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A Critical Analysis of the Intercultural Communication Training Industry

**Thesis submitted by
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In January 2010**

**For the degree of Master by Research (Anthropology)
James Cook University, Townsville**

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STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

This thesis has been made possible through the support of the following people:

Supervisors:

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DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics. Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee, approval number: 2799.

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27.01.2010

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Abstract

Cross-cultural training (CCT) is a form of people skills training aimed at facilitating the development of intercultural communicative competence and cultural sensitivity. Since the 1960s, cross-cultural training has developed into the product of a small, multinational, commercial industry. CCT is predominantly provided through day long training workshops and the primary consumers of CCT, within Australia, are public sector departments and service providers. CCT workshops attempt to provide trainees with an understanding of culture that will encourage cultural sensitivity and appropriate behaviours during intercultural encounters. However, 'culture' is a contested concept; there is no universally accepted definition, or theory, of culture. Over the past two hundred years the discipline of anthropology has produced multiple theories on the nature and workings of this elusive concept. In recent years, some postmodernist anthropologists have even begun to question the utility and descriptive force of 'culture', arguing that the concept promotes essentialist, deterministic and divisionary conceptions of alterity. The existence of a plethora of theories on the nature and influences of 'culture' raises questions as to which conceptions of culture CCT courses are adhering to and promoting. This thesis addresses these questions through an exploration and critical analysis of the contents and influences of cross-cultural training courses.

The primary aims of this thesis are: firstly, to determine how CCT courses conceptualise culture; secondly, to determine the relationship between CCT conceptions of culture and anthropological culture theory and thirdly, to examine the influence of CCT on trainees' orientations towards diversity. Literature reviews are used to explore the theories which inform CCT content and the relationships between CCT theory, CCT content and anthropological culture theory. Information on training content is obtained through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Personal participation in an Indigenous cultural awareness training course and an online intercultural business communication course enable an analysis of the conceptions of culture presented within training programs. Further information on training content is provided through a series of six semi-structured interviews with CCT producers and consumers and an analysis of training materials provided by CCT companies and trainers. The interview findings are subjected to a qualitative comparison with CCT teachings and the stages of cultural competence outlined in Bennett's (1986; 1993) "Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity". These comparisons reveal the relative influence of CCT on participants' orientations towards diversity and understandings of culture. Training materials and CCT theories of culture are subjected to a

critical discourse analysis. The discourse analysis investigates patterns of expression and rhetoric within training materials and CCT theory, in order to discern how the concepts of identity, values, agency and the 'other' are represented within CCT. The discourse analysis, in conjunction with the literature reviews, demonstrates how CCT courses conceptualise culture and shows the relative influences of different anthropological schools of thought on the content of cross-cultural training courses. The discourse analysis also reveals whether the criticisms of 'culture' raised by postmodernist anthropologists apply to the conceptions of culture promoted by the CCT industry.

The findings of this thesis reveal the susceptibility of CCT conceptions of culture to the postmodernist culture critique and how problematic conceptions of culture within training programs are reducing and negating the potentially positive influences of CCT. Current CCT practice is effective at increasing awareness of cultural differences. However, some culture general training is prompting prescriptive understandings of diversity which can lead trainees to view culture as an invariable determinant of behaviour. The final section of this thesis explores how these problems could be solved through the integration of cognitive anthropological theories into CCT training programs. The results of this thesis demonstrate a need for the reformation of CCT conceptions of culture and a possible direction which this reformation could take. The improvement and augmented accuracy of CCT teachings will increase the capacity of these training programs to promote intercultural understanding and positive intercultural relations.

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Abbreviations

AUD	Australian dollars
CCT	Cross-cultural training
CVS	Chinese values survey
DIMIA	Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DMIS	Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity
FSI	Foreign Service Institute
IDI	Intercultural development inventory
IDV.....	Individualism index
LD	Less-developed
LTO.....	Long-term orientation index
MAS	Masculinity index
MD.....	More-developed
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
Orig.	Original
PDI	Power-distance index
Resp.	Response
SIETAR	Society for intercultural education, training and research
UAI	Uncertainty avoidance index