Local-International Student Engagement:

Challenging some Myths and Assumptions

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Previous Research Focus

- In the 80s – 90s, the literature seemed to focus on helping international students (eg. **Problems** with adapting, adjusting, language, needs and access to information)

- The focus was on "How can we teach those international students?"

- Volet (1998) took this to the next level by asking questions around opportunities, community building and classroom interactions, highlighting the need to move beyond a deficit model.

Introduction

- The international education sector in both New Zealand and Australia has been growing over the last two decades. The phenomenon of international students coming to study is not going away in the short to medium term.

- At the same time, increasing competition for students from regional education hubs of Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore for international students.

- Where in the 50s to the 90s, students generally come to Australia and New Zealand to study for a few years, then go back to their home countries… this trend has shifted as the world's population becomes more mobile.

Current Challenge with Research in the Area

- There seems to be a general confusion between cultural, communication and academic competence.

  IELTS is not a measure of all three

- How can we have simple answers to complex questions about the student experience?

  We cannot…

  Therefore, this session is about challenging some of these simplistic answers and point the way for a more holistic approach to research in the area (or we'll try to do that)

International and Local Students

- In the 21st Century, students have become more mobile post-graduation:
  - International students are now seen as an important resource – with increased numbers working and settling down in host countries
  - International students are also more likely to spend a few years in host countries before going back to home country or 3rd country for work, or to settle down
  - Local students are increasing looking for jobs overseas and working across different parts of the Globe as information about the overseas job market beomces more resdily available

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What is the meaning of the local-international dichotomy?

- There is a need to unpack what we mean by international / local… the more realistic mix includes;

  - Migrants, Refugees, Non-English Speaking, English Speaking Internationals, Third country nationals, Returning Expat students, Country and Rural Students

Why is the focus only on how international students adapt?

- Where is the focus on diversified teaching strategies for a diversity in the student cohort?

- What about the Australian students' lack of bilingualism (without generalising too much)?
  - This may be an important focus of research when we are looking at international education because it's also about Australian and New Zealand students working globally

What is Australia's (and New Zealand's) host culture?

- If we are inviting students to our shores, what are we doing about exposing them to our culture(s) and encouraging them to give us insights into their culture – beyond the food festivities

- In Australia, we tend to do very little to expose students to our indigenous cultures

- In homestays – what do you do with students who only want to be hosted by 'real Australians' and 'real New Zealanders'?

Focus on Support Services?

- Why is there a disproportionate focus on support services providing leadership on engagement, rather than through academic teaching and learning?
  - aka – "It's an international student – send him/her to the international centre/ESL teacher"
    - And some times… they are not even 'international'

- There seems to be a managerial approach rather than an educational approach – this should not point to a simplistic 'mainstreaming exercise' of treating everyone the same!

Does internationalisation of curriculum mean a resultant internationalised cohort by default?

- Internationalisation of the curriculum is not just about including international case studies and including international contexts

- The cohort experience HAS to be engineered and scaffolded for it to work

- It goes back to curriculum planning (see Leask et al 2008)
  - Eg. How do we get students to interact, work in groups, how does assessment value communication competence?

Why is English as a second language often cited as the barrier to engagement?

- "English is the problem" should NOT be the default position. We need to be more sophisticated in our analysis of the barriers.

- There is a need to create opportunities for students to engage and understand contexts in order to improve social English language skills

What has worked effectively?

- AEI is conducting a project looking at a programs that work around the country.
  - We know that there are a number of effective orientation, transition and small group discussion programs that are usually part of the informal curriculum, across both New Zealand and Australia
  - We know of key programs at Uni of Newcastle and Uni of South Australia that seek to engage more effectively with the local communities
  - We know of small postgraduate programs that engage international and local students well at various universities

Areas for future research I

▸ Define and understand the experiences and needs of both international AND local students in the same situation (see the similarities and differences in a given context) … extend Volet's 1998 work

▸ The need for better nomenclature that describes diverse cohorts of students

▸ The need to map the complex inter-twining factors – rather than looking for simple solutions

Areas for future research II

▸ Explore curriculum/learning and teaching rather than viewing them as a service area
  ▸ Research is needed on how to embed these English language, communication and cultural awareness preparation programs into the main curriculum for all students
  ▸ This is important and should be seen as preparation for the work place and wider social context

▸ Explore the role of academics in all of these areas;
  ▸ The collaboration between support staff and academics need to increase
  ▸ Understanding what models for integration works in the classroom (See Arkoudis et al.'s project in 2009)