

Introducing the CI model for intercultural contact

Chris Beard Executive Officer, ISANA NZ

Abstract

International education has emerged as a dynamic export sector and key source of income for education providers in Australia and New Zealand. Its development in the last twenty years has been characterised by steady growth of student numbers punctuated by occasional crises and drops in enrolments. To address the emergent challenges in New Zealand, there have been calls for specialised intercultural training and theory-to-practice models to assist international education practice. This article introduces the *CI model for intercultural contact* to guide education providers' engagement with international students. It draws on New Zealand's unique bicultural experience and presents three key concepts (CIs): Cross-disciplinary Inquiry, Comprehensible Input and Collaborative Intervention. The CI model provides a framework that incorporates cross-disciplinary findings, encourages critical inquiry and offers strategies for aiding intercultural learning and international student acculturation.

Keywords

Acculturation
Indigenous perspective
International education
Intercultural exchange
International students
Tailored practice
Theory-to-practice model

Introduction

International education is a booming export industry in Australasia. The sector was worth \$32 billion in Australia in 2018 (Universities Australia 2018) and \$5.1 billion in New Zealand (Education NZ 2018). And yet in New Zealand despite 20 years of stellar growth international education is set apart as an export sector by what it does not possess: an underpinning academic discipline, clear professional pathways or sector-specific qualifications. And it seems there are risks with maintaining the status quo. There is growing evidence that international students experience a unique set of stressors and resultant health-related issues such as anxiety and depression (Mesidor and Sly 2016; Chen et al. 2015; Li et al. 2015). Unless evidence-based approaches are developed to address this kind of challenge, the sector's future sustainability appears less assured.

The CI model for intercultural contact

The aim of this article is to provide a brief outline of the CI model for intercultural contact (see Appendix __) which has been developed to provide a theory-to-practice tool for international education practitioners, educators, international programme leaders and policy makers. In 2018 ISANA NZ gathered feedback and evaluations from eighteen professional development workshops around New Zealand and results showed strong demand for theory-to-practices models tailored for international education contexts.

One of the features of the CI model is that it includes key Māori concepts to inform international student engagement. There are few examples of host providers in English-speaking destination countries appropriating insights from the indigenous culture-majority culture relationship. If there are minimal attempts to do so, it is quite possible that assimilationist attitudes shape the approach to international students (Liyanage & Gurney 2017:211).

The CI model presents three interdependent concepts: *Cross-disciplinary Inquiry*, *Comprehensible Input* and *Collaborative Intervention*. Within each concept three integral domains are identified to form three three-legged stools. The strategies offered in the model represent a fusion of coalface experience and interdisciplinary findings. More specifically, it reflects the author's participation in ISANA international networks, cross-sector teaching experience and insights from fifteen-years working one-to-one with at-risk students on tertiary foundation studies programmes. It is in other words the fruit of shared working knowledge, problem-based learning (Clouston and Whitcombe: 2005) and desktop research.

CI 1: Cross-disciplinary Inquiry

Cross-disciplinary Inquiry emphasises the need to recognise and explore the multi-dimensional nature of intercultural exchange in educational contexts:

(i) *Culture-specific knowledge*

Culture-specific knowledge is critical because it offers education providers and students a window to one another's core concepts, etiquette and communication practices (Cultural Atlas: 2019). It relates to cultural identity, and in New Zealand's case the partnership principle embedded in the Treaty of Waitangi (McHugh 1991: 4). Culture-specific knowledge also alerts host providers and students to the differences between large-power-distance societies and small-power-distance societies (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005: 43). Interestingly, the ramifications of these cultural differences on pedagogy appear to pass largely under the radar of international education practice. Culture-specific knowledge also identifies the dynamics of acculturation as a key consideration for host providers (Ward 2001: 416; Berry 2011: 15; Demes and Geeraert: 2015).

(ii) *Religious literacy*

Religion is commonly categorised as a sub-set of culture in secular host countries. This risks the undervaluing of religious literacy in a world that is predominantly religious (Pew Research Centre 2102) and overlooking the centrality of religious faith for many international students. Low religious literacy diminishes the capacity to provide tailored support for these students. Also, in the New Zealand context, religious literary references the spirituality inherent in tikanga Māori. Penetito (2009: 20) is wary of the secularising influence of the colonisers: "To the indigenous mind, the absence of the human spirit, the mauri and wairua, makes no sense ... The Enlightenment ideals imported from Britain engulfed the people native to this land".

(iii) *Interlanguage awareness*

Interlanguage awareness identifies the central importance of target language proficiency for international students and alerts education providers to the risks of monolingualism. The lack of target language proficiency is emerging as a key acculturative stressor for international

students (Ramia et al 2013:10; Mesidor and Sly 2016; Skyrme and McGee 2016; Bradley 2018). If texts, lessons and lectures are pitched predominantly at domestic students, international students with entry-level language proficiency and smaller vocabulary sizes are disadvantaged (Nation 2006). Te Reo Māori rubrics offer a model for international education practitioners to self-critique and strategically use language (Ministry of Education, 2013).

CI 2: Comprehensible Input

Comprehensible input represents tailored text and speech that is demonstrably communicated. The term is borrowed from Stephen Krashen's classic comprehensible input thesis (' $i+1$ ') in second language acquisition theory (Ellis 1985: 157), but here refers simply to vocabulary and language structure that is accessible to learners.

(i) Tailored messaging

Tailoring messaging focuses on the efficacy of communication in intercultural exchange. This principle affirms Ausubel's dictum: "The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach ... accordingly" (Barker and Bunting cited in Fraser and Hill 2016:38). In the case of international education, learner-centred communication becomes more challenging with linguistic and cultural dynamics to negotiate, along with time constraints on orientations and courses. Without assessment of prior learning, the deliberate use of high-frequency vocabulary (for second language learners) and learner-responsive pedagogy (Ryan 2005:92) tailored messaging is less likely.

(ii) Interactive learning

Interactive learning highlights the value of dialogic approaches in intercultural contexts. Focused, well managed classroom discussions promote quality learning (Sutherland 2006) and interactive tasks reflect the *ako* principle in Māori education which emphasises the reciprocal nature of learning (Ministry of Education 2011). A commitment to the use of communicative activities encourages international students to share their own funds of knowledge, allows them time to 'hook into' the new learning environment (Ryan and Hellmundt 2005:14) and mitigates any institutional inclination to resort to information dumps or sustained flows of unidirectional speech.

(iii) Rehearsal and retrieval

Rehearsal and retrieval identifies the need for multi-varied modes of communication to improve international student uptake of key information. Experienced educators are cognisant of the checking/feedback/reinforcement principles in learning, particularly for transitioning international students. So, providing students with opportunity to retrieve and process new information through repetition, modelling, optimal spacing, loop-back inputs, early formative feedback, and multi-media raises the likelihood of their learning and appropriation of key academic and student welfare content (Coxhead 2004: 2; Ryan 2005: 96; Barker et al 2018).

CI 3: Collaborative Intervention

Collaborative Intervention emphasizes the utility of collaboration and cooperation between education providers and the international student communities. Fruitful intercultural relations and student integration depends on shared interests and incentives.

(i) Host outreach

Host outreach reflects the prominent Māori proverb *He aha te mea nui o te ao. He tāngata, he tāngata, he tangata: What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people* (Tipene-Matua et al 2012). This is embodied in the Māori powhiri, which is the cultural practice of tangata whenua welcoming manuhiri (visitors) onto the marae and finishes with the two groups becoming one: a generous expression of *manaakitanga* (hospitality). Host outreach in the CI model is presented as a rationale for hospitable outreach to international students. It is also posited as a person-centred buffer to counter-balance the revenue-raising focus in export education (Education NZ 2018; Universities Australia 2018). And without strategic outreach, there is a greater likelihood of services-in-waiting for service-shy students who prefer to seek help from one another (Ling and Tran 2015).

(ii) Adjustment scaffolding

Adjustment scaffolding highlights the importance of identifying key drivers and motivators to facilitate meaningful exchange. One trend among international students is the limited social integration and engagement with local communities (Ward 2001; Ramia et al 2013:10; Kukatlapallia 2016; Henrickson 2018). A scaffolding approach provides incentives for community participation for students from cultures where community involvement/volunteering is not highly valued. For instance, leadership awards that are added to student academic transcripts appeal to their study aspirations. Limited work and career opportunities have emerged as a ‘negative driver’ for the export education sector in New Zealand (Education New Zealand 2018) and so initiatives that incentivise international student extra-curricular/work participation appeals to the key drivers of both student and education provider alike.

(iii) Intergroup mediation

Intergroup mediation recognises the key role of culture brokers. International students who intuitively integrate and are prepared to doubly engage (Berry 2011) shape as potential intermediaries who possess the capacity to mediate the relationship between the education provider and their fellow international students. The *tuakana-teina* model in Māori educational practice (Te Kete Ipurangi, n.d.) provides an indigenous model for buddy/ambassador programmes being developed by schools and tertiary education providers. Senior students who act as culture brokers enable the building of intergroup trust and provide a bridge to the influential student *bush telegraph*. Tutors sensitive to intercultural dynamics have also been found to exercise an intercultural connector role (Henrickson 2018).

The CI model reflects a grassroots perspective of international education that presents a theory-to-practice framework for those engaged with international students. It critiques and responds to the cross-disciplinary nature of New Zealand’s fourth largest export sector using a unique bicultural perspective. Findings and insights from Mātauranga Māori, Anthropology, Cultural Psychology, Education, Religious Studies and Applied Linguistics are offered to make sense

of the complexity of the international student experience. And by doing so the model points to the merits of establishing international education as an academic discipline, which is a new strategic goal articulated in the Ministry of Education International Education Strategy 2018-2030 (Education New Zealand 2019: 21).

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Contributor details

Chris is the ISANA NZ Executive Officer based in Wellington. In this role he liaises with education providers, stake-holders and government agencies on ISANA NZ's behalf. Chris is interested in supporting innovative, evidence-based practice in the international education sector. For 25 years he worked closely with international students in a teaching or pastoral capacity. As a teaching fellow he contributes to a postgraduate course in International Education for Victoria University of Wellington's MEd programme.

E-mail: chris.beard.isananz@gmail.com