Opening The Barriers
To Cross Cultural Counselling

A Guide for
Counsellors and Advisers
of
International Students

Alexandra Tanner
1995
As practitioners who daily work with children, youth and families who come to our shores full of hope and searching for peace, we are called upon to respond and deal with a multitude of needs, aspirations, pressures and expectations. This is particularly the situation for counsellors, teachers and advisers of international students who attend our Australian educational institutions.

The development of theory, research and practice texts, manuals, resource books and video materials aimed at the preparation of practitioners in dealing with many cultural issues, continues to occur. With some exceptions, due to the paucity of Australian materials, practitioners have only been able to fashion their counselling approaches and models of psychological intervention and support based on work outside this country. Thus, I am pleased to recommend and recognize this text as making a substantial contribution to the work of Australian counsellors and advisers who daily endeavour to encourage, counsel, motivate, care for and support our many international students.

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Acknowledgements

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Alexandra Tanner
Contents

About this Guide 1

Definition of Terms 3

The Client Group 5

Part 1

The Counsellor or Adviser Role 7
  Role Definition 7
  Ethics 7
  Confidentiality 7
  Student — Helper Contract 7
  Counsellor Values 8
  Some Western Assumptions 9
  Multicultural Awareness 10
  Accumulating Accurate Knowledge about Cultures 10
  Empathy versus Sympathy 12

Part 2

Asian Attitudes to Mental Health 13
  Physical Symptoms 13
  Proceed with Caution 14

Part 3

The Issue of Religion 17

Part 4

Nonverbal Communication 19
  Proxemics 19
  Kinesics 19
Part 5
Multiculturalism as a Generic Approach to Counselling

Part 6
Some Analytic Tools
The Concept of World View and its Applications
The Cultural Grid
Applications of the Cultural Grid to TAFE

Part 7
Culture Shock
Models for Cross-cultural Counselling
The Self-validation Model
Cultural Mapping Developing Skills for Social—Cultural Competence

Part 8
Use of an Interpreter
Support Systems for the International Student
Orientation
Monitoring of Progress
English Language Support
Social and Cultural Support
Re-entry

Conclusion
References
About this Guide

This guide is intended to be used in conjunction with *Bridging the Intercultural Communication Gap — A Guide for TAFE Teachers of International Students* by June Mezger (1992). It will avoid reproducing information already provided in that work except where it appears essential to the guide (e.g., culture shock, definitions of terms). Where Mezger's work was written with teachers in mind, this guide is intended for those who work either in International Education or Student Services in any Australian educational institution and play a more intimate role in the students' lives either as advisers, welfare officers or counsellors. It is understood that these staff will have varying degrees of professional training, but by virtue of their experience and level of involvement will have some established knowledge and skill in intercultural matters.

Mezger's guide is designed to serve as a base for intercultural communication for TAFE staff who teach and work with international students and has proved a useful resource in universities and schools. It provides background on the international student program in Australia and provides information which would be helpful to anyone who has to deal with international students. It would be equally valid with students in higher education and secondary education as well as at TAFE or other forms of post-secondary education. It is also designed to serve as a base for training programs for teachers.

Mezger provides an overview of cultural differences, including the significance of names, special holidays, notes on various religions and social taboos. There are comprehensive notes on cultural background taken country by country. The countries covered in this section are Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, People's Republic of China, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and in the South Pacific Region: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Nauru and Tonga. It is advisable that before working with a student from a different cultural background, counsellors at least familiarise themselves with these basics as they apply to that particular student's culture.

Following the notes on cultural background, the guide provides educational background on most of the above countries—a useful resource when helping students with study difficulties.

Another section concentrates on the needs of overseas students, physical, social, educational and psychological and outlines the particular difficulties they face, while acknowledging that their teachers also have needs and difficulties. The guide identifies and explains the effects of culture shock, institutional shock, learning shock and language shock. Counsellors and advisers need to have an awareness of the impact of all these on a student who is adjusting to our culture and institutions. Strategies for meeting international students' needs are provided.

Mezger's document lists barriers to communication and ways of reducing these barriers. This section includes verbal and non-verbal barriers, the tendency to stereotype and the tendency on both sides to evaluate according to one's own norms.

Research indicates that most international students studying at tertiary institutions in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia experience one or more of the following problems in making the transition academic, social, cultural, linguistic and financial. Academic difficulties have been explored by study skills counsellors and a number of publications address the differences between western and the various Asian systems.
There is evidence that international students have some similar developmental and social problems to our local students, but that these are compounded by their status as a temporary sojourner. Homesickness, independent living, alien cultural values (often to do with religion and personal relationships), expectations of family and self, food and accommodation are frequently observed.

A document produced by Tertiary Research in 1992 for the National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students collected comments from international students at various universities and TAFE institutes across the nation. In this survey students rated the welfare and support networks provided by their institutions as "slightly below average" compared to the overall "average" for teaching quality and educational facilities. Eleven percent of respondents were unsure as to whether their institutions provided counselling services or not (Open Response Comments Document of the Overseas Student Survey "Australian Education: Excellent or Dismal", July 1992). A national student survey undertaken in 1993 among TAFE's international students asked in one of its open-ended questions for suggestions for improving existing TAFE services. Improvement in counselling services was suggested by a number of international students (International Student Survey 1993, Progress Report, January 1994).

Because in most traditional countries it is customary to keep problems within the family and counselling as we know it is not readily available in Asia or the Pacific, there is a reluctance on the part of international students to use the counselling services offered. The cultural values implicit in counselling are essentially western and middle class. However, for international students to complete their courses successfully, Australian educational institutions need to provide services that are accessible and appropriate for all students and which take into account cultural diversity. This guide is an attempt to address some of the questions that arise as counsellors strive to adjust their counselling approaches.

There is a considerable amount of research and literature available originating from the USA and this project has depended heavily on that work. The reader will need to make concessions for the fact that mainstream Australian culture is different from American. The other important factor to bear in mind is that the available material is almost without exception founded on Asian cultures. As a significant number of the international intake in 1994 was from the Pacific, and others hail from Africa, the Middle East, Europe and other disparate cultures, care has been taken not to generalise the findings to include all international students.

This guide provides counsellors and advisers with

- information on different Asian attitudes to mental health that may help counsellors to appreciate possible pitfalls and sensitivities in working with other cultures;
- suggestions on how staff as helpers can define our roles in relation to international students;
- an outline of the possible significance of religion in international students' lives, both as a pervasive influence on culture and as it impacts on their emotional difficulties;
- information on non-verbal cues in cross-cultural communication;
- an introduction to some of the theories and models of cross-cultural counselling that have been introduced from North America in the past decade;
- an outline of practical suggestions for services to ease the students' period of study in Australia.

The guide does not attempt to provide specific detailed information on cultures or religions.
Definition of Terms

Following are some of the terms commonly found in the literature of cross-cultural counselling.

**Culture** implies that we have all inherited cultural patterns of thought and action from our parents and teachers and the society in which we developed. This is the part of our inheritance that is not physical, but acquired. Culture comprises traditional values, customs, beliefs, rules, styles of communication and behavioural norms that govern our ways of coping with life. Culture is developed by a group to ensure its survival. Culture is not static, but is the response of a group of human beings to the needs of its members. Culture relates to social class, gender, urban/rural environment. We may have grown up in ignorance of the existence of other cultures and we almost certainly believed that our culture was the best. Later we may have chosen to reject some of our traditional values or realised that other cultures had some attractive features. Even later we may have realised the validity that other cultures have for people who are born or raised in them (Pedersen, 1991; Pusch, 1979). Refer also to Pedersen’s Cultural Grid (Part 6) which attempts to reconcile the dynamic nature of culture and the place of the individual in it.

**Cultural relativism** is arrived at when we realise that our culture is one of many possible patterns of thinking and acting. It suggests that cultures cannot be evaluated from a single or absolute ethical or moral perspective. No culture is inherently superior or inferior to another (Pusch, 1979).

**Cultural conditioning** (socialisation) is the process by which the cultural norms are handed down from one generation to the next (Hodge, 1986; Pusch, 1979).

**Cross-cultural awareness** (also cultural awareness or cultural self-awareness) refers to the basic ways of learning that behaviour and ways of thinking and perceiving are culturally conditioned rather than being universal aspects of human nature. In this learning, unconscious; culturally-based assumptions and values held by individuals are brought to the surface (Pusch, 1979).

**Cross-cultural communication** involves messages that are sent or received by a member of one culture group in interaction with a member of a different culture group (Hodge, 1986).

**Cultural encapsulation** occurs when the professional is operating from their own culture-specific assumptions and stereotypes, believing that his or her view is the only legitimate one. These assumptions are held without proof and protected without rationality. The behaviour of others is interpreted from the viewpoint of a self-referenced criterion (Pedersen, 1991).

**Culture-specific** (emic) refers to values, customs, beliefs and practices that are specific to one culture group and not to others (Hodge, 1986, Pedersen, 1991).

**Emic and etic** are poles on a continuum; somewhere along which one needs to find a balance between the uniqueness of a culture (emic) and the universal aspects that are common to the human race (etic) (Hodge, 1986; Pedersen, 1991).

**Ethnocentrism** refers to the belief that one’s own culture is normal, natural and right. People generally have a tendency to judge other cultures relative to their own (Hodge, 1986).

**High context/Low context** are extremes on a continuum describing cultural tendencies to be direct in communication. A high context culture (e.g. China) relies heavily on non-verbals and shared understanding. The context of name, family and status must be explored before a relationship can develop. Low context cultures
(e.g. Switzerland, USA, Australia) rely on the explicit verbal message. People do not bother much about the background of those with whom they converse. (Sue & Sue, 1990)

Monoculturalism, biculturalism and multiculturalism are terms which characterise a continuum along which people may move in expanding their cultural identities. It can be argued that virtually no one is purely monocultural or bicultural. A complex, diverse society in which a dominant sub-group expects other sub-groups to conform to its norms and values can be described as monocultural (Hodge, 1986, Pusch, 1979).

Normative value refers to a general principle which through the process of socialisation is typically held in high regard by a given group or society, (e.g. freedom, justice, education)

A subculture is a distinctive sub-group of individuals within a culture group who see themselves as sharing particular beliefs, practices or values, while at the same time maintaining other cultural practices in common with the wider cultural group (Hodge, 1986).

Universalism suggests that there are common-ground universals shared across all cultures. In other words, all human beings are in some important respects alike. This is also known as the etic approach. Taken to its extreme it would suggest that a "culture-free" individual were possible, which it is not (Pedersen, 1991).

World view is a way of perceiving one's relationship to the world (nature, institutions, other people). It is highly correlated with our cultural socialisation and affects how we think, behave and make decisions (Ibrahim (1991), Sue1991).
The Client Group

Marketing educational courses off shore is a growth industry in Australia. The focus of this guide is the international students who arrive in Australia to study at secondary and tertiary institutions for two or three years and then return home. They constitute a significant proportion of our student population. Most of the students are part of an expanding full fee paying program and in 1994, 5703 were recipients of scholarships sponsored by AIDAB (Australian International Development Assistance Bureau) now AusAID.

Table 1

Numbers of International Students Studying in Australia by Sector by Country of Origin 1994

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<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
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| Oceania           |                  |                      |                     |                           |       |
| Cook Islands      | 16               | 1                    | 0                   | 0                         | 17    |
| Fiji             | 705              | 38                   | 35                  | 0                         | 778   |
| Kiribati          | 1                | 0                    | 4                   | 0                         | 5     |
| Nauru            | 73               | 12                   | 89                  | 0                         | 174   |
| New Caledonia     | 41               | 15                   | 1                   | 1                         | 58    |
| New Zealand       | 83               | 0                    | 1                   | 0                         | 84    |
| Papua New Guinea  | 465              | 29                   | 501                 | 0                         | 995   |
| Solomon Islands   | 121              | 21                   | 22                  | 0                         | 164   |
| Tahiti            | 1                | 0                    | 0                   | 0                         | 1     |
| Tonga             | 165              | 14                   | 8                   | 0                         | 187   |
| Tuvalu           | 0                | 0                    | 1                   | 0                         | 1     |
| Vanuatu           | 47               | 7                    | 13                  | 0                         | 67    |
| Western Samoa     | 90               | 14                   | 3                   | 0                         | 107   |
| Other             | 76               | 6                    | 0                   | 0                         | 82    |
| Total Oceania     | 1884             | 157                  | 678                 | 1                         | 2720  |

| Europe           | 1188             | 191                  | 315                 | 734                       | 2428  |
| Americas         | 1176             | 131                  | 236                 | 57                        | 1600  |
| Africa           | 870              | 63                   | 32                  | 4                         | 969   |
| Other            | 1721             | 75                   | 114                 | 41                        | 1951  |
| Total All Countries | 49240         | 5260                 | 8846                | 6473                      | 69819 |

In 1994, 86% of the international students came from Asia. The top ten sources were all Asian. Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia were the top four source countries.

Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1995
The Counsellor or Adviser Role

Role definition

It is understood that people operating in these roles in Australian educational institutions will come from varying academic backgrounds. Generally counsellors have a background in one or more of psychology, social work or education. Advisers may have a qualification in welfare or teaching or indeed any of those mentioned. Nevertheless, all staff working with international students will find themselves in a helping role from time to time.

This guide is intended for all those people for whom helping international students is a part of their activities. However, it is assumed that the people who work with international students will have clear boundaries concerning their role. Only those with appropriate training should be engaging in a therapeutic encounter. All staff should know the limits of their knowledge and skills and when to refer or consult with another professional.

Ethics

It is important for helpers to know the ethical standards of their profession. Just as social workers and psychologists are bound by a code of ethics, it is wise for all who operate with privileged information to give considerable attention to this subject.

While it is controversial but not unheard of these days for teachers and adult students to have, for example, a consenting sexual relationship, it would be quite unethical for this to occur between a counsellor and student.

International students often like to buy small gifts for people to whom they feel gratitude and these may be accepted graciously in the spirit in which they are given. However, there could be some ambiguous situations involving money or gifts.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a complex issue. While professional counsellors are bound by the code of ethics of their profession, it would be wise for all those in the helping role who are offering any degree of confidentiality to realise there are times when confidentiality needs to be over-ridden and students should be informed of this from the outset. Confidentiality cannot be kept if there is an expressed intent on the part of the student to cause physical harm to self or another or to property. If in doubt, counsellors or advisers should discuss the case hypothetically or anonymously with another counselling professional.

Student-helper contract

In Australia, currently, the helping professions are more mature and clients are more sophisticated and less willing to put themselves in the hands of a professional without knowing what the counselling relationship is about. This is not so for most of our international students who may have no pre-conceived ideas of the counsellor role. While an explicit contract (even if only verbal) is becoming more the norm with our Australian students, it is equally relevant with international students as it becomes a means of educating them about what we see as a collaborative venture. It can help the student and counsellor to develop realistic mutual expectations, diminish initial student anxiety and give an outline of what the helping process is about.

Following is an example of the content of a contract (based on Egan, 1990, p 81).

- An overview of the helping process, including some of the techniques to be used. A plain English pamphlet, ideally translated into the student's first language, could be useful to give.
the student to read at leisure.

- What a client-helper relationship is like: "I'd like us to be partners. But counselling is not about our relationship so much as you managing your problems better. I'd like our relationship to help you do that."
- The responsibilities of the helper: "I want to make sure that I understand your concerns. If I do that, then you will come to understand them better and be more able to do something about them."
- The responsibilities of the client: "In the end, counselling is not about talking, but about acting. If people are to manage their lives better, they usually have to act differently. I'd like to help you do that, but of course I can't do it for you."
- Certain limits (e.g. can the student contact you between sessions?): "If you need to contact me I am available in office hours on this number."
- The kind of influence the helper will exert: "If I see you trying to avoid doing something that I think is for your own good, I will challenge you, or invite you to challenge yourself. But I will not force you to do anything."
- An understanding of the flexibility of the helping process: "I have outlined what the helping process might look like. But, in the end, there are no rigid rules and we can do anything that is ethical and useful to help you manage better."
- A discussion about confidentiality and when you might have to over-ride it

It is a matter of judgment and experience to know how much the student is able to assimilate of this list. It may be best with some students particularly if they are very agitated to leave most of this to a second session.

Counsellor values

He who knows not, and knows not he knows not, is a fool — shun him.

In developing cross-cultural awareness counsellors must have an appreciation of their own values which, if they are Australian, may heavily reflect Australian culture. The values will also reflect the counsellor's culture in the broadest sense of the term, including demographic variables (age, gender, place of residence) status variables (social, educational, economic) and affiliations (clubs, church). It is not necessary to rid oneself of these values, but to be aware of them.

"Know thyself" is an old adage that is of huge importance in the helping role. It can be valuable to explore the values and assumptions on which clients' behaviours are based, but without understanding their own beliefs, including religious beliefs or prejudices and attitudes to the supernatural, counsellors might find themselves adopting an arrogant or superior position and be in danger of operating from a perspective of cultural encapsulation. Knowledge of our assumptions, values and standards and realisation of the ways these affect our interactions with others will enable us to respect the helping process and our clients' values.

Another reason for the need for this awareness is that we need to be able to interpret the Australian culture for students.

To produce a quality helping relationship, a non-judgmental attitude is a basic requirement. Recognising one's own values is a first step in suspending judgment of another's opinions and attitudes. Clients do bring issues and concerns that are counter to our own beliefs and experience. If we can assume a value neutrality towards them and listen to them carefully we will come to a better understanding as to how they might have arrived at that position. A non-judgmental attitude is expressed through vocal tone and body language and by statements indicating neither approval nor disapproval (Ivey, 1983)
As well as having a thorough knowledge of their own personal values, counsellors need to be fully aware of their communication style. Sue (1990, 71) suggests counsellors ask themselves:

- What is my counselling and communication style?
- What does it say about my values, biases, and assumptions about human behaviour?
- How do my non-verbal communications reflect stereotypes, fears, or preconceived notions about various racial groups?
- What non-verbal messages might I not be aware of but might be communicating to my client?
- In what way does my helping style hinder my working with a culturally different client?
- What culturally/racially-influenced communication styles cause me greatest difficulty or discomfort? Why?

Some western assumptions

Pedersen (1988) recommends that counsellors become aware of their own culturally learned assumptions. He lists ten culturally biased assumptions from western culture and their reasonable opposites, italicised here.

1. We all share a single measure of "normal" behaviour. This is more or less universal across social, cultural, economic or political backgrounds.

Behaviour will change according to the situation, the cultural background of a person and the time period during which a behaviour is displayed.

2. Individuals are the basic building blocks of society. In most counselling, criteria such as self-awareness and self-fulfilment are important measures of success. We capitalise the pronoun "I" in English while there is no such pronoun in Japanese.

In Chinese culture, individual counselling has been described as destructive of society in promoting individualistic benefits at the expense of the social fabric.

3. Problems are defined by a framework limited by academic discipline boundaries: e.g. psychologist, anthropologist, medical doctor.

In many cultures the really important questions related to mental health involve life and death, perhaps even reincarnation. A person's illness or health has a systems-wide impact on family and total surrounding context. We need to relearn our self-imposed boundaries in moving from one culture to another.

4. Other people will have the same understanding of abstract words as we have.

Other cultures are "high context" (see Non-verbal Communication) and people will need concepts such as "good" or "bad" to be put in a contextual setting.

5. Independence is desirable, individualism is emphasised. An individual should not be dependent on others nor allow others to be dependent on him.

There are many cultures where dependence is considered healthy and absolutely necessary.

6. Clients are helped more by formal counselling than by their natural support systems.

In many, if not most of the world's cultures telling intimate family secrets to a stranger is not allowed. The health of an individual is tied to the health of a support unit surrounding that person. The counsellor needs to include the support system in any treatment plan.

7. Everyone uses linear thinking to explain the world. Each cause has an effect.

In many cultures cause and effect are two aspects of the same (as in Yin and Yang).

8. Counsellors help the individual to change to fit the system and not the system to fit the individual.
It is a professional obligation for counsellors to at least ask the question about whether the best interests of the client are being served by existing social institutions, and whether those institutions can be changed even in small ways.

9. History is not very relevant in understanding immediate events.

In many cultures, a clear understanding of the historical context of the person or his people is considered essential in grasping present behaviour.

10. We already know all our assumptions.

As we increase our contact with other cultures we will gain a more comprehensive perspective and be able to challenge more of our unexamined assumptions.

To counsel people from other cultures we need to examine our assumptions and learn adaptive skills. Pedersen suggests a method for doing this which he calls the "test of reasonable opposites". First identify an unchallenged assumption. Then define an opposite or contrary assumption. Finally compare the two statements to determine which alternative is more reasonable. The opposite often seems just as reasonable and can lead to new and creative alternatives.

For example, a counsellor has worked with a Chinese student who is grieving for a close relative who has died at home during her absence. During counselling the student has displayed her emotions and worked through them quite openly. She is returning home for the holidays and is concerned she will break down when her family greets her at the airport. A culturally encapsulated counsellor might assume this is a normal and healthy response to be accepted and perhaps expected by the family. The opposite assumption could be that the family will be displeased by this loss of control and will anticipate resulting bad luck. This being the more reasonable assumption to the student, the counsellor could look at ways to help her overcome her emotions at the airport.

We are entering uncharted territory with this exercise as we leave behind a closed, biased and culturally encapsulated system. We need to distinguish between cross-cultural disagreements, where the assumptions are different and interpersonal conflict where the assumptions are similar (See also the Cultural Grid in Part 6).

Some values and beliefs of white American culture, which is heavily influenced by the Protestant work ethic are demonstrated in Table 2.

The person who assumes all people make the same assumptions as himself or herself is using a "self-reference criterion" (Pedersen & Ivey, 1993). To do so leads to inaccurate attributions about other people's behaviour. For clarification of this concept see the Cultural Grid (Part 6); this analytic tool explains the complexity of the cultural context.

Multicultural awareness

Pedersen and Ivey (1993) itemise the requirements of multicultural awareness as follows:

1. Being aware of one's own complicated cultural identity,
2. Understanding how cultural values and biases influence one's self and other people,
3. Becoming more comfortable with cultural differences between one's self and others,
4. Becoming more sensitive to the cultural context in every situation,
5. Identifying culturally learned assumptions about one's self and others.

Accumulating accurate knowledge about cultures

This guide does not attempt to provide culture specific information. However, once the counsellor becomes aware of culturally learned assumptions, the need for cultural knowledge,
### Table 2

**The Components of White American Culture: Values and Beliefs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Rugged Individualism:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Protestant Work Ethic:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual is primary unit</td>
<td>Working hard brings success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual has primary responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence and autonomy highly valued and rewarded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual can control environment</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Competition:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Progress &amp; Future Orientation:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winning is everything</td>
<td>Plan for future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win/lose dichotomy</td>
<td>Delayed gratification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Action Orientation:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Emphasis on Scientific Method:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Must master and control nature</td>
<td>Objective, rational, linear thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must always do something about a situation</td>
<td>Cause and effect relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic/utilitarian view of life</td>
<td>Quantitative emphasis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Communication:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Status and Power:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard English</td>
<td>Measured by economic possessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written tradition</td>
<td>Credentials, titles, and positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct eye contact</td>
<td>Believe &quot;own&quot; system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited physical contact</td>
<td>Believe better than other systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control emotions</td>
<td>Owning goods, space, property</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Time:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Family Structure:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adherence to rigid time</td>
<td>Nuclear family is the ideal social unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is viewed as a commodity</td>
<td>Male is breadwinner and the head of the household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female is homemaker and subordinate to the husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patriarchal structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Holidays:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Aesthetics:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on Christian religion</td>
<td>Music and art based on European cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on White history and male leaders</td>
<td>Women's beauty based on blonde, blue-eyed, thin, young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men's attractiveness based on athletic ability, power, economic status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>History:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Religion:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on European immigrants' experience in the United States</td>
<td>Belief in Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No tolerance for deviation from single god concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Sue (1990, p. 148)
facts and information becomes obvious. One realises the need to gain specific information about the history, experiences, values and lifestyle of cultural groups before working with them in order to comprehend the implications of relationships and behaviours in a cultural context. This knowledge is essential in using a tool such as the Cultural Grid (Part 6).

**Empathy versus sympathy**

Whatever the discipline from which helpers come, they will be familiar with the concept of empathy as basic to sustaining a counselling relationship. A distinction between empathy and sympathy is useful in counselling people from other cultures, as it is so much concerned with subjective experience. Empathy is the sharing of feeling based on differences between the observer and the communicator. This should hearten those of us who thought that the bond of empathy required shared qualities. The empathiser uses the imagination to transpose himself or herself into another by attending to the other's feelings. Empathy is a skill that can be learned, by focussing on what the person being listened to is experiencing.

Sympathy, by contrast, is the affective reaction experienced by the observer on the basis of perceived similarity with the communicator. It focuses on the listener's experience. The person feeling sympathy is using their own feelings as the barometer, feeling their own sympathy and pain by which they judge those of the communicator. Stewart (1981, p.70) gives an example of sympathy:

A police officer was called to investigate a citizen's threat to kill the president of the local draft board. The officer was informed that the citizen had just learned that his son, a draftee, had been killed in Vietnam. When the officer approached the citizen, he encountered a man possessed by grief and hate. The officer responded by taking great pains to identify his own feelings as a young man and those of others he knew in Vietnam. This is sympathy.

Sympathy expresses a universalist attitude. An example in an educational context could be a student who has missed a lot of classes and needs to catch up on overdue work. A sympathetic response might be "I can remember my son getting into that situation. He used to get sick with worry. A lot of our students are feeling overwhelmed at this time of year." This sympathetic response does not validate the student's unique experience and if he or she comes from another culture may be missing the mark entirely.

In expressing empathy we are not guided by our own feelings to formulate our response, but will communicate in our response that we understand in some initial way the other's experiences, behaviours and feelings. This will be based on what we see in their body language, hear in their voice and what they actually tell us. An empathic response to the student above might be "You've got a number of assignments still due. This is causing you to tense up physically (noting twisted legs). How does that feel to you?" There is much less risk of error with this response.

Stewart tells us the Japanese are particularly good at empathy and gives the following everyday example from Japan:

K. was speaking with her friend but also listening to the conversation between her husband and a foreign guest in an adjoining room. After an hour or so she noticed that the speech of the guest slowed and his voice became a little husky. She remembered that they had talked late into the night after a hard day's journey and another leg of the journey would begin in a few hours. In a few minutes K. left her companion, walked into the adjoining room and spoke with her husband in Japanese. He translated to the guest that his wife had said that his (the guest's) conversation now revealed that he was tired and that she would serve refreshments.

Ibrahim (1991) believes that the importance of empathy in multicultural counselling cannot be overemphasised, as the counsellor endeavours to understand the client's world view. Being aware of one's own and the other's assumptions is the key to fully appreciating another's feelings.
Asian Attitudes to Mental Health

It is important to stress that there is no such thing as an Asian attitude any more than there is one Asian culture. However, an awareness of our own assumptions about and attitudes towards mental health compared with some general comments about some Asian attitudes will alert practitioners to possible variances.

The concepts to ideal mental health proposed in various forms by mental health practitioners as criteria of normality which can be universally applied are examples of cultural encapsulation. To impose these concepts on clients from other cultures would be insensitive and inappropriate. Mental health and psychotherapy are foreign concepts to the east Asian countries (Sue, 1990).

On the whole there is no clear distinction between mental and physical illness or health. Mental illness is attributed to a disturbance of internal vital energy. In China and Vietnam herbal medicine and acupuncture are used to restore balance and order to the body. In some cultures mental illness may be associated with family disaster or failure, heredity, personal weakness or physical disorder, soul loss or revenge by fate (McFadden, 1993). Shame and disgrace are attached to any suggestion of mental illness.

Eastern cultures regard mind and matter, soul and body as interdependent. The eastern view is organic by contrast to the western mechanistic view and all events are interrelated, connected and manifested in the same ultimate reality. The eastern view sees the individual in context and the relationship between persons as primary.

One Asian belief is that because no one can avoid pain, no one should resist it. The person with an illness should tolerate it, not feel it spiritually and the pain will disappear.

Physical symptoms

Physical complaints are a common and culturally accepted means of expressing psychological and emotional stress in the East. It is generally believed that physical problems cause emotional disturbances and that these will disappear when the physical illness is successfully treated. Asians are more likely to report headaches, gastrointestinal complaints, menstrual irregularity, fatigue, restlessness and disturbances in sleep and appetite, than they are to mention stress or depression. It is important to acknowledge these physical symptoms, as experience has shown that for the counsellor to suggest that these are symptoms of depression may lead to defensiveness and the client may not return.

Alexander, Klein, Workneh and Miller (1981) in their study of foreign students argue that the psychological experience of culture shock has a strong somatic component and that concern with self heightens the students' awareness of stress reactions such as rapid heart beat. While international students are a high risk group, who may be under considerable stress, they are also more likely to experience stress in the form of physical complaints than psychological complaints. Therefore they are more likely to seek medical help and would seek psychological help only on the basis of medical referral or as a last resort.

Breaking down the barriers

Sue and Sue (1990) found through experience of consulting to several campus counselling centres in the U.S.A. four main barriers that tend to block access to the culturally different.

1. Lack of ethnic staff this may be rightly or wrongly perceived as discriminatory.

2. Office-type one-to-one counselling this approach demands that the client adapt to the
counsellor's culture. Most counsellor training does not encourage a more active outreach role as this type of activity-based agency is seen as "unprofessional". Clearly opportunities are being missed when counselling doesn't consider activities such as playing billiards or sharing food in the cafeteria as a critical opening for intervention.

3. **Asian educational orientation**. Asian students are more concerned with educational issues than personal-emotional issues.

4. **The process of counselling**: sitting down one-to-one and talking in standard English about one's most intimate life matters may be a cultural anathema.

Students are more likely to discuss vocational choices with a counsellor, than emotional conflicts. It may be obvious to a counsellor that confusion about courses is a manifestation of a deeper conflict, for example traditional duty to the father as opposed to newly developing interests. Where this is the case it is wise to address the superficial concern, perhaps cautiously and very indirectly alluding to the deeper matter only after a trusting rapport is established.

With reference to the second point above, there are schools and institutions in Australia that have a friendly international student centre where staff are accessible on an informal basis and students know they are welcome to drop in to eat their lunch or use the tea-making facilities. Staff report this informality helps considerably to break down barriers as they are seen as easily approachable and there is ample opportunity for trust to develop.

Casual chat about mundane and minor issues opens the door for students to talk about matters that are really worrying them.

**Proceed with caution**

Do not expect international students to express their emotions freely.

Emotional restraint is valued in many cultural groups as associated with wisdom and maturity, and a western counsellor might perceive these clients as "repressed". Thus a virtue in one culture can be interpreted in a negative light in another.

In traditional Japanese culture, for example, children have been taught not to talk until spoken to and patterns of communication tend to be vertical, flowing from those of higher status to those of lower status. This well defined pattern of interaction is a feature of high context cultures. Therefore many clients from Asia might respond with silence, as a sign of respect, whereas in Australia we expect the client to be the primary active participant and patterns of communication are generally from client to counsellor. Thus if Asians seek a counselling relationship they may well be seeking advice rather than the exploratory approach used in western counselling. Counsellors would need to consider carefully whether to take a more directive role than they would with an Australian student.

This section focuses on how the values of counselling may be antagonistic to the values of our international students. Counselling in Australia is influenced by certain values and assumptions upon which largely American theorists have based their goals for counselling and methodology. Potential variance between an Indochinese patient and his American-trained therapist is illustrated in Table 3.

Many western counsellors value insight, where an individual gains understanding about underlying dynamics and causes. Other cultural groups do not value this method of self-exploration. Many Asian elders believe that thinking too much about something can cause problems. The traditional Asian way of handling frustration, anger, anxiety and other negative emotions is to "keep busy and don't think about it" or "think about the family and not about yourself".

If a student does seek psychological help as a last resort and the therapy is unsuccessful, the almost inevitable result is the return of the student, disgraced and wounded, perhaps disqualified.
Table 3

Areas of Difference Between Southeast-Asian Patients and American-Trained Therapists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indochinese Patient Values</th>
<th>Western-Trained Psychotherapist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on interdependence</td>
<td>Personal choice and independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured and appropriate social relationships</td>
<td>Situational ethics, rejection of authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should live in harmony with nature</td>
<td>Equality of family relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness due to imbalance in cosmic forces or lack of will power</td>
<td>Nature to be mastered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No cultural conceptualization of psychotherapy</td>
<td>Mental illness is a result of mental and physical factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment should be short and rapid</td>
<td>Strong orientation to values of psychotherapy and personal growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healer should be active and give solutions to problems</td>
<td>View that therapy could take a long time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness represented a failure of the family</td>
<td>Therapist often passive Best solution is one developed by the patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental illness is the same as other problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sue & Sue (1990, p. 98)

from the home country's professional or government system. To return home may be an agonising decision whether it is enforced or seen as the best therapeutic option. Discussing these matters openly from the practical and psychological point of view is very helpful. The counsellor can facilitate smoothing over in both countries. The co-operation of teachers and program managers can be obtained so that documentation of work completed can be transmitted to the appropriate authorities. Separation from local friends needs to be worked through. Perhaps of most importance, communication with the student's family must be facilitated as their investment of money and aspirations in the student is usually huge.

A survey of fifteen international students studying in Hobart in 1994 (see Appendix) showed that at home most of them would turn only to family or close friends for guidance with personal problems. A surprising number (in view of what is commonly cited in the literature) would not talk to their parents about problems because the parents, being of an older generation would not understand or would become too involved. Several of this number were from Hong Kong where traditional values have been undermined by western influences. Others were from Indonesia where there appears to be less intergenerational communication. Several of these students were very interested in the Australian concept of counselling and said they would avail themselves of it if necessary. In fact a small number of them did seek counselling soon after the interview. This would seem to indicate that more promotion and explanation of the service in an accessible way so that students can meet the counsellors would encourage the international students to use the service.
General guidelines

It is important to remember that Asia and the Pacific is a wide area and its population quite diverse. Bearing this in mind and the oft-repeated caution against stereotyping, there are certain areas of commonality among our non-western students: deference to authority, emotional restraint, specified roles and hierarchical family structure and a family and extended family orientation.

The following list of suggestions for counsellors working with overseas students is based on Sue and Sue (1990) and Alexander, Klein, Workneh and Miller (1981).

- Remember that it has not been easy for the students to come for help. If they are strongly traditional they may feel ashamed at admitting there is a problem.
- Never underestimate the students' sense of both national and personal pride and the threat that the current situation presents to it.
- Use restraint when gathering information. Students may feel their privacy is being invaded.
- Prepare students for counselling by explaining the process and outlining the roles (see student helper contract).
- Focus on the specific problem brought in by students and help them to develop goals for counselling. This reduces the likelihood of imposing one's own world view.
- Take an active and directive role. Because of cultural expectations and lack of experience with mental health concerns, the students will rely on you to direct.
- Never lose sight of the student as an individual, rather than as a stereotype of his or her cultural group. Personality will also play a role in the development of world view.
The Issue of Religion

Religion has a truly pervasive impact on culture. The Protestant work ethic has certainly influenced white Australian ethos (Hodge, 1986) and has a significant place in American culture (Table 2). The Protestant ethic has enhanced a scientific rational approach to psychology, which prefers active adjustment on the part of the client, as the individual strives for success, to passive acceptance. The fabric of our society and the organisations within it, including our educational institutions, have developed out of this ethic.

Mezger (1992) provides a useful overview of the main religions which are practised by or have influenced international students. One cannot assume that students practise the predominant religion of their country of origin. It is important to acquire this information in the early stages of a counselling relationship (Refer to Phase 1 Cultural Mapping p 30).

A student's spirituality may carry him or her through a crisis. When all the other self-validating trappings of the home culture are gone all the student has left is the spiritual self.

Beliefs of some Asians include an element of superstition. They may have a profound belief in omnipotent fate, which can take the soul away from the body, resulting in mental illness.

Two cases will serve to illustrate the significance of the impact of belief systems on our students. The first is from Wohl (1981, p. 132) who, when he was starting to practise as a psychologist in Rangoon, had a student referred to him.

The young man told me in limited but understandable English that he was very nervous and felt considerable distress in the abdominal region. He said that his discomfort was due to some demonic spiritual power that he had offended, a belief consistent with Burmese folk conceptions of psychological disturbance, but it surprised me because he was a university student of anthropology. In my ignorance I thought that university students, especially those in cultural anthropology, would not have such “pre scientific” notions. When I asked about his belief in the light of his knowledge of anthropology, I was even more surprised as he calmly indicated that he knew “primitive people” (his term) believed that spirits caused such distress and, since he was one of this class of people, he of course held this belief.

Wohl does not enlighten us as to the outcome of this young man's plight, but adds, “It was fortunate for both of us that I was not then called upon to continue to satisfy his therapeutic needs.”

Animism can also be very important to students from Indonesia, Thailand, the Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea and Africa. Closer to home, Petchell (1981) tells of the following case:

I would like to quote the case of a middle-aged single Indonesian woman who was studying for a Master's degree in Victoria. I became involved with her when six months after her arrival here she was charged with a shoplifting offence. At the time of the offence, she had a poor understanding of English and she was attempting to cope with adjustment and academic problems. She was in fact quite depressed. The guilt and shame of being apprehended was so great that she was contemplating suicide. She could not explain her actions but said it felt as though evil spirits compelled her to do it. The week that the offence took place she had received a letter of warning from her ageing mother that something “bad” would happen to her. The student was able to resolve her personal conflict after confiding in her mother who consulted a “bomoh”. Under instruction the student went to the railway station (where she had started the journey that ended in the shoplifting accident) at midnight and burned...
various herbs and flowers to propitiate the evil spirits. If the student had been in Indonesia she would have conducted the offering in daylight hours and in view of passers by.

According to Petchell most of the students who come from countries where a belief in spirits is held are aware of western scepticism and well developed cross-cultural awareness on the part of the professional is necessary for either the student or counsellor to feel comfortable discussing the concept of animism.
Non-Verbal Communication

(Based on Sue & Sue, 1990)

What a person says can be either enhanced or negated by the accompanying non-verbal communication. Counsellors are trained to be aware of these cues. However, in different cultures, non-verbs have different meanings.

**Proxemics** refers to perception and use of personal and interpersonal space. In the English-speaking world, people tend to become uncomfortable when others stand too close rather than too far away. Reactions include flight, withdrawal, anger and conflict. However, different cultures dictate different distances in personal space. Latin Americans, Indonesians, Arabs, South Americans, and French are identified as preferring a close conversational stance. Both client and counsellor need to be aware of reactions to each other based on establishing a spatial dimension to which they are culturally conditioned. A client may see an Australian counsellor as being aloof or haughty and a counsellor might find a client pushy or too intimate. The arrangement of furniture is a consideration in proxemics. People from some cultures may prefer to sit side by side when talking about intimate matters.

**Kinesics** refers to bodily movements, including facial expression, posture, gestures and eye contact. Like proxemics, kinesics appears to be culturally conditioned. Smiling is an example that is culturally ambiguous. In our culture, it is believed to indicate liking or happiness. People attribute positive characteristics to those who smile, they have a good personality and are pleasant. However, when Japanese smile or laugh, it may convey embarrassment, discomfort or shyness.

Many Asians believe that smiling and other facial expressions suggest weakness. The Chinese and Japanese believe that restraint of strong feelings, both positive and negative, is a sign of maturity and wisdom, and children are discouraged from outward emotional expressions. Unenlightened counsellors may assume that eastern clients are out of touch with their feelings.

In Moslem countries touching someone with the left hand or even offering something with the left hand may be a serious insult as the left hand is used in the process of elimination and considered "unclean".

Eye contact and the avoidance of it are assumed to have significance in counselling. We tend to associate the avoidance of eye contact with negative traits such as shyness, sneakiness, depression, or unassertiveness. In some cultures, it is not considered necessary to indicate that you are paying attention by nodding and looking at the speaker's face. In many cultures, it is considered disrespectful to maintain eye contact and a fixed gaze may indicate defiance.

**Paralanguage** refers to other cues that individuals use to communicate, for example, loudness of voice, pauses, silence, hesitations, rate, inflections. It also includes how we take turns speaking.

There are complex cultural rules about when to speak or yield to another person. Americans and perhaps Australians are uncomfortable with pauses and feel obliged to fill them in with more talk. Silence can have many different meanings. The English and Arabs use silence for privacy. In Asian countries, it is traditionally a sign of respect for elders. Silence may also be used to make a particular point, after which the speaker intends to take the floor again. In counselling, it is particularly important not to misunderstand silence as sullenness. Clients need to be given time to elaborate without the counsellor filling in perceived gaps. The student may be struggling to formulate his or her next thoughts (in a second language) and thus simply need time.
Asking questions of teachers is discouraged in many cultures and may be seen as implying the teacher did not explain clearly. International students need new skills for asking questions and a “cultural map” (Westwood, 1994, see Part 7) for participating in groups. It helps to explain the local “rules” for interrupting and taking turns in discussion. Asians tend to speak more softly than Australians and may find our loudness uncouth or interpret it as aggressive. Arabs on the other hand like noise and so counsellors need to be aware also of possible misinterpretations of speech volume.

Many other cultures prefer an indirect approach to Australian bluntness, and the custom of “telling it like it is” can give offence. Asians generally are at great pains not to hurt feelings or cause another to “lose face”. Thus euphemisms and ambiguity are the norm.

High-Low Context Communication Australian culture is relatively low context and we expect people to have the same understanding of words, including abstractions as we do. High context communication relies heavily on non-verbal and commonly held understandings by the communicators. For example a normally stressed “no” by an Australian may be interpreted by an Arab as “yes” because in Arab culture a real negation would be stressed more emphatically. Arabs may refuse an offer of food several times before giving in. If we pay attention to only the explicit coded part of the message, the words themselves, we are operating on a low-context level. It appears that in the English speaking world, the Swiss, Germans and Scandinavians are low-context cultures. At the other end of the scale China has a high context culture. This relates to the subtlety and indirectness noted earlier.
Multiculturalism as a Generic Approach to Counselling

Pedersen (1991) writes of a broad definition of culture that enables a multicultural perspective to be applied to all counselling relationships. This broad definition goes beyond national and ethnic boundaries recognising that people from the same ethnic group may experience cultural differences. Remember the outcry when "Sylvania Waters" was shown overseas as typifying Australian culture. "Culture" is very different in a mining or construction community, an academic community, an aboriginal community. The broad definition of culture includes demographic variables, status variables and affiliations as well as the ethnographic variables of nationality, ethnicity, language and religion. Nor do all old people, or all women or all disabled people have the same experience. Each of us belongs to many different cultures at different times, in different environments and in different roles.

Pedersen points out the dangers of cultural encapsulation for the counsellor. Adaptation and openness to alternatives are seen as the key in counselling people from other cultures. The counsellor's response repertoire can be broadened to match the best response in any culturally different situation. The term "intentional interviewing" was coined by Ivey (1983) to mean deciding from a range of alternative actions, using a variety of skills and personal qualities to suit different situations and cultural groups. Ivey's basic rule is "If something doesn't work, don't try more of the same... try something different" (p. 4). Failure on the counsellor's part to match the communication style of the student may lead to premature termination, inability to establish rapport or cultural oppression of the student.

Treating a person as a cultural stereotype violates his or her individuality.

A multicultural approach to counselling avoids the risk of stereotyping that is found in the "culture pure" emic point of view and at the other end of the continuum, it avoids the tendency to generalise or ignore cultural factors as seen in the "culture free" or universalist etic.

In the real world though we cannot be all things to all people and the crucial element seems to be that the counsellor has the ability to acknowledge limitations in his or her helping style and to say something like "I understand your world view, and I know that what I do or say will appear very "western" to you, but I'm limited in my communication style I may or may not understand where you're coming from but let's give it a try." Sue and Sue (1990) suggest this in itself may begin the process of bridging the communication-style gap.
Some Analytic Tools

The concept of world view and its applications

(Sue & Sue, 1990)

World view could be defined simply as how we think the world works. It is composed of our attitudes, values, opinions and concepts and how they affect our thinking, behaviour and our perception of events.

Western culture generally differs from others in its orientation towards future time. People from other cultures may note that westerners do not know how to enjoy themselves because they will leave a party in order to prepare for a meeting. On the other hand, westerners may be irritated by apparent inability to organise and plan demonstrated by a group from a more present-oriented culture.

Western culture values activity highly. Other cultures may be more involved in "being" rather than "doing". The counsellor should take care not to judge a perceived lack of action by a client as inadequacy, when it may be that the person adheres to a "being" orientation.

In traditional Asian cultures, relationships with people tend to be more lineal, authoritarian, and hierarchical, with the father as the absolute ruler of the family. For people from this background, a counselling relationship which tends to be more equal and individualistic could prove uncomfortable. The Australian culture tends to foster a more equal and horizontal relationship with emphasis on the individual. Still other cultures have a more collateral point of view which involves a much larger community of people in decision-making.

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) designed a framework for looking at the concepts of human nature, social relationships, nature, time and activity in various cultures. Ibrahim (1991) modified Kluckhohn's schema to produce his Scale to Assess World Views (SAWV). Table 4 illustrates Ibrahim's version of this model. The SAWV helps the counsellor to understand the student's specific world view, beliefs, values and assumptions as well as those of the counsellor and will assist the counsellor's understanding of the student's expression and experience of the issues that bring him or her to the helper. The model also clarifies the student's world view as compared with the primary cultural group. The student as an individual will have his or her own world view, particularly if he or she has been exposed to more than one culture.

Westerners have been shown to value conquering and controlling nature, whereas many other cultures perceive themselves as either existing in harmony with nature or having events determined by forces beyond their control. Mainstream Australian culture is similar to American and most of our counsellors are of the opinion that people are responsible for their own actions and can change their life by their own efforts, as the many self-help books on sale indicate. The Australian counsellor, believing that barriers to personal success or happiness may be overcome by hard work could alienate a client who is diagnosed as being the source of his or her own problems. To be actively self-assertive could cause adjustment difficulties for some of our international students. A culturally encapsulated counsellor who cannot appreciate the student's world view could harm the student, particularly as international students are required to return home on completion of studies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Value Orientations</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Time Focus</em></td>
<td><em>Past</em></td>
<td>Plan for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the temporary focus of human life?</td>
<td>The past is important. Learn from history.</td>
<td>Sacrifice today for a better tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Human Activity</em></td>
<td><em>Being</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the modality of human activity?</td>
<td>It's enough to just be.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Social Relations</em></td>
<td><em>Lineal</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are human relationships defined?</td>
<td>Relationships are vertical.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are leaders and followers in this world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <em>People/Nature Relationship</em></td>
<td><em>Subjugation to Nature</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the relationship of people to nature?</td>
<td>Life is largely determined by external forces (God, fate, genetics, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Harmony with Nature</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People and nature co-exist in harmony.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mastery over Nature</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Our challenge is to conquer and control nature.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sue & Sue (1990, p 139)

Figure 1 may help to conceptualise the complex blending of influences on a person’s world view that Ibrahim believes it is necessary for a counsellor to take into account in order to be effective. To gain a full understanding of the client, the simultaneous influences of culture specificity (emic), individual uniqueness and human universality (etic), need to be explored. The overlapping of the three spheres in the middle represents the rich combination the individual possesses.
We value independence in Australia. The corollary is that dependence is undesirable and a counsellor might see its elimination as a desirable outcome. Yet there are many cultures where dependence is seen as healthy and absolutely necessary. For example, in Japan there is a concept (amae) which literally refers to the bond between a mother and her eldest son, as she prepares him while he is young and dependent for his role later when his mother becomes old and dependent. The concept is widely used in referring to relations between employer and employee, teacher and student and other relationships where dependence is seen as appropriate and normal (Pedersen, 1988, p. 41).

The Cultural Grid

Pedersen and Pedersen (1988) developed the Cultural Grid (Fig. 2) to address the dilemma of descriptively combining individual features with social system (cultural) variables. Its premise is that culture is within the person and not necessarily the group. It is an open-ended model and acknowledges both the complexity and dynamic nature of culture. The implication that the boundaries of one's personal cultural orientation are complex and ever-changing is its most important feature. It is concrete rather than abstract as it seeks to identify an individual's personal-cultural orientation in a particular situation through attention to his or her behaviour and its meaning. The cultural grid goes further than being merely descriptive as it suggests explanations for the interrelationship of the variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social System Variables</th>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnographic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nationality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socioeconomic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A person's behaviour does not communicate a clear message by itself. The message will become clear when it is analysed within the context of the person's relevant social system variables. The learned "expectation" is the outcome the person anticipates in the light of these variables.

The practical advantage of the Cultural Grid is that it increases our accurate assessment of another person's behaviour in the context of that person's culture, without reducing culture to static and fixed dimensions. The Cultural Grid provides a "road-map" for the counsellor to interpret a person's behaviour accurately in the context of learned expectations. For example, a counsellor might be interviewing a Taiwanese, Christian, teen-aged, wealthy female student about a personal problem. It is possible that because the student is in a wheelchair and is paraplegic, the counsellor might make an inaccurate assessment that the student's disability is the most relevant aspect of the student's culture, even though the student refers to each of the above social system variables during the interview.

Applications of the cultural grid to an educational setting

To illustrate the application of the Cultural Grid here is a possible scenario in a TAFE Institute. Hasan, a 19 year old student, has had some difficulty following his computer course. His teacher has happily and courteously spent more than an hour reviewing some of the material with him. Unfortunately Hasan failed his next test. He has not gone back to class and has never spoken to his teacher again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client</th>
<th>Nationality — Indonesian</th>
<th>Ethnicity — Javanese</th>
<th>Sex — Male</th>
<th>Age — 19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Does not seek teacher's help. Skips class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Avoid loss of face, shame.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Value</td>
<td>Conformity to societal, family's expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another example could be a Cook Islander who has been summoned to the Director's office to discuss a perceived serious misdemeanour. The Director greets Tom at his office door and Tom throws himself into a chair uninvited while the Director remains standing. This could be contrasted with similar behaviour from an Australian student as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client</th>
<th>Nationality — Cook Islander</th>
<th>Sex — Male</th>
<th>Age — 20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Throws himself into a chair while elder stands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Conveys respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Value</td>
<td>Values authority, wisdom, age.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client</th>
<th>Nationality — Australian</th>
<th>Sex — Male</th>
<th>Ethnicity — Irish</th>
<th>Age 20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Throws himself into a chair while elder stands.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Conveys lack of care.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Value</td>
<td>Values self above others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar behaviours may have different meanings and different behaviours may have the same meaning. Consider the meeting of two businessmen, one Australian and the other Japanese. Both have an expectation of being polite and respectful. Both have a shared value of pleasing their business associates. However, their behaviour differs: the Australian holds out his hand and the Japanese bows. This is an example of cross-cultural conflict. If two people are accurate in their interpretation of one another's behaviour, they do not always need to agree. The Cultural Grid attempts to answer the question of whether one's interpretation is correct.
There are four types of relationships: (Pedersen, 1988, p. 70)

Type I relationship. Two people have similar behaviours and expectations. They interpret each other's behaviour accurately.

Type II relationship: Behaviours differ but expectations are shared. Both intend to be trusting and friendly but they perceive and interpret the other's behaviour inaccurately. This illustrates the most common example of cross-cultural conflict.

Type III relationship: Two people have the same behaviours (e.g. smiling) but differ greatly in their expectations, one being trusting and the other distrusting. If there is a low level of accuracy in assessing the other's expectation, the relationship is likely to result in personal conflict. If mutual assessment is accurate each person may adjust to expectations.

Type IV relationship: Two people have different behaviours and different expectations. If there is a low level of accuracy in their interpretations of one another's actions, hostile disengagement will be the result.

Figure 3 shows the interpersonal cultural grid, the various combinations of which create the above relationships.

- **Type I**
  - Both have the same behaviours and expect similar outcomes.
  - Positive expectation.

- **Type II**
  - Behaviours differ, but expectations are shared.

- **Type III**
  - Both have similar behaviours, but their expectations differ.
  - One is trusting, the other is distrusting.

- **Type IV**
  - Both have different behaviours and expectations.

**Figure 3**

'The Interpersonal Cultural Grid'

Pedersen & Ivey (1993)
Culture Shock

Culture Shock, a term first coined by Oberg (1960) has been described by Mezger (1992). It is a normal and wholly to be expected process of adaptation involving:

- Strain due to necessity to adapt psychologically,
- Sense of loss in regard to friends, status,
- Being rejected by and rejecting the new culture,
- Confusion in role, role expectation, values, feelings and self-identity,
- Surprise, anxiety, even disgust and indignation after becoming aware of cultural differences,
- Feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment.

Westwood and Barker (1990) liken the stages of adjustment to a new culture as being like a roller coaster ride, "a pattern of valleys and peaks, where excitement and interest are succeeded by depression, disorientation or frustration. The intensity of the ups and downs depends on the nature of the individual, as does the length of time an individual experiences each stage." During this period of disorientation the students are being called upon to make critical vocational and course choices. Information overload and unfamiliarity with the educational institution may contribute to bad decisions. Culture shock needs to be discussed during pre-departure briefings and orientation to prepare students for its onset and assist coping. The W-curve reproduced here (Fig 4) can also be useful in interpreting the stages of adjustment through which students progress in the host culture and then after returning home.

![Figure 4](image-url)

**Figure 4**

Stages Of Inter-Cultural Adjustment And Orientation W-Curve Oriented for Success; AIDAB (1990 p. 16)
Models for Cross-Cultural Counselling

The self-validation model

(Based on Westwood & Ishiyama, 1990, 1992)

This model is seen as particularly useful for students who are involved in the psychosocial adjustment issues of moving from a familiar culture to a foreign one.

Common themes which international students bring to counsellors include cultural disorientation, self-doubt, loneliness and identity crisis. These could all relate to the broad issue of culture shock. Students who have left behind a supportive social network and are feeling discouraged may express feelings like the following:

- No one seems to understand what I'm going through;
- I miss home, but I can't go back I feel trapped here;
- I'm not good enough to be successful in this country;
- People think I'm dumb and incompetent I resent that No one seems to need me or care about me. I feel insignificant and abandoned,
- I was "somebody" back home but nobody here,
- I feel different and isolated. I don't belong here.

The resultant anxiety, depression or hostility will interfere with a student's ability to settle in to study and the student can obviously benefit from the help offered by counselling.

Good interpersonal communication is seen as a prerequisite for effective helping. Many writers agree that Rogers' three well-known counsellor attributes which he maintained release a growth-promoting climate are important in the domain of cross-cultural counselling.

These attributes are:

1. congruence (genuineness),
2. unconditional positive regard (acceptance and caring),
3. accurate empathic understanding (an ability to grasp the subjective world of another).

In many counselling approaches Rogers' three conditions form the basis for applying specific techniques. In the self-validation model the communication process itself is seen as an intervention that can effect client change. The role of the counsellor is that of a client-validator.

The primary goal of helping is to allow students to own their own subjective world and to engage them in dialogue with the counsellor and within themselves. Thus it is interpersonal and intrapersonal. As students struggle to make themselves understood in the presence of the counsellor and their interpersonal communication effectiveness develops, so does their understanding of themselves. They may be empowered to integrate his bicultural experiences.

An essential part of this process is that students are encouraged to educate the counsellor about their cultural and personal systems of language, metaphors, world views and meanings.

The self-validation model describes the experience of cultural adjustment and provides a holistic framework for understanding the person's struggles toward personal, social, physical and spiritual well-being. The four premises of this model are:

- Students who lack the language and cultural awareness skills of local students also lack opportunities to be socially validated in their new environment;
- Students desire relationships that are
empowering and validating to them;

- The counsellor can be an active agent of student validation,
- Self-appreciation results from increased awareness of deeper feelings and values and a realistic appraisal of the present situation and inner resources.

![Diagram of Psychological Themes and Components of Self-Validation](image)

**Figure 5**
Psychological Themes and Components of Self-Validation

Five interrelated validation themes are identified (Fig 5). Change in one component is likely to affect the others.

**Security, comfort and support.**

Feelings of loss, uprootedness and homesickness are common among international students in varying degrees. The helping relationship can be an emotional sanctuary where students can feel supported and more in control. Students can be helped to work through their experience of loss and grief.

**Self-worth and self acceptance.**

Frequent experiences of being misunderstood because of communication difficulties can cause loss of self-confidence and may even cause the student to deny his or her own feelings and thoughts. A sense of impotence may result after a series of failures in various adjustments (making friends, academic performance). The gradual loss of sense of self-worth may result in depression. The counsellor can offer a relationship in which the person feels listened to with understanding and respect. Students may be reminded that they have positive qualities and that they are valued and loved at home and perhaps in this country.

**Competence and autonomy.**

Students' own ethnic ways of relating to others, accessing and processing information and expressing ideas may not be effective or appropriate in this country. This lack of culturally appropriate skills may make students self-critical and feel inferior. The counsellor can acknowledge these feelings and both validate the competencies they do have and motivate them to develop new skills. They may be helped to learn about the host culture, making comparisons with their own and examine and modify their behaviour.

**Identity and belonging.**

Moving to a new country inevitably involves loss of reference groups, such as extended family, co-workers, friends, religious gatherings around whom one's self-concept is developed and with whom values and world view are shared. There may be hurts and conflicts in the host culture. The counsellor can help by helping students to express their frustrations and grieve the loss of the previously owned sense of self. This is an identity issue which requires exploration and guidance to reach a higher level of awareness of the ethnic and bicultural aspects of self. Validation of their belonging to the culture of origin and the human race could help.

**Love, fulfilment and meaning in life.**

These themes are placed in the centre of the self-validation model because they are closely related to feelings of hope and emotional and spiritual well-being. If repeated failures and a succession of losses occur together with social isolation, individuals may become despairing and depressed. The counsellor may not be able to change the present difficulty, but can help the individual to search for meaning in the current situation and clarify personal values and goals.
Through unconditional acceptance of the student, and an awareness of how the student perceives the world personally and culturally, the helper facilitates the discouraged student's getting in touch with his or her feelings and developing constructive goals. The validation process involves recognising the person's strengths and accomplishments.

Termination needs to be handled very sensitively with international students, as even if the presented problem appears to have been overcome, the relationship may have become a source of security and validation in itself. Other sources of stability and validation need to be put in place so that the client does not perceive the termination of counselling as yet another loss.

Cultural mapping: developing skills for social-cultural competence

(Westwood, 1994)

The focus of this behavioural approach is developing culturally appropriate behaviours that have been shown to bring about more positive interactions and outcomes. It is a preventative approach rather than remedial and its purpose is to provide a means for teaching newcomers critical behaviours and understandings so they can be more successful in reaching their goals. People protect their original cultural self-identities at the same time acquiring a dual identity of sorts as they augment their repertoire of competencies. The helper is seen as a coach or teacher and no special professional background is required. The skills approach is particularly appropriate for specific situations involving making requests, asking for help, assertion, speaking up in class and making social contacts. Westwood stresses that helpers have an ethical responsibility to point out that these behaviours may not work in their country of origin.

There are three phases:

Phase 1: The process begins with "building the cultural bridge", using basic communication skills to put the student at ease and clarify student expectations and counsellor role. This is akin to the exploration of cultural, family and personal background that people from a "high context" culture engage in before proceeding to the business at hand. It may involve talking about the student's name and its significance while ascertaining what the student prefers to be called. A useful question in Phase 1 is "What would happen at home in this situation?"

Phase 2: This involves gathering information about the problem, defining and describing it.

Phase 3: This is the implementation or action phase. It requires the counsellor to provide a cultural map, a formula for achieving a goal. Cultural mapping involves:

— a description of the behaviours and statements to use to achieve the goal explanations (cultural information),

— anticipation of possible responses of others.

Next the counsellor models the skills and the role-play is discussed. Further explanation may be needed. The student then practises and is coached. This is followed up by counsellor feedback, encouragement and correction. A second demonstration may be given before the student repeats the practice as many times as required until the student feels comfortable. The session finishes with a contract to apply the skills in a real situation and arrangements are made for follow-up.

An example could be learning how to take turns at speaking in a tutorial. The explanations would involve the expectation in our culture that students do speak out or we assume they have nothing to say and that challenging other opinions is acceptable so long as it is done to certain formulae.
Use of an Interpreter

There may occasionally be a case for the use of an interpreter and students need to be made aware of the service and their right to access it. Such instances could be, if accuracy is essential in providing evidence for police or taking a matter to a lawyer, or indeed, if the student is too distressed to speak in a foreign language or just does not feel understood.

The following guidelines on counselling with interpreters are taken from a video: Counselling with Interpreters — Sexual Assault Interview by Health Media for Sexual Assault Education Unit, Department of Health, NSW.

Use a professional interpreter, as they are bound by a code of ethics and will be trained to treat the matter sensitively and confidentially.

The pre-interview session

• Brief the interpreter.
• Obtain cultural background information from the interpreter.
• Establish the mode of interpreting Is it to be simultaneous or concurrent?

The interview

• With consecutive interpreting use short sentences.
• Introduce the interpreter to the student.
• Arrange seating to facilitate communication between the student and counsellor.
• Establish ground rules, most importantly that you speak to the client through the interpreter.
• Use the first person, ie no third person “Does he or she [the student] think ..?”
• Speak slowly, clearly, but naturally Avoid jargon
• If control slips in the interview, stop it straight away and restate ground rules
• Summarise periodically to ensure understanding.

The Post-interview session

• Debrief the interpreter.
• Give the interpreter the opportunity to vent any feelings and raise any issues that may have come up for them.
Support Systems for the International Student

The focus of this guide has been on ensuring that interventions we use with international students when problems arise are culturally appropriate. However, some mention must be made of the provision of ongoing support services which endeavour to pre-empt the most common difficulties and make the transition and adaptive process as smooth as possible.

Table 6 (Williams, 1989, p. 80) outlines the range of services that should be offered to overseas students. This basic provision will prevent many students from floundering and can be added to as the institution sees fit.

Oriented for Success, A Resource Book on Overseas Student Services provides excellent suggestions for organising and delivering support programs, from pre-departure briefings to returning home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Appropriate Support Services for International Students

#### Pre-departure
- Adequate and accurate course advice.
- Information & briefing covering practical items such as climate, clothing, living expenses, health services, immigration regulations, the practicalities of everyday life.
- Meeting with ex-students or a representative of the educational institution to gain first hand information would be useful, if possible.

#### Arrival and ongoing support

1. Welfare services
   - Reception, arrival orientation to the city and institution, provision of temporary accommodation.
   - Assistance with finding permanent accommodation.
   - Orientation to life in Australia, study at university or college, the institution and local area.
   - Emergency financial assistance to help students cope with changed personal or family financial circumstances. In fact, advice on part-time employment may be provided.

2. Educational services
   - Course advice.
   - Language and communication skills.
   - Study and learning skills.
   - Careers advice and placement services.

3. Personal and health services
   - Access to medical and hospital services both on-campus and after hours.
   - Access to dental and optical services.
   - International student adviser.
   - Counselling service.
   - Peer support.

4. Recreational services
   - Sports and cultural activities.
   - Student clubs and societies.

#### Pre-return
- Information and briefing on current situation in home country.
- Re-entry programs to assist in adjusting to the back home culture and practical situation.
Orientation

The concept of orientation is preventative in that an orientation program aims to predict possible difficulties and provide students with information and training to overcome them. The aim is to help students adjust to their new life.

A typical formal orientation program might cover:

- academic English skills assessment;
- library and computer lab familiarisation;
- a tour of campus facilities;
- settlement problems, culture shock and introduction to counselling service;
- enrolment;
- discussion of different cultural approaches to study;
- cross-cultural issues - adapting to Australian ways.

Monitoring of progress

The first six to eight weeks post-arrival as the critical time in the adjustment process and a formal follow-up program at this stage to review and build upon the orientation program is recommended. (Barker 1990).

For example, the staff of Hobart Institute of TAFE's International Student Unit call in every international student after they have been attending classes for a few weeks for an individual interview to assess progress academically as well as to check on health and welfare.

Monitoring of students' academic progress can involve:

- student interviews with international student adviser;
- academic staff comments on students;
- monitoring of exam results;
- identification of "at risk" students and appropriate referral;
- coordination of monitoring procedures with AusAID

In 1992 AIDAB (now AusAID) reported that up to 50 per cent of Pacific Island students studying Law at the University of Tasmania were failing. This meant a cost to the Australian government in terms of extending awards and a huge personal loss to the students in terms of returning home a failure. These students are often disadvantaged because they have not been taught the skills necessary to be successful in Law - critical thinking, analysis and objectivity. In 1993 the University implemented a program to improve the pass rate by integrating these students into the Law School and providing them with special support measures, such as group and individual tutorials and a full day seminar. By Semester 1 1995 the success rate was 79 per cent.

English language support

Most institutions offer ongoing English language support for international students. The service usually includes:

- classes in academic writing;
- English for specific subject areas (e.g., Commerce);
- examination techniques;
- oral seminar skills;
- individual assistance;
- thesis editing services.

Social and cultural support

Social issues also need attention, so that adult students can make decisions about the extent to which they adjust to Australian culture, even if it is only a temporary adjustment. At Hobart Institute of TAFE, sex education lessons are offered for separate groups of males and females. Family Planning runs the women's session which begins with no assumptions about level of knowledge, using physiological models to
illustrate menstruation, sexual intercourse and conception. STDs and the prevention of them is also covered. Samples of sanitary items and contraceptives are passed around for scrutiny in a matter of fact and cheerful manner. The class is handled with cultural sensitivity beginning with asking the participants who, if anyone, is responsible for handing down this type of knowledge in their culture, and exploring to some extent the range of values. There is also some attention given to dating practices in Australia. The women are intrigued by their sex education class and obviously learn a great deal. From the level of interest displayed and the type of questions that arise, it would be easy to justify a series of classes or discussion groups, each of two hours' duration.

There are many instances of practical support offered by University, TAFE and AusAID staff as well as locally based groups who offer friendship and support in various ways. Names and addresses of these organisations are kept by the International Student Unit or Student Services. It is beyond the scope of this guide to list them specifically.

Peer pairing or a buddy system offers a formalised helping arrangement from an Australian student or occasionally a more established international student. The chief benefit to the new arrivals is that they learn the unwritten social rules of the new culture. They also receive help in negotiating their way around the campus and the Australian student may act as an advocate for them.

For information on peer-pairing programs see Bowden (1990), and Westwood and Barker (1990).

Re-entry

Institutions should consider offering brief re-entry programs for students returning home, as there may be an experience of reverse culture shock (see the "W" curve Part 7).

Alumni Associations provide the opportunity for students to maintain links with their former place of study in Australia.
Conclusion

It has been difficult to set limits to this guide as people working with international students have such varied roles to play. The guide has deliberately concentrated on presenting a summary of the literature available that offers models and approaches for counselling students from other cultures, the most sensitive of tasks. It aims to provide a starting point and orientation for people who wish to improve their cross-cultural competence and gain expertise in this area.

Cross-cultural counselling is a relatively new field in Australia and counsellors and advisers have an obligation to international students to improve their knowledge and skills in this area. International students have special needs and in order to maximise their academic progress and personal development, we have a moral responsibility to provide them with culturally appropriate services.
References


Pedersen, P (Ed ) (1991) Journal of counseling and development—multiculturalism as a fourth force, 70 American Association for Counseling and Development


Petchell, D (1981) A cultural encounter. Paper presented to a Seminar on Counselling the Overseas Student, Melbourne


**Videos**

*Counselling with Interpreters*, sexual assault interview by Health Media for Sexual Assault Education Unit, Department of Health, NSW

*Peering Up*, from Canada by Marv Westwood describes prevention of problems by anticipating them and putting peer programs in place *Reach Out* provides before arrival orientation to the peer system.

*Returning Home*, by AIDAB reviews the experience of overseas study and recommends joining alumni and professional associations to maintain links between old and new countries. For showing prior to re-entry.