

## Research Article

# Building Intercultural Competence One “Patch” at a Time

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This paper describes a program called *Patches* that was implemented to assist a group of Australian and Malaysian pre-service teachers to enhance their intercultural competence through their involvement in a series of reciprocal learning activities. Each learning experience was considered a “patch” that eventually created a “quilt of intercultural learning.” The purpose of this study was to enhance the intercultural competence of domestic and international students through organized intercultural activities, through a series of reflective writing sessions, and mutual engagement on a common project. The effectiveness of the *Patches* program was analysed in accordance with Deardorff’s elements of intercultural competence. The qualitative findings indicate that both cohorts of preservice teachers showed elements of intercultural competence through participation in the program, with both groups reporting a deeper appreciation and understanding of how to communicate more effectively in intercultural contexts.

## 1. Introduction

Globalisation of the world’s economic, political, technological, and environmental systems has resulted in the need for academic institutions to prepare graduates with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to work effectively in the global arena. Universities across Australia agree that the development of intercultural competence or the “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations” [1, page 238], is a key priority in preparing graduates for the global workforce.

As a nation with a successful track record in attracting international students to study in both onshore and offshore courses [2], Australian universities are at the forefront of globalization in higher education. Indeed, Australia is the third largest exporter of higher education to South and East Asian countries [3]. It is therefore important for Australian educators to consider how their courses can maximise intercultural learning opportunities for domestic and international students.

Both domestic and international students need to obtain at least a “minimal level of intercultural competence in order to operate effectively in an increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse society and globalised economy” [4, page 414]. Eisenchlas and Trevaskes [4] propose that is only through intergroup communication that domestic and international students become competent communicators and develop the skills and attitudes necessary to breakdown cultural barriers.

How to assess intercultural competence, however, has not been a strong point for Australian universities. First, intercultural competence is a complex concept, and until recently, there has been little agreement amongst scholars about how intercultural competence should be defined [1, 5–9]. Without a clear definition, the measurement of intercultural competence and its associated competencies has been difficult. Deardorff’s [1] study, however, is the first researcher to provide consensus from expert intercultural scholars and academic administrators on the core components of intercultural competence, and it is for this reason that the present study will use Deardorff’s model as a basis

for exploring the intercultural competence within a group of preservice teachers comprised of domestic (Australian) and international (Malaysian) students.

Another reason why higher education institutions have been slow to measure intercultural competence is that they often assume that intercultural competence naturally develops as a result of domestic and international students sharing learning spaces [10]. However, intercultural competence is not something that automatically results when people from different nationalities and cultures are brought together at the same institution [11]. Studies suggest that there is often little interaction with high levels of disinterest shown between domestic and international students when left to their own devices [12]. Zhao and Wildermeersch [13] propose that there may be two explanations for this lack of social interaction. First, in an attempt to relieve homesickness, insecurity, and loneliness, international students tend to form a conational subculture to support themselves emotionally and socially in the host country [14]. Second, local students tend to be rather passive and wait for international students to initiate conversation [14].

Volet and Ang [15] examined international university student interactions in culturally mixed groups and found that given the freedom to choose, students preferred to work in homogenous cultural/national groups. This tendency was attributed to the familiarity and sense of belonging provided by a peer group comprised of members from the same or a similar culture. When students were forced by circumstances to form culturally diverse groups; however, both domestic and international students found the experience positive. Despite reporting the experience as positive, students did not seek further involvement in culturally and linguistically diverse teams upon completion of the work task. Volet and Ang [15] concluded that unless student group work in multicultural teams is well structured, students will miss critical learning opportunities to further develop their intercultural competence. Similarly, Briguglio [16] argued that deliberate and structured interventions, that promote reciprocal learning among students of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, are vital if students are to acquire intercultural competence.

The need for intercultural competence is particularly evident in classrooms where educators are working increasingly with multicultural and multilingual students. Intercultural competence amongst educators and students is deemed to be of both practical and strategic importance in the university environment [17]. Indeed, several scholars believe that our future rests upon the abilities of educators to assist students to interact effectively with people from cultures different from their own [18]. Similarly, Sercu [19, page 58] argued that educators are in the best position, “to help their pupils relate their own culture to foreign cultures, to compare cultures and to empathize with foreign culture’s points of view.” This process is true at any level of education.

Within faculties of Education, there remains a great need for an articulated approach to assist preservice teachers in improving their intercultural competence as well as the skills and attitudes to be able to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students, once they graduate

and become professional teachers [20, 21]. We argue that teacher education programs are in an excellent position to provide opportunities for domestic and international preservice teachers to collaborate and engage in meaningful intercultural experiences that will enhance their cultural knowledge and skills, so that they can communicate and teach successfully in a global context. Below Deardorff’s conceptual model of the core components of intercultural competence is used in the present study as a guide to explore domestic and international preservice teachers’ intercultural competence as a result of an intercultural learning experience.

*1.1. Deardorff’s Model of Intercultural Competence.* Deardorff’s [1, 22, 23] model of intercultural competence was developed in consultation with a group of institutional administrators and internationally known intercultural experts. Together these intercultural experts and administrators agreed that a range of components contribute to the development of intercultural competence. These key components primarily involve communication and particular behavior in intercultural contexts. The key elements recognized by 80% of the intercultural experts and administrators are summarized in Table 1 and are used to analyze data in the current study.

Deardorff suggested that the components of intercultural competence develop by degree, and having components at the lower levels of competency enhances the upper levels. Elements at the lower levels of competency include: requisite attitudes (respect, openness, and curiosity), knowledge and comprehension (cultural self-awareness, deep understanding of culture, and sociolinguistic awareness), and skills (listening, analysing, etc.). Elements at the upper levels of competency include internal and external outcomes. Internal outcomes involve an “...internal shift in one’s frame of reference,” whereas external outcomes manifest as “behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations” [22, page 196].

The aim of this paper is to review a program designed to support intercultural competence amongst domestic and international students by creating an environment in which students engage in reciprocal intercultural learning experiences. Qualitative data is analysed in relation to Deardorff’s components of intercultural competence. In the following section, a brief description of the *Patches* program is given before detailing the research methodology.

*1.2. Overview of the Patches Program.* Led by a team of lecturers from a Faculty of Education in an Australian University, the *Patches* program provides a supportive framework for group interaction, whilst allowing international and domestic students to author for themselves the nature and extent of their involvement in a series of intercultural learning tasks. The process of negotiating and implementing these activities forms the basis for establishing meaningful relationships between the two groups of students in the program. While most such “interventions” are conceived as unidirectional (e.g., assisting international students to adjust to the Australian academic culture and context), the *Patches*

TABLE 1: Deardorff's elements of intercultural competence.

Element of intercultural competence	Indicators
(1) Requisite attitudes	(i) Respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity) (ii) Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment) (iii) Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty).
(2) Knowledge and comprehension	(i) Cultural self-awareness, deep understanding, and knowledge of culture (including contexts, role, and impact of culture and others' world views) (ii) Culture-specific information (iii) Sociolinguistic awareness
(3) Skills	(i) To listen, observe, and interpret (ii) To analyse, evaluate, and relate
(4) Desired internal outcome	<i>Informed frame of reference/filter shift:</i> (i) Adaptability (to difference communication styles and behaviours; adjustment to new cultural environments) (ii) Flexibility (selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviours; cognitive flexibility) (iii) Ethnorelative view (iv) Empathy
(5) Desired external outcome	Behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some degree.

program frames intercultural learning as a reciprocal process in which the students (domestic and international) benefit from their participation in lecturer-scaffolded and peer-initiated social activities, weekly reflective writing workshops and an end of semester poster presentation depicting their intercultural journey. The highly active and engaging tasks in the program promote students' learning from each other and provide students with insights into each other's cultures and social practices, thereby increasing their mutual respect and understanding. An earlier published paper (see [24]) describes the intercultural learning activities comprising the *Patches* program in more detail.

## 2. Research Methodology

*2.1. Participants and Procedure.* This paper reports on the first iteration of the *Patches* program which involved a sample of 58 Malaysian preservice teachers who were completing the second year of their Bachelor of Education course in Australia as part of a transnational teacher education program as well as a sample of 14 Australian preservice teachers in the fourth year of their Bachelor of Education course. Participants were divided into groups of approximately 4 Malaysian students to 1 Australian student. The Australian preservice teachers were enrolled in the service learning Pathway of the core subject: Inclusive Education and self-selected to work with the Malaysian students as part of their 20-hour voluntary commitment to service learning. Service learning, as a concept, takes a "critical" social justice approach where students have opportunities to realise "real-world" learning beyond the classroom. Service learning in this project included opportunities to experience diversity in people's cultures, backgrounds, abilities, and needs and, in the process have their assumptions about the world challenged [25].

The *Patches* program ran over 9 weeks in semester 1 and was specifically designed to promote equal and reciprocal relationships among Malaysian and Australian preservice teachers. Together, the Malaysian and Australian preservice teachers were required to engage in a common task (critical reflective writing tasks) as well as three organised social activities throughout the semester. The three interactive, intercultural activities included: (1) an organised visit to the *Cultural Precinct* of Brisbane (the Queensland Museum, the Gallery of Modern Art, e.g.); (2) an *Amazing Race*, where groups competed with each other in a circuit around the university campus (the purpose of which was to familiarise the Malaysian students with the layout of the campus); and (3) *A Poster Presentation* at the end of the program, in which the students displayed photographs and written text to depict and celebrate their intercultural learning journey. In addition to these three faculty-organised activities, the mixed groups of Australian and Malaysian students participated in at least another 12 hours engaged in informal activities, which were self-initiated and occurred largely off campus and outside university hours (e.g., fishing, cooking dinner together, and playing football). While the domestic students had 12 hours of engagement to fulfill for the *Service-learning Pathway* component of their program, it should be noted that all domestic students exceeded this time frame, some by many hours, as over the course of the semester genuine friendships grew between the Australian and Malaysian participants, and they began to socialize as any other group of young people might. These additional extra-curricular activities were unexpected by the research team and were viewed with great interest as shall be explained later in this paper.

*2.2. Data Collection.* Previous studies that have attempted to measure intercultural competence have relied largely on qualitative data methods, such as student interviews, student

presentations, observations, student portfolios, professor evaluations, and to a lesser extent quantitative data taken from pre- and posttest instruments. Consistent with previous qualitative studies, the data collected in the present study included samples of students' reflective writing (voluntarily submitted by the students) and focus group interviews. Of the 14 Australian and 58 Malaysian preservice teachers in the program, 11 Australian and 48 Malaysian students granted permission for us to report on the data obtained from a final reflective writing activity. The reflective writing task involved students responding to 10 open-ended questions such as, "In what ways is the *Patches* program contributing to your learning about intercultural communication?" and "In what ways do you think your learning in the *Patches* program will contribute to your future work as a teacher in schools?" Eight Australian and 47 Malaysian students also agreed to participate in small focus group interviews (4–6 participants), which were also held at the end of the program. The students responded to semistructured focus group questions such as, "How has your engagement in the *Patches* program affected your confidence in interacting with others who are culturally and linguistically different from you?"

**2.3. Data Analysis.** The focus group interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. To begin with, the focus group transcriptions and reflective writing responses were read by each researcher in order to develop familiarisation with the data. Next, theoretical thematic analysis [26] occurred where the researchers read the focus group transcriptions and reflective responses thoroughly for evidence (i.e., key words and phrases) of the five key components of intercultural competence as defined by Deardorff's [1, 22, 23] description of each component (see Table 1). Once the research data had been coded, the researchers crosschecked their codings to ensure that the research data had been coded reliably. Inconsistencies in coding were solved by group consensus.

**2.4. Findings.** The findings of the study are described with reference to the elements of Deardorff's model of intercultural competence and include requisite attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills deemed necessary for intercultural competence. Examples illustrating these intercultural components are then followed by examples of higher level competencies-desired internal outcomes and desired external outcomes for intercultural competence. Data from the Australian preservice teachers is given before reporting on the data from the Malaysian preservice teachers, providing insight as to how the intervention was experienced by two different cultural groups in relation to acquiring greater intercultural competence.

**Requisite Attitudes.** Deardorff's research ranked "requisite attitudes" at the lower end of the scale of what participants in her study indicated were needed to express intercultural competence. Respect (valuing other cultures and cultural diversity), being open to people from other cultures and withholding judgments about others, and possessing enough curiosity to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty were included

as requisite attitudes. The research data provided strong evidence with all Australian preservice teachers stating that they were keen to engage their Malaysian peers in dialogue in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of Malaysia's multidimensional culture and customs. In addition, one-third of the Australian participants were planning to travel and/or work in Malaysia or other southeast Asian countries in the future and saw their participation in the *Patches* program as an exciting opportunity to gain insight into Malaysia's "way of life." The following statement indicates an openness to learn more about the Malaysian students and a willingness to confront uncertainty:

*I liked the idea of expanding my global network and opening up opportunities for the future. I hoped to learn many things from this experience [participating in the Patches program], to learn about an unfamiliar culture, country and religion. Also to learn a little about teaching and learning with regards to ESL [English as second language] students (Female Participant 1, Reflective Log).*

Although some of the Australian preservice teachers did not always understand the customs associated with Malaysian culture, it appeared that the students recognised that their customs were important to the Malaysian culture and identity and expressed a respect for the Malaysian students, in following the customs of their culture:

*I am very open to other cultures and I feel that it is up to an individual to choose their own life choices. In saying this I do feel that some of the customs in Malaysian culture are unfair to women and do not really give women many rights in some areas. However as I have never lived in that type of environment I cannot speak knowingly on the topic (Female Participant 10, Reflective Log).*

The majority of Australian students described themselves as very open to the experience of associating with the Malaysian students outside of formal classroom tutorials. Whilst there were times where they were challenged by their cultural differences, at other times they were delighted by their similarities. The similarities they shared were simply being young university students who liked the same kinds of music, movies and having to balance school/work/life priorities.

**Knowledge and Comprehension (Cultural and Sociolinguistic Awareness) and Skills (Listen, Observe, Interpret, Analyse, Evaluate, and Relate).** Deardorff's model suggests that individuals develop a heightened cultural and sociolinguistic awareness through listening, observing, and interpreting other cultures. It was evident that the questions posed by the Malaysian preservice teachers during discussions prompted all the Australian preservice teachers to reflect more deeply about their own values, beliefs, and norms, and how to best communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds. For example, one Australian preservice teacher and his group visited a display of Aboriginal history in Australia. When he was asked, in relation to this display, about

Australia's former White Australia Policy, the Australian preservice teacher commented:

*It was challenging as I felt as though it was partly my fault, being part of my history. I felt I had to take ownership of the actions from the past. I felt guilty (Male Participant 6, Service-Learning Log).*

The conversation continued with the Malaysian students describing how indigenous people in their country had been treated in a similar manner. This exchange caused the Australian preservice teacher to interpret how dominance of one culture over another occurs in countries around the world, and he was able to relate this new knowledge to his revised understanding of the world.

One area of concern for many of the Malaysian students was the alcohol consumption by Australian students. Most of the Malaysians were Muslim and did not drink alcohol. One of the Australian participants described a conversation she had with her group, and how it made her think about how cultural customs generally go unchallenged. It was through this interaction that she began to think more deeply about the idea of her own culture, and how it might be seen by someone from another culture. She began by stating the question asked by her Malaysian peer: "Do you drink to make yourself happy?" and responded by saying:

*...actually, I drink because it's accepted and my friends are drinking at the same time. It's a social activity you do together. I don't do it to fix a problem or to become aggressive. Just, yeah, they made you realize what you see as normal and natural here isn't actually normal or natural across all cultures. (Female Participant 6, Focus Group).*

Several of the Australian students commented that in trying to understand Malaysian culture they came to interpret their own prejudices and/or stereotypical viewing of others:

*I have been learning much about the life of a Muslim woman which has been a great learning curve helping me to break down my views, beliefs and stereotype of the Islamic faith and life...I feel that these first-hand experiences ...have been so worthwhile and extremely invaluable and have made me less prejudiced and more tolerant and accepting (Female Participant 3, Service-learning Log).*

Another student described the need to be respectful when speaking with others and to be culturally aware in order to avoid offending the other person. She described her process to communicate with her group to ensure that she was being understood:

*I could see they were a bit puzzled with what I asked and I found myself rephrasing the question two or three times. I'd say the same question three times before I got them to speak. I'd be like, so what are you doing this afternoon? Are you going anywhere? That kind of thing... (Female Participant 10, Focus Group).*

The above comments indicated that Australian preservice teachers expanded their knowledge and understanding of Malaysian culture through their daily interactions with each other and through listening and using their observation skills, they became more effective communicators.

*Desired Internal Outcome (Cognitive Flexibility, Empathy).* There was some evidence that gaining a deeper knowledge and appreciation of Malaysians and their religious beliefs and customs led Australian preservice teachers to take an advocacy role for their Malaysian peers, as they tried to dispel inaccurate beliefs held by other Australian students. The majority of participants showed a strong empathetic response towards Malaysian students and their experiences of living and studying in a foreign country. As a result, they proactively encouraged friendships between Australian and Malaysian students. This is reflected in the following participant's response.

*I see the Muslim religion in a way that is no longer "threatening" to some degree. I believe this is an important point because I don't think that many Australian's are aware of what it means to be Muslim and this can therefore lead to prejudice. As I have been given this opportunity, I have spoken to many people about my encounters which have hopefully made a positive impact on other people and taken away some concern that others may have had (Female Participant 12, Reflective Log).*

Importantly, their involvement in the *Patches* program made it possible for Australian preservice teachers to think about themselves differently.

*I think it's definitely increased my confidence because you really do realise that there's so many similarities between you. Although there are differences, they're not obstacles. I think even though there are some cultural differences, they're not obstacles to becoming friends or forming some type of relationship (Female Participant 1, Focus Group).*

*I think that the program has definitely taught me to not make any assumptions about other people and their culture/beliefs and knowledge. (Female Participant 2, Focus Group).*

Through their interactions with their Malaysian peers, Australian preservice teachers described how they had learned to be more flexible in planning activities. For example, one participant went to the movies with his group but was embarrassed by his perceived self-thoughtlessness when the group members left the movie to pray:

*Again my naivety over-clouded their need to pray and halfway through the movie they left and shortly returned. I apologized at the end of the movie for not catering for their needs to which they replied that they did not mind (Male Participant 6, Service-Learning Log).*

Similar kinds of interactions resulted in several of the Australian preservice teachers making considerations for prayer when undertaking future activities with their Muslim group members.

*Desired External Outcome (Behaving and Communicating Appropriately and Effectively).* Their knowledge and understandings gained through their dialogues with the Malaysian students prompted the Australian preservice teachers to commence thinking about how they could work more effectively with students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds when they began their careers in teaching. A typical response was as indicated below:

*This experience will unquestionably support my teaching abilities. Having an awareness of the Muslim culture now means that I will have a better understanding and a method of approach in circumstances where it may be an issue. (Male Participant 1, Reflective Log).*

Service learning provided the Australian preservice teachers with an opportunity to experience diversity, question their assumptions, and consider how they could relate their new understandings to their teaching careers. The Australian preservice teachers' reflections, however, did not articulate how their insights might translate into appropriate pedagogical practices in the classroom when teaching CALD students. Whilst the *Patches* program appeared to contribute to important shifts in behaving and communicating effectively with Malaysian preservice teachers, a limitation of the present study is that it is not possible to determine how the Australian preservice teachers' future teaching might be enhanced as a direct result of their participation in the program. The following section describes the Malaysian preservice teachers' perspectives of their involvement in the program, in relation to Deardorff's model.

*Requisite Attitudes (Respect, Openness, and Curiosity).* Similar to the Australian preservice teachers wanting to know about Malaysian culture, all the Malaysian preservice teachers showed a strong curiosity and willingness to learn about the Australian way of life. A typical response from the Malaysian preservice teachers was that they were excited to meet Australian students and learn more about Australia. They saw this as an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the local way of life so that they could become more comfortable living and studying in Australia.

*When we were introduced to our partner, I was excited, wanted to know her, and in a way get to know Australia more. (Female Participant 3, Reflective Log).*

*The most interesting part about the Patches program is that we had a chance to mix with the Australian students...and thus, helped me to learn to adapt to the new environment here (Female Participant 14, Reflective Log).*

*Knowledge and Comprehension (Cultural and Sociolinguistic Awareness) and Skills (Listen, Observe, Interpret, Analyse, Evaluate, and Relate).* The Malaysian preservice teachers showed a sense of cultural and sociolinguistic awareness similar to the Australian preservice teachers. They demonstrated a strong sense of pride for their country and their customs, but viewed conversing with local Australian preservice teachers as an excellent opportunity to gain confidence in using the English language. They also observed sociolinguistic differences and adapted their language accordingly.

*During our cultural precinct visit, we have a talk regarding our culture and our partner did ask a lot of question regarding our culture especially about our religion. This happened due to the way of how we dress ourselves. I am very proud that I can be my country ambassador by explaining to others about our beloved country and its cultures (Female Participant 14, Reflective Log).*

*She asked things like the purpose of us wearing scarves, halal food and generally about Malaysia. We tried our best to explain clearly to answer her questions to the point that she became excited to visit Malaysia (Female Participant 19, Reflective Log).*

Indeed, one of the Australian preservice teachers arranged to complete her next practicum in a school in Malaysia. Her group members helped her in choosing what they thought would be appropriate clothing for a teacher in Malaysia and provided names of introduction to their friends and families back home. The Malaysian preservice teachers described how having the opportunity to interact with native English speakers helped to enhance their own English proficiency.

*The Patches program was an opportunity for us, Malaysian students, to befriend with local students as well as enhance our English proficiency in communicating (Female Participant 9, Focus Group).*

They also described how these interactions taught them some of the more subtle nuances of language that they would not have learned without being immersed in a native-speaking culture, thus increasing their knowledge on sociolinguistic awareness.

*The way we communicate with others might be a little bit different from Australians. For example, back in Malaysia, we have to address our lecturers with the title either "Miss" or "Madam" however, here in Australia, we can simply call our lecturers by their [first] names (Female Participant 43, Focus Group).*

*Desired Internal Outcome (Informed Frame of Reference/Filter Shift).* Most Malaysian preservice teachers reflected on the value of learning about the Australian culture and how this experience would enhance their confidence in getting

to know others of different cultural backgrounds in the future. Many Malaysian students reported having a rather ethnocentric view of the world prior to studying abroad in Australia, but that this view had been challenged and changed:

*I learnt to be open to other cultures. During interactions with other program participants, I learnt new cultural values, norm, and beliefs that cannot be learnt elsewhere. And I also learnt to understand and be open about differences between cultures. This practice in fact has help me to get to know people better, especially local people, as they are more comfortable interacting with people who are open to them (Male Participant 2, Reflective Log).*

*This program also helps me to get rid of ethnocentrism in myself. I learnt that I should not judge other's cultural practice and expectations based on my culture's point of view as it is very unfair for the other culture (Female 6, Reflective Log).*

Like the Australians, the Malaysian preservice teachers learned to be more flexible in their communications with others and to be more accepting of others' viewpoints and behaviors, but they did not articulate how their experiences and learning from their involvement in the *Patches* program might enhance their teaching in the future when working with CALD students.

*Desired External Outcome (Behaving and Communicating Appropriately and Effectively).* The Malaysian preservice teachers described how they altered their natural style of communication for the Australian context without compromising their own cultural identity. For example, one student stated the following:

*I learn to apply politeness in daily communication. Even though Asian stresses on the politeness in term of communication or behavior, I personally [find it] hard to say thank you to people unless the deeds are very clearly shown. In contrast, in Brisbane, I could see the... citizen always greet and say thank you even for the smallest deeds such as the bus driver, the seller and to their friends. I find it very positive in a way that they show some gratitude and appreciations to other people (Female Participant 19, Reflective Log).*

In order to participate more fully in the Australian context, comments such as that above were followed by action where the Malaysian preservice teachers altered their behavior to match their words.

### 3. Discussion

By examining the perspectives of Malaysian and Australian preservice teachers, this paper provides some evidence to suggest that a purposeful and well-supported intervention

in the form of a semester long unit such as the *Patches* program is an effective way in enhancing preservice teachers' intercultural competence. The *Patches* program was designed to facilitate intercultural competence through the intercultural experiences that occurred during both structured and unstructured academic and social activities. Qualitative data (reflective logs, focus groups) was collected from participants and analysed with respect to the specific intercultural competencies identified in Deardorff's [1, 22, 23] model. The reported data provided qualitative evidence that is consistent with Deardorff's [1, 22, 23] model. All the Australian and Malaysian preservice teachers showed the requisite attitudes of genuine respect, openness, and curiosity towards each other by showing a desire to learn more about each other as individuals but also about their respective cultures. Briguglio [16] argued that the ability to question, probe, discuss, and analyse linguistic and cultural issues is an important first step in the process of becoming interculturally competent. Dialogue among the Australian and Malaysian preservice teachers often centred around exploring the similarities and differences between their cultures. Being of similar ages, both the domestic and international preservice teachers shared a love of music, socializing, eating, shopping, and engaging in outdoor activities together. These preservice teachers were equally eager to explore their differences. The Australian preservice teachers were particularly interested in learning more about Muslim religion and Malaysian customs. The Malaysian preservice teachers were keen to learn more about Australian patterns of life.

Part of this interactive process involved the preservice teachers becoming more sociolinguistically aware. In their desire not to offend one another, students learnt to overcome sociolinguistic barriers by including each other in conversations, rewording questions, and explaining the meaning of words. This led to a heightened awareness of how to communicate in respectful manner with others that are CALD.

Further learning took place at an intercultural level, where Australian and Malaysian preservice teachers used their skills of observation, listening, interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating, resulting in deeper levels of appreciation of their own and others' cultural beliefs. Zhao and Wildermeersch [13, page 55] argued that higher education is not only about "transmitting knowledge, skills, and social values to students; it should provide opportunities for individuals to come into the world, to know who they are and where they stand, to have a better sense of who others are, and how to respond to them." The *Patches* program assisted the domestic and international preservice teachers, think about the complexities of their own cultural values, rules, and lifestyle as well as to accept alternative cultural viewpoints.

Elements at the upper levels of intercultural competency, that is, desirable internal and external outcomes, were not articulated strongly by the Australian and Malaysian preservice teachers. However, both groups of preservice teachers showed the beginnings of both desirable internal and external outcomes. The intercultural journey appeared to have positive effects personally and to a lesser extent professionally for these preservice teachers. Both the domestic

and the international preservice teachers reflected that their personal experience in the program gave them a greater appreciation and empathy for others of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A positive external outcome of the program was that both the Australian and Malaysian preservice teachers also spoke about their desire to become more culturally sensitive to others by drawing upon their experiences in the *Patches* program. A limitation of the current study, however, is that we are unable at present to determine from the responses of the preservice teachers whether their understandings and learnings gained in the *Patches* program may assist them in working with CALD students in the future.

#### 4. Summary of the Major Findings

- (i) Both domestic and international preservice teachers reported a high level of curiosity and enthusiasm for learning about cultures different from their own and demonstrated a respect for cultural differences.
- (ii) Both domestic and international preservice teachers showed an awareness of sociolinguistic differences in communication and adapted their communication accordingly.
- (iii) Both domestic and international preservice teachers reported desirable internal and external outcomes from working with individuals from cultures different from their own, but these aspects of intercultural competence were not explained at a sophisticated level. In the future, the academic educators involved in the program need to support the preservice teachers in reflecting upon and articulating both personal and professional changes as a result of the *Patches* program.
- (iv) The researchers found Deardorff's model to be a useful heuristic for exploring intercultural competence among domestic and international preservice teachers. In the future, research should continue focusing on validating the components of intercultural competence, examining the conditions that enhance intercultural competence, and developing a sound measure of this multifaceted construct.

#### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study reviewed a program designed to foster intercultural competence by helping domestic and international students to appreciate and understand different cultures through reciprocal learning activities. Deardorff's model of intercultural competence proved to be a useful framework for exploring the intercultural competence of domestic and international preservice teachers. Findings from the qualitative data collected from participants were consistent with the specific components of intercultural competence posited by Deardorff [1, 22, 23].

The program promoted students to actively think about themselves in relation to their own culture, giving them

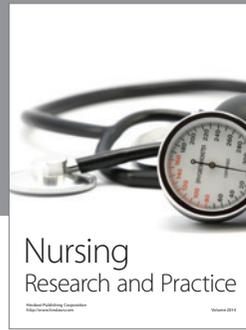
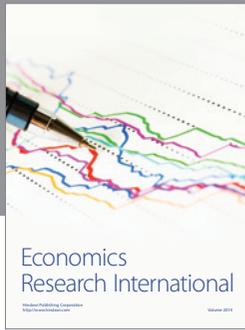
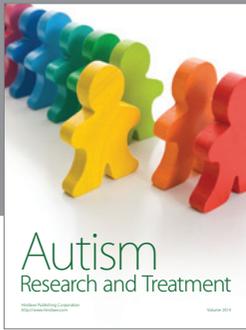
a sense of who they are, and how their values differed from others. Through actively engaging in cross-cultural conversations, participants showed an appreciation of diverse perspectives. Active involvement in this program extended their knowledge about diversity in people's cultures, backgrounds and contributed to a reduction in stereotyping. The participants demonstrated an understanding of how to communicate with individuals of different cultures in a sensitive and respectful manner. The findings suggested that programs such as *Patches* can play an important role in fostering intercultural competence among students of different cultural backgrounds.

The findings also suggest that whilst a structured well-managed intervention approach designed by educators does facilitate the enhancement of intercultural competence amongst domestic and international students, students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are also highly capable of organising social engagements to further build on the strong rapport that was established in the university setting. Finally, it should be noted that the *Patches* program was designed for domestic and international undergraduate students and not specifically for preservice teachers. As a consequence, the intercultural knowledge, skills, and understanding gained from undertaking this program are not domain specific and could be embedded in educational courses across a range of disciplines (e.g., business and law) as well as settings (e.g., schools, higher education institutes). To further assess the reliability of the present study's findings, future research should focus on developing a sound measure of intercultural competence that can be completed by participants prior to and following their involvement in programs such as *Patches*. A mixed-method approach where both qualitative and quantitative data is collated will also enhance our understanding of how intercultural competence may be developed further, so that graduates are prepared to work in a global workforce.

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