

Conference Abstract

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Does Teaching of Entrepreneurship Programs Require Differing Approaches Across Cultures?

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The significant growth in one knowledge-driven service industry, ie tertiary education, has resulted in Universities seeking international students not only for financial awards but also to bring in a diversity of norms and cultures to enrich the learning experience. The increase in migration from Asian countries as per Legat (1996) in the mid-nineties, has resulted in non-English speaking background (NESB) students entering Tertiary Institutes in large numbers, more so in the Australian and New Zealand market. This trend continues with more international fee paying students (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). More than 75,000 foreign students studied in New Zealand last year, earning the country \$2.5 billion and making education the fourth-largest export earner. Nearly 80% of all foreign fee paying students are from Asia and as described by Biggs (1996) of Confucian Heritage Culture (CFC). The Ministry of Education in New Zealand has identified many other potential benefits, including greater diversity of programmes; exposure to different cultures and perspectives; enhanced facilities and teaching; and a wider international network (McKinlay, 2002). At UNITEC Institute of Technology in Auckland, more than 60% of the students enrolled in the Business Faculty are international students.

With this dramatic increase in our classrooms of international students, the challenge for educational institutions and teachers is to be able to adopt innovative teaching strategies, that meets the legitimate needs and expectations of this group of international CHC students. This is even more so pronounced in the entrepreneurial programs like the Bachelors (BBIE) and Master of Business in Innovation and Entrepreneurship (MBIE), because as social scientists have postulated (Weber, 1964), Confucianism is hostile to entrepreneurship. Schaper and Volery (2004) highlight factors that are most commonly cited for entrepreneurship to occur, being an individual, an act, an organization and innovation. International students with a CFC background belong to collectivist societies (Hofstede, 1991) where personal relationships and contacts, the much cherished “guanxi” play an important role. This conflicts directly with the definition of an entrepreneur (Hisrich, 2004; Kurataka & Hodgetts, 2004; Kao, 2002) where individualism, self reliance and self-interest are emphasised. Therefore overcoming the mindset of CHC students towards learning via academic programs on how to be an entrepreneur becomes a challenge in the classroom. Another major problem of CHC students is that they are

lecture driven as opposed to learning through problem solving, an important approach used in teaching entrepreneurship.

This paper investigates the cultural learning environment of NESB/CHC students specially for courses in innovation and entrepreneurship. This paper also suggests teaching strategies to help in the development of discussion skills and problem solving, whether individually or in teams for CFC students in such programs. These are only two of the learning and teaching issues that act as hurdles in their learning process amongst many. This paper accordingly proposes a range of classroom practices, which enable NESB students to be independent thinkers with a more practical and applied approach to learning; in addition to developing communication, presentation and inter-personal skills, skills that are important and valued in entrepreneurs.

Therefore, the overall benefit students vest in a degree (in entrepreneurship, for example) is translated into providing better career opportunities in their home country (cf. Cannon, 2002). Hellstén (2002) believes another expectation of international students is of increased intercultural exchange for the benefit of improving professional and language skills, both written and verbal. International students expect to complete their study within the expected timeframe and to enhance their English language ability, to increase the chance of getting a 'good' job back home (Peterson et al, 1999) or to be able to immigrate to their host country and start a new venture.

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