse the conversation at a later date. Interview tapes will only ever be heard by me and will be destroyed once my thesis is completed. While I am writing up the research, the tapes and word processed data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home or at my location in Singapore, or on my password protected computer.
Attachment C: Invitation Letter

Dear [ ]

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I am a student in the Education faculty at the University of Melbourne and am planning to undertake my PhD research in Singapore. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to interview you as part of my research. Without participation from people like you my research will be unsuccessful. Your twin roles; as a participant of the Bachelor of Education & Training (HRD) program and someone who works in the field of HRD or training and development, are very important. In the first instance I am asking if you would please consider completing the attached questionnaire. If you could find the time to do that and return it in the enclosed reply paid envelope I would be most grateful. I have also attached a “plain language statement” that tells you more about my research.

I must stress that your participation is purely voluntary and anonymous, and if you choose to participate you could withdraw your participation or any discussion we have shared, at any time until the data is collated. If you should decide not to participate in the research then that would not have any impact on your participation in the Bach. Ed & Trng. program. In either case: participation or non-participation, you will remain anonymous.

Again, the attached “plain language statement” outlines my proposal, and you can see that the final question on the questionnaire asks if you would be prepared for me to interview you. If you consent to being interviewed, I will contact you by telephone again shortly to co-ordinate a time and venue that is convenient for the interview. In the meantime, I can be contacted at;

Singapore:11 Holland Drive

#18-14

Singapore 271011

Handphone: 96147533 (has voicemail)

My thesis supervisor is:

Dr Irene Donohoue-Clyne
Faculty of Education
Phone: 061 03 9344 8441
Email: i.donohoue.clyne@unimelb.edu.au

The Singapore Institute of Management and [‘The University’] Human Research Ethics Committee have approved this research. They can be contacted on:

- S.I.M. c/- Ms [ redacted ], ph: 64629489 email: [ redacted ]@sim.edu.sg
- [ redacted ], University Human Research Ethics Committee: ph: [ redacted ]; fax 9347 6739

www.[ redacted ]

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to contacting you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Lynnel Hoare
# Student Questionnaire

**Name**  
Please underline Family Name

**Gender**  
Please tick the appropriate one  
[ ] Male  
[ ] Female

**Racial background/Heritage**  
(eg; Chinese, Indian, Malay, Eurasian, English etc.)

**Work Sector**  
(eg; public sector, defence forces, industry, multinational company, self employed etc)  
*Whatever generic term describes your workplace best.*

**Job Role**  
(eg; Generalist manager, Human Resources Manager, Human Resource Development/Learning Officer, Trainer, Director etc.)  
*Whatever best describes what you do in the organisation.*

**Please describe how satisfied you are with the Bachelor Of Education & Training (HRD) program.**  
[ ] Very Satisfied  
[ ] Quite Satisfied  
[ ] Undecided  
[ ] Dissatisfied  
[ ] Very Dissatisfied

**Please briefly list the main issues affecting your description of your level of satisfaction above.**  
Just one or two words will do (eg; value for money, teaching quality, assignment related issues, learning opportunities or anything else that is appropriate for you.)

**Would you recommend the Bachelor of Education and Training (HRD) program to a fellow Singaporean?**  
[ ] Yes  
[ ] No

**Would you be prepared to participate in the research as outlined in the accompanying letter?**  
(If you would like me to phone or email you before you decide, please ensure details are provided)  
[ ] Yes  
[ ] No  
[ ] Maybe, please phone me

**Please list your PREFERRED Contact Address:**  
Please provide the best address at which to reach you and identify it as either (work) or (home).  

**Please list your PREFERRED phone number or numbers**
Dear [        ]

I know how busy you are with work and study (believe me, I really do know!). Therefore I am sorry to
bother you again. However, probably because of the fact that everyone in the BET class three had an exam
and then an assignment due in after we met in Carol’s class, I have not had many responses to my
questionnaire.

Despite not getting many responses to the questionnaire, I felt during class that many of you were happy to
meet with me. Quite a few people indicated to me verbally that they would be happy to talk with me,
however I have only had three questionnaires returned.

Even if you have misplaced the questionnaire, please just drop me a quick email if you would be prepared
for me to meet with you at some time. I must stress the following about the interviews:

1. The date for the interview doesn’t have to be straight away – can be any time before January 20th.
2. I won’t be asking you anything terribly personal, or that might be sensitive to your work. In
   fact you will probably think the questions are very basic, but the answers will be useful to me.
3. I will come to you or we can meet anywhere that is convenient - you name it I’ll be there. The
   place just has to be relatively quiet and uninterrupted.

So, could I ask again, if you could spare me an hour or so drop me an email at lhoare@ihug.com.au or phone
my hand phone on 96147533.

Thank you sincerely

Lyn Hoare
Attachment F: Student Interview Schedule

1. What do you enjoy about your learning experiences; whether they be school, work or life based?

2. What things are not so good about learning?

3. What sorts of experiences and attitudes have existed during your life that may have shaped your thoughts about how you learn? For example; why is learning important?

4. What influenced you to enrol in the B.E.T. program?

5. If you could cast your mind back to when you were taking the decision to enrol, what picture did you have of yourself at the end of the program?

6. (This question may not be required, it is an addendum to question five): In other words, what outcomes do you expect from the program, what do you want to be different?

7. What education (teaching or training) environments have you experienced as a participant? (For example, an environment could be on-the-job training, a university course, learning in a community or religious group, learning from mentors and friends etc)

8. What education (teaching or training) methodologies have you experienced as a participant? (By methodologies I mean ways of teaching, like teacher controlled at the front of the class, “repeat after me”, coaching, group work, learning by doing, computer based learning…etc.)

9. Please describe what you consider good teaching/training practice - in other words, what is the “best” way for an educator to educate?

10. Do you think the content of the BET program, the actual knowledge, skills and attitudes you are being guided towards and taught in the program, is relevant to your current work and/or life?
11. When you take the content of the BET program and think about applying it in Singapore, do you think the Singaporean context changes the way ideas and knowledge might or might not work?

12. Do people brought up in Asia or Asian families have a different attitude to learning from Western people based on your experiences?

13. If you had one minute to talk to someone putting together a program of learning to be delivered in, and relevant to, Singapore as a country and the culture of its people; what would you advise?
Attachment G: Lecturer Interview Schedule

1. What sort of experiences and attitudes have existed during your life that may have shaped your thoughts about how you learn? For example; why is learning important?

2. How would you describe the values of CHRDT?

3. How would you describe ‘best practice’ in terms of educational practice in CHRDT? What’s important? What sort of person would be a ‘role model’?

4. What about your own values in terms of teaching?

5. Are work practices and relationships between members of CHRDT collaborative or individualistic in nature?

6. Was teaching in the BET your first experience of teaching outside Australia?

7. Did you have any concerns before embarking on your first teaching trip to Singapore?

8. What sort of learner did you expect to find in Singapore?

9. Did you get what you expected?

10. What do you think motivates Singaporean students to enrol in the B.E.T.?

11. In what ways is the teaching experience in Singapore different to Australia?

12. How do you respond to those differences?
Attachment H: Subjects in the Bachelor of Education (Human Resource Development) program

1. Assessing trainee competence
2. Advanced learning theory
3. Contemporary issues in education and training
4. Designing for flexible delivery
5. Evaluating HRD programs
6. Facilitating work-based learning
7. HRD policy and strategy analysis
8. International human resource development
9. Learning and thinking
10. Managing learning in the workplace
11. Managing diversity in the global workplace
12. Organisation change and development
13. Linking theory and practice
14. Program design in education and training
15. Work-based project
16. Workplace organisation and technology
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