Intercultural chameleons or the Chinese way? Chinese students in Western art and design education

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Abstract

Globalization is dramatically increasing numbers of international students in UK art and design institutions. Education as a primary source of enculturation can play an important part in bridging cultural differences; however, without awareness of the different learning cultures of Western and Confucian Heritage Cultures there is a danger of stereotype, prejudice and barriers to learning. There is a lack of research into intercultural communication in the creative fields; this article considers whether art and design institutions can adopt and adapt best practice from other fields of education in order to provide intercultural learning cultures that recognize both differences and common ideas of education and creativity.

Introduction

Cross-cultural life was not meant to be easy

(Furnham and Bochner 1986: 10)

The United Kingdom currently has a quarter of the global market share of international students; there were over 90,000 international undergraduates in the United Kingdom for the academic year 2004–05, of which nearly half were from non-European Union countries (UKCOSA 2007). The internationalization of higher education and resultant multicultural classrooms both pose challenges and present opportunities for students, lecturers and educational institutions. Studying abroad is promoted as a chance for students to develop greater awareness of their own and host cultures and thus advance intercultural understanding (Allport 1954). Yet, the intercultural situations which arise may bring conflict in the form of racism and prejudice, and research on UK undergraduates undergoing extended residence abroad found their prior stereotypes had been reinforced and, more damaging, up to 30% had developed even more negative stereotypes of strangers (Coleman 1998: 59). There is a lack of empirical research into student learning in art and design (Drew, Bailey and Shreeve 2002), but opinions about art and 'what constitutes art' are culturally bound (Fleming 2006: 55). Thus the challenge of providing an effective art and design education in an era where the world is increasingly interconnected by globalization (Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001; Fennes and Hapgood

Keywords

creativity
intercultural
    communication
learning culture
stereotypes

1997) is as much about creating a culture as it is about designing a syllabus (Fleming 2006).

In this article I review current literature relating to learning cultures in the East and West, 'culture shock', creativity and intercultural communication [the recognition of the need for knowledge, skills and attitudes, which support an ability to decentre and understand otherness and self (Byram and Fleming 1998)] before reflecting on my experiences as a lecturer at the London College of Fashion and my attempts to foster intercultural communication on courses with a high proportion of Confucian Heritage Culture students [CHC D. Y. F. Ho's 1991 term for the cultures of China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea, in Biggs (1996)].

Learning cultures

Cultures of learning exist in all educational institutions, encompassing views of the role of schools within society, expectations of classroom structure and behaviour; as such they reflect the dominant cultures they exist in and teachers and students are expected to operate within their implicit rules and customs, whilst 'other' behaviours or indeed models of learning may be rejected as inferior or primitive (Gudykunst 1998). From Kim's (1988) system's perspective one's cultural identity is not a simple static construct but a complex ongoing 'interpretative activity' (p. 45); individuals grow up internalizing specific cultural attributes which form a common cultural identity, giving in-group members efficacy in familiar cultural settings. 'Strangers' (Simmel 1908/1971: 143) who can demonstrate their use of majority culture's accepted communication and behaviour norms are rewarded with acceptance, whilst those who cannot or do not adapt will be excluded (Cushner 1994; Kim 1988). Education is considered one of the primary sources of enculturation and it may be difficult for strangers to 'enter into the narrative' of unfamiliar learning cultures (Dillon and Howe 2003: 293) and due to the short-term nature of their sojourns, international students may make minimum efforts to adapt to a new learning environment (Kim 1988). If differences in learning cultures are not acknowledged, international students may suffer stress from cross-cultural misunderstanding and finding their needs unmet (Fennes and Hapgood 1997; Jin and Cortazzi 1998), they may feel disenfranchised from the host culture, negatively affecting self-concept. In her autobiographical work *Lost in Translation* Eva Hoffman, a Polish immigrant to Canada, expresses this feeling of exclusion 'Because I'm not heard I feel I'm not seen' (1989: 147). Without explicitly addressing cultural differences, educators in Western universities may be vulnerable to stereotyping and cultural superiority (Goodman 1994). If communicating on 'autopilot' (Gudykunst 1998: xi) teachers may be susceptible to stereotyping international students and prescribing their behaviours to oversimplified ideas of their learning cultures (Kirby, Woodhouse and Ma 1996), or popular concepts such as culture shock (Cushner 1994). Without guidance, international students of art and design may fail to embrace Western design models and resort to maintaining their ethnic aesthetic (Kim 1988) thus negating a primary reason for studying abroad.

The education system in CHC countries has been characterized as a hierarchical, teacher-centred system, utilizing expository teaching techniques to

large groups of passive students and focusing on results not process (Biggs 1996; Furnham and Bochner 1986; Ng 2001). In their book *The Chinese Learner* (1996) Watkins and Biggs (and other contributing researchers) seek to explain the seeming paradox between what Western educational theory would prescribe for the ideal student-centred classroom and the evident academic success of CHC students both in their home cultures and when studying abroad. In Western education, teachers strive to generate 'flow' experiences (Czikszentmihalyi cited in Gudykunst 1998: 24) and promote deep learning, where varied teaching methods are utilized and where participation is a sign of engagement in contrast to the more formal, hierarchical CHC classroom environment. Whilst methods utilized in the CHC system are suitable for learning in that educational cultural milieu, when viewed from a Western perspective, or transplanted into a Western education system they are often misinterpreted and may become inappropriate (Biggs 1996).

Although CHC societies are not homogeneous entities, they are fundamentally different to Western societies (Ng 2001). Using Hofstede's dimensions of culture may illuminate these distinctions and thus the differences between Western and CHC attitudes towards teaching and learning as products of the cultures in which they are embedded (Fennes and Hapgood 1997). The power-distance dimension describes the degree of social inequality considered normal; high power-distance is associated with CHC cultures that accept the Confucian model of hierarchies 'san gang' and implies acceptance of authority, explaining students' compliance with the vertical model of teacher-student relationships and why CHC learners may prefer the teacher, as source of knowledge, to lead sessions (Biggs 1996). Low power-distance, associated with Western cultures, allows students freedom to criticize teachers and to intervene in class. The individualism-collectivism dimension describes the extent to which people are integrated into groups; in a Western individualist culture individuals are loosely organized, have personal responsibility, and competition and individual achievement are stressed. CHC collective societies are more tightly organized with strong in-group ties; conflict is avoided in order to maintain group harmony and individuals tend to worry about maintaining in-group approval, or 'mian-zi' (face). In the classroom this individualism – collectivism dimension may help illuminate group dynamics; a CHC student may fear losing face by asking a foolish question, or causing the teacher to lose face by asking a question to which they do not know the answer. The uncertainty avoidance dimension describes the optimal degree of structure in a society; strong uncertainty avoidance is a trait of CHC cultures that are intolerant of ambiguity and have conventions in place to counter this; low uncertainty avoidance cultures are tolerant of divergent opinions and the unknown. In an educational context it can be argued that those from high uncertainty avoidance cultures will be less comfortable with the unfamiliar, with questioning the teacher and will be more concerned with giving the 'correct' answer.

These cultural-general tendencies may be useful in explaining the underpinnings of both home and international teachers' and students' previous educational experiences and expectations. When re-examined with cultural awareness the Chinese teacher-centred education system (the verb to 'teach' or 'jiao shu' translating as 'teach the book') is balanced by the

student-centred concept of 'yu ren' or the idea of 'cultivating a person' (Jin and Cortazzi 1998). Rote learning, a strategy often condemned by Western teachers, can be understood not as surface learning (a tactic for short-term academic success), but rather as deep learning, part of the Confucian tradition of memorizing prior to understanding, reflection and questioning (Biggs 1996; Lee 1996). In Chinese a question 'wenti' translates as a 'problem' which students do not wish to impose, but rather they expect teachers and classmates to be sensitive to their unasked questions [in Japan 'sasshi' means 'the ability to guess' (Gudykunst 1998)], and to allow time after class to discuss unresolved issues (Biggs 1996; Jin and Cortazzi 1998 Yifan Mandarin 2005). Behaviours such as conversation management vary across cultures with the Japanese sharing short turns as opposed to Americans who find 'long monologic' turns and the weighting of speech with the initiator appropriate (Yamada cited in Gudykunst 1998: 182).

However, one must guard against over-reliance on such cultural information, especially in regard to ascribing causal explanations of behaviour (Gudykunst 1998) as CHC and Western teachers and students do not form homogeneous groups (Ng 2001). It is intuitive that cultural behaviours may be adapted or rejected once students are no longer operating within their home culture; a student from a collective society need not feel under such strong obligation to their in-group once they have moved away from it (Eberhard, King cited in Lee 1996: 33). Students also have their individual motivations to achieve, and in responding to the educational environment in which they are studying, may adopt strategies most likely to be rewarded with academic success (Biggs 1996; Volet and Renshaw 1996; Watkins 1996).

Culture shock and adaption

Students transferring to higher education may suffer culture shock whether they are home or international, but for international students, especially those studying in a second language and alien educational culture, there are additional challenges. All may suffer emotional problems of late adolescence and young adulthood as well as academic stresses of dealing with new complex content and concepts. International students may additionally suffer problems related to relocating to a foreign culture, e.g. racism, language difficulties, separation and loneliness as well as their new role as ethnic ambassadors in their host country (Furnham and Bochner 1986; Kirby, Woodhouse and Ma 1996). Sojourners' lack of shared cultural norms and values may add to a sense of being out of control, which if from a high uncertainty avoidance culture, e.g. Japan will be extremely stressful (Gudykunst 1998).

The term 'culture shock' has been in use since 1960 when Oberg introduced it to codify the anxiety experienced in unfamiliar social settings. Oberg proposed a 'U' curve to represent the negative and then positive emotional responses to displacement; initial euphoria or 'honeymoon', followed by hostility to the host society, then a 'recovery' stage and ultimately 'adjustment' (Kim 1988). The concept had popular appeal and despite empirical research that denies its reliability (Church cited in Kim 1988: 25; Furnham and Bochner 1986), its potency as a model for sojourners' emotions persists especially in advice for international students. Culture shock

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is popularly presented as an entirely negative phenomenon; contemporary advice for international students coming to the United Kingdom makes grim reading as it cites contributors to culture shock as including: *climate* 'greyness and dampness', *food* 'bland or heavy', *language*, *dress* 'immodest, unattractive, comical or simply drab', *social roles* 'surpris(ing) or offen(sive)', '*rules' of behaviour* 'disorientating… complicated', *values* 'surprising… distressing' and suggests only adverse possible reactions to living and studying in a new environment, e.g. health worries and mental and emotional problems (UKCOSA 2004).

Kim (1988) proposes a multidimensional model of cross-cultural adaptation that recognizes the stress experienced in deculturation and acculturation but suggests a dynamic stress – adaptation – growth interplay in which stress has a positive function in stimulating change and advancement. Similarly Gudykunst (1998) suggests an optimal level of anxiety will facilitate cross-cultural communication. Kim (1988) suggests that a stranger's 'adaptive potential' (reflecting their cultural and racial background, their personality attributes and their preparedness for change) will predict the ease of their cross-cultural adaptation. Furnham and Bochner (1986) present a behavioural model of culture shock, a social skills training model, which seeks to 'de-emphasize the exotic' (p. 7) and rather likens cross-cultural communication situations to learning a new game where either one or both players do not know the rules. In research with overseas students in English Universities they developed an 'index of culture-distance', relating to an in-group – out-group scenario when comparing students' home culture to that in England (1986: 20). Defining cultures as 'near, intermediate or far' they proposed that the greater the culture gap the greater the degree of social difficulty experienced by international students. Given their findings, they question the assumed need for sojourners to adapt and propose instead culture learning to narrow the gap and thus address culture shock and identify a top ten of difficult social situations including at number one, making British friends.

Communicating with 'strangers'
Communication involves the construction and interpretation of messages: verbal, nonverbal, in writing or through artistic media. The meanings of such messages are not fixed but open to interpretation by both the sender and receiver, affected by perceptions of self and others. Communication taking place between interlocutors without a common culture may suffer from misunderstandings and be prone to stereotypes (Gudykunst 1998; Kim 1988) preventing successful intercultural communication (Allport 1954; Gudykunst 1998; Tajfel cited in Vivian and Brown 1995). Most people have limited experience of interacting with strangers (Gudykunst 1998) and there is evidence that, contrary to their hopes and expectations, international students may find themselves isolated from home students, socializing with fellow nationals or other international students thus reducing their opportunities for cross-cultural adaptation (Kim 1988), successful intercultural communication and thus affecting mental health (Furnham and Bochner 1986). Research has found that the responsibility for successful communication is too often placed entirely with the sojourner or stranger, relying on their ability to learn both language and

appropriate communication techniques with minimal awareness and action expected or offered from the hosts (Fennes and Hapgood 1997; Furnham and Bochner 1986; Kim 1988).

Throughout their work *The Chinese Learner,* Watkins and Biggs (1996) draw attention to the widespread misconceptions about students from the CHC; Volet and Renshaw (1996) highlight the propensity for teachers to rely on anecdotal evidence and extrapolation from the specific to the general where there is little 'systematic and theoretically-informed research' (p. 205) in defining international students from South East Asia (SEA). The acceptance of stereotypes is common in teaching international students (Biggs 1996; Volet and Renshaw 1996) and although sometimes a useful shorthand it is ultimately lazy and damaging. The act of social categorization may be seen as simply a natural way to order complex information and put people into social categories assuming shared group behaviours (Hewstone and Brown cited in Gudykunst 1998: 123; Simmel 1908/1971; Vivian and Brown 1995). Notwithstanding the fact that some stereotypes may be accurate, there is evidence that stereotypes of minority or out-groups are apt to be negative, inaccurate and prejudicial, and tend to persist if they go unchallenged. Even experiences of stereotype-disconfirming behaviour may be rationalized as exceptional or from an atypical individual and thus not challenge preconceptions (Vivian and Brown 1995). If stereotypes of the other are positive they may not be perceived as a problem, but it is the generalization and the anti-individualization of people that ultimately prevents successful communication and the development of deep relationships. International students and their work may also suffer from being exoticised (Fennes and Hapgood 1997), a situation in which they may be complicit, favouring this position as one in which they receive attention. Eva Hoffman (1989) talks of her status as an 'exotic stranger', how she is 'excited by my own otherness' but also realizes that this 'will become a treacherous condition' as it makes it hard to 'reclaim a state of ordinariness in which, after all, we want to live' (p. 179).

In reviewing the literature, Volet and Renshaw (1996) find a 'stereotyped, negative and static view of SEA students' learning' (p. 205). This stereotyping as a homogeneous group depicts SEA students as 'rote learners who rely on memorisation, lack critical analytical skills, and seldom question the content of what they read' (Pearson and Beasley 1996: 1). Jin and Cortazzi (1998), researching the experiences and perceptions of Western teachers working in Chinese schools and universities, report Western teachers as regarding Chinese students as 'diligent, thorough, persistent, friendly' but also 'weak (orally), 'unwilling' (in group tasks), 'shy,' 'passive,' 'quaint' and 'misguided' (p. 104). In their overview Watkins and Biggs (1996) note that by using their own 'polarities' (p. 270) to view CHC learners, Westerners inevitably misinterpret behaviours; teachers, who view participation as a sign of a healthy classroom culture, may encourage questions or at least expect students to ask for clarification, questions, however, may illicit inaccurate responses where in many Asian countries 'yes' can mean 'no', 'maybe' or simply 'I heard what you said' (Furnham and Bochner 1986; Yifan Mandarin 2005).

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Creativity through a cultural lens

With the caveat that cultures are not homogeneous, Ng (2001) argues that the different notions of 'self' inculcated in the West and in CHC cultures do impact on predispositions to creativity. Where the West encourages individuated behaviours such as self-determination and concepts of uniqueness, seen as important for creative practice, CHC cultures foster an interdependent self-construal, where filial piety is paramount, there is less concern with autonomy and independence and thus there is a tendency to conformity. Rudowicz (2004), reviewing the few empirical studies that explore creativity and CHC cultures, concludes that there is no universal concept of creativity and the fact that creativity is context-bound impacts on both teachers and students of art and design. In a qualitative study of Hong Kong secondary school art teachers, Lam and Kember (2006) found consistent links between teachers' conceptions of art and their approaches to teaching; teachers with an essentialist orientation (art for art's sake) adopted subject-centred teaching approaches, those with a contextualist orientation (art for life's sake) adopted student-centred approaches.

Educators in the creative fields have adopted terms such as 'deep' and 'surface' and assigned interpretations of what these concepts mean in regard to their teaching methods and delivery (Drew, Bailey and Shreeve 2002). Models of good teaching practice in Western art and design embrace heuristic project work with teacher as facilitator, encouraging students to take ownership of their own creativity and inculcating independent learning in a non-authoritarian environment which utilizes workshops and demonstrations, group work and peer critiques to share best practice and promote supportive feedback (Dineen and Collins 2005). Western design education seeks to present the design process as a series of sequential activities, 'specifying, researching, making, testing, refining and evaluating' (Dillon and Howe 2003: 290). There is a significant overlap between Western and CHC concepts of creativity (Cheng 2004) but there are also fundamental differences; in the West experimentation and innovation are valued, in the East technical mastery (Dineen and Collins 2005; Fung and Choi 2001). In Chinese art education repetitive exercises are used to develop skills; this belief in 'effort and diligence' is illustrated in a proverb that states 'you can grind an iron bar into a needle' (Fielding and Chung 1998; quotes from Tang and Biggs 1996: 159).

Whilst current governments in CHC countries have a strong vision for creative education, the pressure of a highly focused examination-based school system can, in practice, limit the freedom of art and design teachers and consequently, students' experiences of varied approaches to developing creativity (Cheng 2004; Lam and Kember 2006). Fielding and Siu (in Fung and Choi 2001: 174) found two traits in Chinese design students which militate against successful performance in a Western arts education system; design students had 'narrow, focused interests' and secondly the strong emphasis on 'two-dimensional techniques.'. In Mainland China there is an additional motive of using art to instil correct moral and spiritual values in students (Gardner cited in Biggs 1996: 55; Fielding and Chung 1998). In their own research in Mainland China, Fung and Choi (2001) conclude that contrary to the Western model, CHC arts education

posits 'one right way' to produce an artefact; the value is product- or performance-oriented. Furthermore, they also found many design educators cognizant of the limitations of CHC art and design education, motivated to change, but unsure as what to alter and how.

Using a Western lens to analyse practices in Chinese arts education it is tempting to oversimplify both systems and superiorize Western contemporary arts education as a process-led pedagogy, and to view non-Western students' often superior technical skills in a patronizing way. However, it is simplistic and naïve to think that Western design classes are homogeneous, that teachers do not feel external, assessment pressures and to imagine that in Western design classes students are interpreting their design briefs in one unique prescribed way. Evidence shows that in processing design briefs, students perceive a variety of interpretations, use their existing knowledge and creative intuition to find ways through the uncharted territory of the design project and consequently adopt learning strategies which range from product-focused to concept-focused (Dineen and Collins 2005; Drew, Bailey and Shreeve 2002). Arts education in the West prides itself on its multicultural approach; however, it is prone to exoticism of the non-Western whilst simultaneously excluding non-Western art from the contemporary; complex cultures are often viewed as primitive and reduced to a shorthand of colour and pattern. This Eurocentric cultural essentialism includes representing cultures by tourist souvenirs, which may have no relation to the cultures they seek to represent (Crouch 2000; Duncum 2000). The sophisticated technical ability in drawing and painting demonstrated by very young children in China is often negated by Western teachers as merely a result of the Chinese teacher-centred approach and emphasis on skills of copying necessary due to the fact that entry to higher level art education is by drawing examination (Gardner cited in Biggs 1996: 52; Fung and Choi 2001).

Intercultural communication in art and design education

The increased awareness of miscommunications that can arise between interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds has led to research into theories of intercultural communication. One response to the problems and frustrations of cultural misinterpretations and misunderstandings has seen the development of consciousness-raising activities in the form of intercultural communication training for teachers and students (Byram and Fleming 1998; Fantini and Smith 1997; Jin and Cortazzi 1998). This development is crucial due to increasingly international classrooms, and since globally, the teaching force represents a 'rather homogenous, privileged, and cross-culturally inexperienced majority' (Cushner 1994: 113–114). To increase effectiveness, avoid participants embracing oversimplified versions of others' cultures and to prevent stereotypes from being reinforced, it is suggested that training models should be structured so they go beyond simply giving information about others' cultures (Fennes and Hapgood 1997; Furnham and Bochner 1986; Sercu 1998), and additionally encourage openness (Fennes and Hapgood 1997), empathy and mindfulness (Gudykunst 1998; McAllister and Irvine 2002) where mindfulness raises awareness of the complexities of communication situations and militates against lazy stereotyping. In acknowledging that knowledge of

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one's interlocutors' worlds is useful, Byram, Nicholls and Stevens (2001) recognize that no teacher can 'have or anticipate' (p. 6) all the cultural information that they and/or their students might need, it is rather knowledge of the 'process of how social groups and social identities function' (p. 5) that will benefit intercultural communicators. A 'cultural synergy' model recognizes the added value of collaboration where diversity in cultures, communication styles and learning cultures are recognized, and also identifies the need for explicitness (Jin and Cortazzi 1998). The role of teacher as intercultural communicator shifts the emphasis from being the provider of all cultural information to the mediator between the home culture and those of strangers.

As recognized above, artistic expression, as a form of communication, can also be subject to intercultural misunderstandings and international students may find it difficult to gratify their aesthetic needs in an unfamiliar culture (Gudykunst 1998; Kim 1988); the academic context representing a second or even third culture with its own specialist behaviours, aesthetic sensibilities and language (Dillon and Howe 2003; Kim 1988; Kirby, Woodhouse and Ma 1996). In reviewing the literature, there is general agreement that it is important for teachers to be made aware of their own cultural conceptions and the implications for education in order for successful intercultural communication to take place (Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001; Fennes and Hapgood 1997; Goodman 1994; Williams 2001). Teachers should be conscious of the potential misunderstandings and conflict that may arise from different interpretations of events due to cultural differences (Cushner 1994; Furnham and Bochner 1986; Gudykunst 1998; Sercu 1998) and recognize the need to change their self-concept (Sercu 1998). In developing intercultural communication training programmes, it is important to provide information around which these concepts can be explored (Furnham and Bochner 1986); and the use of a culture-general framework is proposed (Gudykunst 1998; Sercu 1998). Goodman (1994) adapts Hofstede's dimensions of culture to devise a self-assessment exercise (see also Cushner 1994) about instructional styles. This exercise, used in initial teacher training or staff development, could be a useful way to introduce relevant concepts such as collectivism-individualism and power-distance. It is furthermore critical that reliable cultural informants or culture friends are utilized to avoid reinforcing stereotypes; exchange or international students or scholars could be invited to share their experiences (Furnham and Bochner 1986; Goodman 1994; Gudykunst 1998). Another suggestion is the logging and analysis of case studies of critical cultural incidents (Cushner 1994; Goodman 1994, Williams 2001), to be utilized in role-play exercises in order to experience first hand the ensuing emotions (Fennes and Hapgood 1997; Goodman 1994; Williams 2001).

Fashion is an international creative industry and The London College of Fashion (LCF) offers courses in fashion design and technology, management and marketing, communication, promotion and image creation, to students from over 70 countries, as well as having global academic and industrial links (www.fashion.arts.ac.uk/about-lcf.htm). LCF is one of the six colleges of the University of Arts London, which, with 16% of its students being international, is listed in the top 20 of UK universities for the recruitment of international students (UKCOSA 2007). I have lectured at LCF in fashion and

related subjects, both studio-based and theoretical, for over ten years since undertaking a PGCE student placement there in 1993, culminating in a full-time post on the Fashion Portfolio course, an introductory one year full-time course designed to develop fundamental skills in art, design and communication with a fashion focus (www.fashion.arts.ac.uk/docs/ Fashion_Portfolio. pdf). The Fashion Portfolio course is unusual, even in the global environment of LCF, in that the majority of students are international; including a large number of CHC students. Although not specifically tested in this area, techniques developed for intercultural communication including those explicitly addressing cultural differences have enormous potential to be utilized in creative subject areas, and it is in this environment that I partici- pated in and/or developed strategies to promote intercultural communication in a creative education.

In a paper highlighting the need for cross-cultural negotiation in Australian art and design practice, Crouch (2000) contends that visual lan- guage should strive to be inclusive, whilst Fennes and Hapgood (1997) sug- gest that the language of creativity should be used in intercultural training in ways that range from those that simply expose others to technical lan- guage to the promotion of the use of minority language vocabulary for important subject-specific terms. In recognition of the importance of enabling students to communicate effectively in the language of creativity, a 'Language of Fashion' module is core to the Fashion Portfolio course, giv- ing an opportunity to explicitly address the terminology of fashion design and garment construction. Students are taught in groups according to English language proficiency and are supported in developing their descrip- tive language as well as a personal subject-specific glossary, through project work encompassing both historical and contemporary fashion design and textiles. Teaching this module reinforced for me the necessity for all stu- dents of art and design to be exposed to the terminology of their specialism and as a course team we made efforts in this direction in other subject areas, e.g. visual studies and 3-D pattern-cutting where I was greeted by giggles from the Japanese students each time I asked them to get out their 'hasami' (scissors).

The group crit can be a highly charged and daunting experience for stu- dents, but is an integral part of any design project, providing a public forum to analyse and discuss outcomes. However, with awareness, the crit, as an informal exhibition of students' work, could be an ideal situation in which to expose students to different cultural aesthetics (Kramsch cited in Byram and Fleming 1998: 28). The teacher as facilitator should be sensitive that they do not dominate the discussion, but rather invite students to com- ment on their own and others' work, are mindful of comprehending skills such as perception checking, attending, following and comprehending skills (Gudykunst 1998). I was responsible for the revamp of a 3-D Accessories module on the Fashion Portfolio course; this module ran for the duration of the first term and incorporated market research, fashion forecasting, colour theory, materials, and 2-D and 3-D work. I felt that the previous format of a terms' worth of input and student work, followed by a project hand-in and summative assessment had potential for students los- ing their way, losing interest and ultimately losing the chance to be suc- cessful in this module. In conceiving an alternative approach to the delivery

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of the module, I took the opportunity to incorporate formative, informal mini-exhibitions of students' project work, as well as pre-assessment mini-crits where I encouraged students working in small groups to appraise each others' work against the stated assessment criteria. I feel that particularly in the early stages of the course it was beneficial for students to have the opportunity to see how their classmates approached the same tasks in different ways, and especially useful in dispelling the notion of there only being one approved way to approach a design brief. The project culminated in an exhibition and group crit followed by an invitation for students from other groups to view the work; this format provided an opportunity to share and voice opinions about the project and to rehearse creative language to be used in future crits.

Cultural artefacts (objects, photographs, drawings or film) are frequently used as inspiration in the creative industries and in college design projects. Fennes and Hapgood (1997) suggest that those interested in increasing intercultural awareness should engage in debate about the value of such artefacts as representations of culture, their cross-cultural aesthetic appeal and their cultural significance; whilst observational drawing of cultural objects can lead to greater analysis of them. To increase awareness and dispel myths about other cultures and relate to issues such as globalization it may be useful to analyse texts or textbooks from other countries in your subject area (Goodman 1994; Williams 2001). With this in mind, I deliberately adopted strategies to encourage intercultural communication and awareness in a Fashion Media project. First I implemented Cushner's (1994) concept of the cultural scavenger hunt starting with a lecture tracing the history of women's (fashion) magazines in Europe and the United States. I related their development to contemporary social and political factors, e.g. the spread of literacy and civil rights movements. Then, as a group we analysed fashion and lifestyle magazines from around the world, especially informative was the comparison of different editions of the same title, e.g. American, British and Italian versus the editions of *Vogue* published in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Aside from the fact that many home students had been unacquainted with the Asian editions of magazines that they considered Western, it was insightful for all to see the similarities and differences in editorial and advertising style, before embarking on a group project to research and produce their own fashion lifestyle magazines. The second strand of my approach was a light-hearted questionnaire entitled 'My Favourites' which I asked the students to complete after the magazine comparison exercise. It comprised 15 questions about their preferences covering their taste in the creative arts, e.g. music, art, film, as well as how they like to write (e.g. what with? what on?), how they like to approach academic work (e.g. independently or collaboratively) and how they organized their time. The idea behind the questionnaire is to facilitate group members codifying preferred learning styles, e.g. individual/collective and then for them to use that information to designate task responsibilities in a manner sensitive to these stated preferences. Cooperative learning is a strategy often adopted in arts education with potential for positive intercultural communication outcomes (Allport 1954; Cushner 1994). Group work comprises a triangular didactic 'you, me and a common theme' (Fennes and Hapgood 1997: 76) to be jointly undertaken; group work will be more successful when

differences between participants are minimized and commonalities stressed. The final strand to my intercultural approach to this class came with an exercise designed to make learning outcomes and tasks more transparent. Armed with a printout of the project brief and working in teams, I asked the students to unravel the aims, objectives and tasks by physically cutting and pasting the brief into what they considered explicit activities, to confer until they agreed on these and then as a whole class we discussed the different interpretations and how the project could now be separated into manageable chunks and these assigned to group members with reference to their previously stated learning preferences.

Another innovation on this course was the introduction of a Cultural Film Club showing films from students' home countries, including classic British, Hollywood and European films alongside films from Hong Kong, China and Japan. This scheme addressed concerns about students having opportunities to mix and meet other international and home students away from a formal classroom setting, as well as providing awareness raising and cultural reinforcement for students by the sharing of the cultural signif-icance of self-presentation such as costume, fashion, hair, make-up and self-decoration and furthermore provided (hopefully) informed inspiration for their design work (Fennes and Hapgood 1997).

Conclusion

In the foreword to *Developing Intercultural Competence in Practice*, Alison Phipps writes that 'intercultural communicative practice is a messy business' (Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001: viii). It is this very mess, and the dynamic process of research, experimentation, failure, success and peer evaluation, which should be appreciated by those involved in art and design education (Dillon and Howe 2003). Pearson argues that art educators have a 'uniquely influential role' in the mediation of cultural goods (in Duncum 2000: 171) and it is by recognizing existing diversity and adopting intercultural best practice from other fields of education that art and design education can proceed to minimize the 'communicative distance' (Gudykunst 1998: 107) between its multicultural participants and encourage 'mutual understanding and adapta-tion by choice, rather than assimilation' (Jin and Cortazzi 1998: 114).

In an increasingly multicultural world institutions which send or receive culture travellers should take a positive role in recognizing and ameliorat-ing the possible negative outcomes of intercultural interaction (Furnham and Bochner 1986) and be aware of the risks of making 'barriers to inter-cultural communication' instead of 'bridges for the learning of intercultural skills' (Jin and Cortazzi 1998: 98–99). Educators can play an important role in bridging cultural divides (Byram and Fleming 1998; Cushner 1994), because without cultural awareness, classroom discourse, which should offer opportunities for intercultural learning may actually, due to its struc-ture, prevent it (Jin and Cortazzi 1998).

My own efforts to encourage intercultural communication in my teaching highlighted for me both the dangers of making lazy cultural generalizations and the advantages of making one's expectations explicit. I also became increasingly convinced that behaviours were more likely to be context-bound or individually based than defined by nationality. Furthermore, any assump-tions I may have made about international and/or home students learning

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needs did not form an accurate picture but the strategies I initially adopted to assist international students, actually provided benefits for all. Reviewing the literature exposes a need for more research in art and design colleges to define teachers' and students' conceptions of a creative education in order to generate a model of creativity for our intercultural classrooms. Now that I am working abroad (in Hong Kong), I empathize even more with the situation of international students in London; living in a different society offers a heady mix of both tremendously exciting and extremely frustrating cultural opportunities and experiences.

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Suggested citation

Radclyffe-Thomas, N. (2007), 'Intercultural chameleons or the Chinese way? Chinese students in Western art and design education', *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* 6: 1, pp. 39–53, doi: 10.1386/adch.6.1.39/1

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