

# Supporting international students in schools and implications for VET and HE sectors

Professor Ly Tran

Australian Research Council Future Fellow

School of Education, Deakin University

[Ly.tran@Deakin.edu.au](mailto:Ly.tran@Deakin.edu.au)

*ISANA Vic/Tas and Vision International Webinar:*

***17/03/2021***



**DEAKIN**  
UNIVERSITY

# Please type in the chat space



- One word each to describe international students pre and during COVID-19



- Factors impact international student (IS) mobility
- International students' experiences
- Practical recommendations and examples of good practices to support IS
- *This presentation draws on data from several projects, including the Australian Research Council Discovery Project: International students in secondary schools. (ARC DP160103181). The research team comprises Chief Investigators J. Blackmore, L. Tran, C. Beavis, L. Rowan; Partner Investigator C. Halse, Research Fellows T. Mccandless, H. Bui, C. Mahoney and C. Moore. Doctoral candidates T. Hoang, M. Chou-Lee and A. Hurem.*

# In addition to traditional pull and push factors, IS mobility trends post COVID-19 will likely depend on:



- the recovery of major sending countries
- COVID-19 infection loads & pandemic management in key destination countries
- vaccine uptake and effectiveness
- the length of border closures
- host countries' approaches to treating IS (on & offshore) during the crisis
- responses to pre-existing racism and new forms of COVID-19 racism facing IS
- quality and flexibility of (online) education programs offered during COVID-19
- visa extension/renewal support and flexibility
- policies around post-study work and migration
- geo-political tensions: international education weaponised and international students used as political tools

- The importance of understanding international students' **study purposes, needs** and **characteristics** to engage
  - Academic needs, English language needs, pastoral care, belonging, wellbeing and future aspirations
  - Connect IS **academically, interculturally and affectively**
  - Productive Connectedness:
    - With domestic students, international peers, teachers and staff
    - A sense of belonging to the classroom, school and broader community
    - Content of teaching and learning: being included and valued intellectually and culturally
    - Holistically across the formal and informal curriculum
- (Tran, 2014; Tran & Pham, 2016; Tran, 2020)

# Belonging: International students' perspectives (Rowan et al., 2021)



*...when I first got here I think the problem is within myself, like every time when I recall it it's like I don't talk to people and then people don't talk to me so it feels like I'm being left out and then isolated from everyone else. Dishu (China)*

## **Surface connection:**

*I really don't talk to with someone really deep, maybe just fairly communication, joking, this kind of thing, that is fine, but it's like when you really sit down or really want to think deep or talk deep, communicate deep, there's no one here.*

*Aoi (Japan)*

**Online connection** as a means of lessening students sense of outsidersness, loneliness, isolation and homesickness:

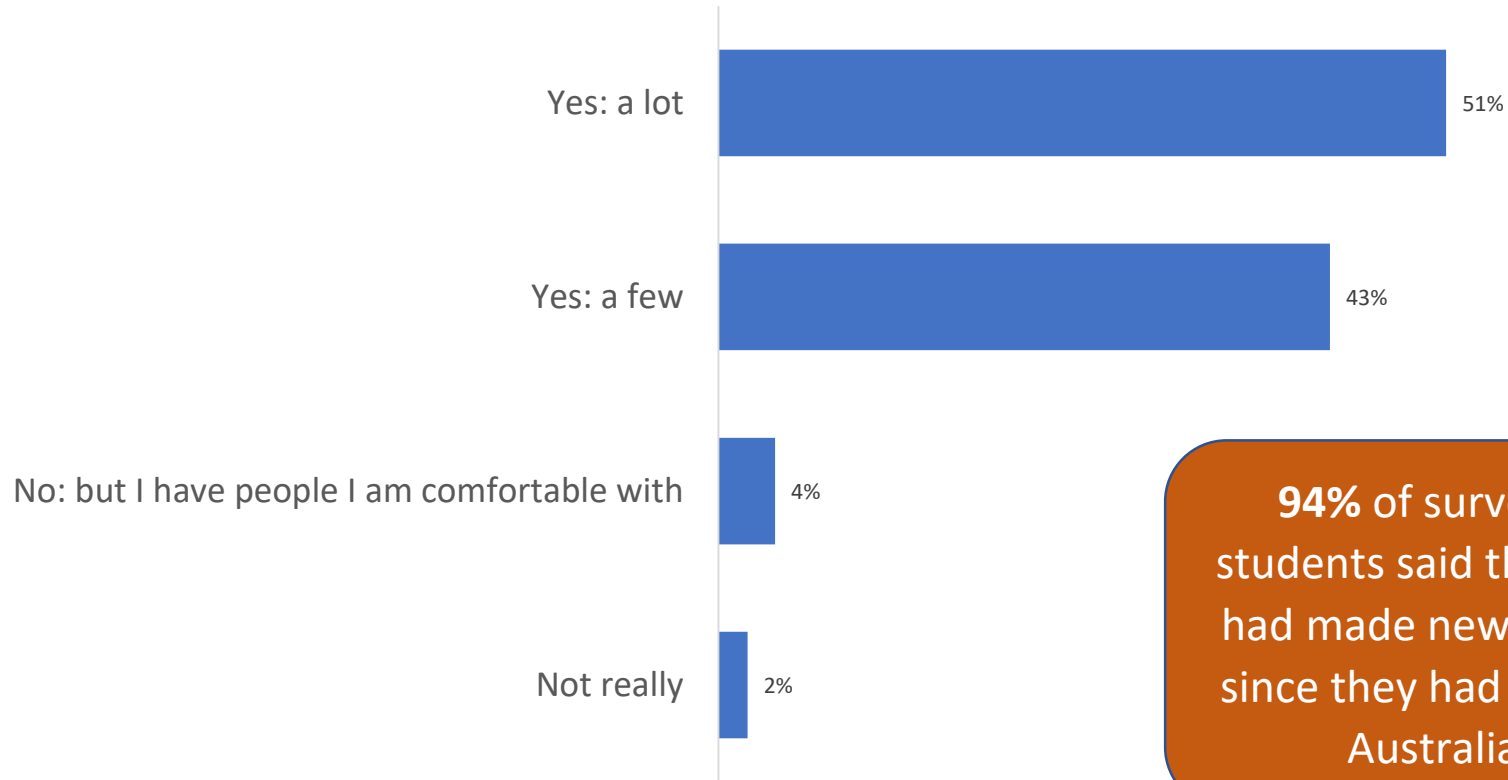
playing online games with Australian friends:

*"make me feel that I'm not completely lost and alone in Australia. Sometimes I can connect with them through social media and make me less homesick for Cambodia and yeah, get along with my friends better"*

*Mittapheap (Cambodia)*

- Role of English language proficiency in not only academic learning but also intercultural interaction, sense of belonging, and wellbeing
- “Many had studied English in their home country for much of their life, participated in English program in Australia and felt prepared for their Australian experience” (Rowan et al., 2021)
- But this was challenged by their early experience in Australian schools, impacting their confidence, identity and longing to make friendship connections (Rowan et al., 2021)
- Formal English language assessment results might not tell us accurately about IS needs for English improvement and the proficiency levels and domains needed for IS to engage meaningfully and productively

# Making new friends since they have been in Australia (n=292 from 21 schools)



**94%** of surveyed students said that they had made new friends since they had been in Australia.

Yes, but...

# Domestic students' perspectives: them-us or no boundary? Making friends? **Yes but at a surface level**



*“It’s not just the language barrier, it’s the lack of common interests that really prohibits **them from integrating themselves.**”*

*“They might not want to have that person part of the group as it may bring the whole group down with them...it may affect your own mark and then that kind of has an hesitation on **whether you want to be a partner with them** no matter how good a friend you are.”*

*“I’ve been friends with two international students and at first I definitely... I didn’t have an idea that they were international students, to me they were just two new students in my class but over the year we’ve become really good friends and like decided hanging out outside of school, like **we went to a movie recently and we message each other a lot online and stuff like** that so they just eventually like become part of the crowd.”*

*“**All of us in our year level try to accept them** and we all do but it simply comes down to the fact that we can’t relate as well as all domestic students can to each other.”*

# Survey data:

## My life as an international student would be happier if:



- the most prominent theme: making friends: ...*“I have more friends who have same hobbies with me. I am able to make more friends with Australian students.”*
- more opportunities for international students to integrate: group gatherings, school meetups, more clubs or classes where people who has the same interest gathered, more activities set up to *“introduce ourselves to the local students”*
- more opportunities to take leadership roles: *“Many people at school don't even know our existence because we don't have the chance to perform at school. We need the chance to speak for ourselves and our feels.”*
- More opportunities to **immerse into the local community**
- Disrupt racism and **stereotypes associated with being an IS and non-native speaker of English**: *“I wish I didn't have to care about people's reactions when I am trying to tell them something in English. I was not forced to sit with local students without any help as we don't really have the common things to talk about. It is just awkward. I was not considered to be irresponsible because I am an international student”*

# Survey data: My life as an international student would be happier if:



- Disrupt teachers' stereotypes associated with being an IS and non-native speaker of English: *"If I was treated more like a domestic student and if I was put in the same classes as domestic kids. Also if **teachers will stop underestimating my abilities based on the fact that I am an international student**"*
- Reciprocal learning: more activities to help domestic students, teachers, advisors and host school community to learn and understand more about IS's cultures and countries: *"Many students from my school always think China is a poor country like 50 years before. I think school should **do more research about international students' country and explain to school students.**"*
- Understanding of challenges encountered by international students and developing empathy
- More understandings from subject teachers: *"We want school to listen to us and give us more help on the subjects and we want teachers can know us well."*
- more support resources regarding homesickness or **mental health**
- Homestay and boarding: time restriction, expectation management, food, diverse sports activities *"Get Uber eats, because boarding food is bad"*

## Happy to be in a supportive and inclusive environment at school:



- I think now when I have studied in Australia in a short time, the staffs at my school are very friendly and they always listen to international students when they need help. They always ask me about my homestay, give me more information about the school and Australia community as well as help me **to make more friends** in my school from other countries.
- I would also like to note that the negative comments upon racism in Australia are not portrayed and employed by many surrounding me, and are only a few cases in which it was present. Most of my friends and members of the surrounding community are **accepting, respecting and understanding** of my cultural backgrounds and physical appearance, and am comfortable at school and in the community.



Can you please imagine an **orange**?



# International students viewed from a deficit frame (Tran, 2016)



- Differences viewed as deficiencies
- Ethnocentric lens of looking at IS: regard international students as being deficit
- Silence, lack of English proficiency and lack of classroom participation are seen as deficiency in cognitive ability
- Silence or inadequate spoken English proficiency seen as a lack of engagement, lack of commitment or lack of responsibility
- **Pro-active/productive silence**
- Assume that it is the onus of international students to adjust to what is required of them (McLean & Ransom, 2005 , p. 45)
- Remedial programs that centre on the provision of language and learning support to help 'fix' international students' 'deficiencies' rather than assist them in developing their learning skills or maximising their potentials (Tran, 2016)

# Understanding students' study purposes and aspirations to engage them in learning



*First we need to understand **what you are interested in, your purposes in coming to study in Australia** - we need to communicate with them more to understand - we need to understand them to engage (Secondary school teacher)*

*To **understand more about their reasons for being** here because they're complex... I'm able, usually to eventually get to the point with the student but sometimes it's very hidden [...] But I do think that there are international students that are studying for a myriad of reasons and if I was clearer about those reasons, it might make my work quicker [...].  
(VET Teacher)*

- Mixing students in class activities, class seating
  - creating an inviting environment for them to speak English in class and to seek support
  - Include international elements in content and teaching approach (topic discussion, case studies from IS' home countries, encourage international students' reflection of their home perspective)
  - Use a variety of pedagogical practices: more visuals, regular checking, notes
  - Extra support to students who are unable to keep pace
  - English language support integration into subject teaching and learning
- Create an *inviting environment*: “meet and greet them in the early day- at a more personal level and say that it is ok for them to come and seek help/support – say that to them in a non classroom environment because I have said that many times in the class but it’s not very effective” (Teacher)
  - “But I think in the higher levels it’s limited because they’re teaching curriculum which is VCE. In the lower levels I think there’s that opportunity”

# Position international students as a resource of knowledge and culture



International students are a resource of subject knowledge/validate the knowledge, experience and cultural capital international students bring into the classrooms

✓ Yes but still fragmented and ad-hoc; Learn on the job; Good practices not widely shared

*“Some internationals have also experienced friendships through them understanding the maths or science better and them tutoring the Aussies. There’s been a few examples of that so yeah helping each other out study wise.” (Teacher)*

*“Some of them might be more intellectually smarter than us, like they might have learnt something from a year ago and they’re just learning now so they can help us now if we needed some help or something....mostly mathematics.” (Domestic student)*

*I’m looking at modern history, if I’m looking at politics and ancient history, I would say well how does that happen in China or give me an example of how that would... **so I would often use their experiences from their own country to talk about that.** It often becomes relevant certainly in humanity subjects for sure (Teacher)*

# Extracurricular activities: Breaking barriers and tapping on hidden talents



- Capitalise on IS's hidden capabilities and potential, understand what their interests are and tap on those
- Connect IS through:
  - Sports and sport clubs
  - school camps, excursions
  - cultural events (harmony day), multicultural concert,
  - music, house singing competition,
  - performing art
  - voluntary work
  - leadership opportunities

*One of the students in year 11 this year is running a Chinese calligraphy class so students who want to participate will come, he'll teach them, and suddenly he's got a friendship network. (IS coordinator)*

*I think the other strategy is sport. Sport has no language... And then on a Friday we have open lunch for the students to go into the gym and play sports and there's quite often local students so we're trying that. Like our students come in, they play... they love badminton and table tennis and basketball so we've started that at lunch time. And then hopefully you know there's other local students there and we going hey would you like to join up with this person and that's how we're trying to get some sort of integration happening.*

# Foster understanding and involvement of local students



➤ Assist with the development of empathy

*I said have you guys ever thought about what the EAL girls do. Oh yeah, yeah, they're pretty good. And I said right, so you learn Japanese right, I want you to read Staziland in Japanese and then write me a four page essay in 75 minutes in Japanese, **and they're like... and it's like but that's what they [IS] do. And they're like oh my god.** And once you actually spell it out for them they've got this whole new understanding but they don't get it until you spell it out for them. I think that's important.*

➤ Buddy system

*Because I think a lot of the time **the local students perhaps don't have a good understanding of exactly how hard it is to be an international student in a school** and so I've been working a lot with my year 7 class with the two EAL students that I have sort of having talks with them about exactly how hard it is to do what Ying and Hattie do and so they've developed this real respect and so with my year 7 class the integration is fantastic and the two girls you know can easily be divided off into groups with local students and work very happily*

# Developing Empathy



*I asked for volunteers, I'd speak to them in English and they had to answer in their language. The group had to try and figure out from their body language and tone of voice what they were actually saying to me...But what I try and make them understand that part of the reason we're doing that, not in English, is because it's like excluding the local students and it's making them look like foreigners and to understand the challenge. (VET Teacher)*

# Being exposed and developing empathy: perspectives of domestic university students

- We send students to the Indo-Pacific to develop Indo-Pacific capabilities!
- 1 out of 4 Australian student had a learning abroad experience in 2019
- Almost 50% in the Indo-Pacific (AUIDF, 2020)
- How about Indo-Pacific resources within our classroom and within Australia (given Indo-Pacific students represent 85% of international student population in Australia)
- To what extent have we taken advantage of Asian resources in the classroom and on campus to enrich student experience

*“Japanese local people do not often expect me to speak Japanese and whenever I make an effort to speak Japanese, it is so much appreciated by local people here whereas international students in Australia are often expected by many local people to **speak fluent English as if everyone else in the world had to speak fluent English!** and when international students speak English, they are sometimes criticized for not speaking fluently enough or with an accent.” (Domestic HE)*

*“It’s important to level myself, **I am not superior, I just have more opportunities.**” (Domestic HE)*

*“it would be great to experience **the social privileges of domestic students**” (IS)*

*“There is a bigger world of science than just Australia” (Domestic student studying in Japan)*

- Leadership
- Resources
- Staffing/Staff communication/pastoral care

- *...we have three staff members in addition to those so the structure we have is we have an **international mentor** for the students so they have within their own class they've got their mentor and their subject teacher but we have an international mentor who will meet the students every week or two weeks depending on the year level to make sure that the students are reaching academic goals... so he only mentors them academically and cocurricular within the school community.*
- *Then we have multicultural assistant who will do tutoring... she'll do literacy with them. Tutoring. And making sure that they are on top every day with their work. And then **a third person** we have goes into class with them, she's a **cultural aid** so she'll go into class. She'll help them get organised. She'll go on camp with them. She'll go to city project with them. So they don't feel that they are just lost. So she's the legs with them. So when we have like in year 9 we have the city program where the students had to go to the city for the few days she'll actually go with them, make sure they don't get lost, make sure they're working with their group... Like if they have to go for their driving lesson she will take them and spend the day with them making sure they're safe.*

- Providing individual IS profiles for subject teachers
- Tapping on cultural interests
- Build facilities that target IS

*“we prepare **a profile for every new student** that comes to us, international student, so we know the strengths, the weaknesses, or the attitudes or how a student should be properly supported. **So we communicate that to every subject teacher** and then within the class we actually ask them what is the seating plan for the student.”*

*“we identified some cultural interests, we’ve identified some performing arts interests and we’ve got a whole list of those and so we purposefully try to then set up meetings or direct them to various areas so that they are involved”.*

*“We have **a table tennis centre as an acknowledgement of our particularly Asian cohort**. Not just international. I used some funds to buy that locally. We didn’t get the department to do that. So we’ve got our table tennis centre which is very well serviced. Some good table tennis players”.*

# What can we do to support teachers better in their teaching of IS



*“Like I would actually **want to know about that student** and then that will help me with my teaching of that student.” (Teacher)*

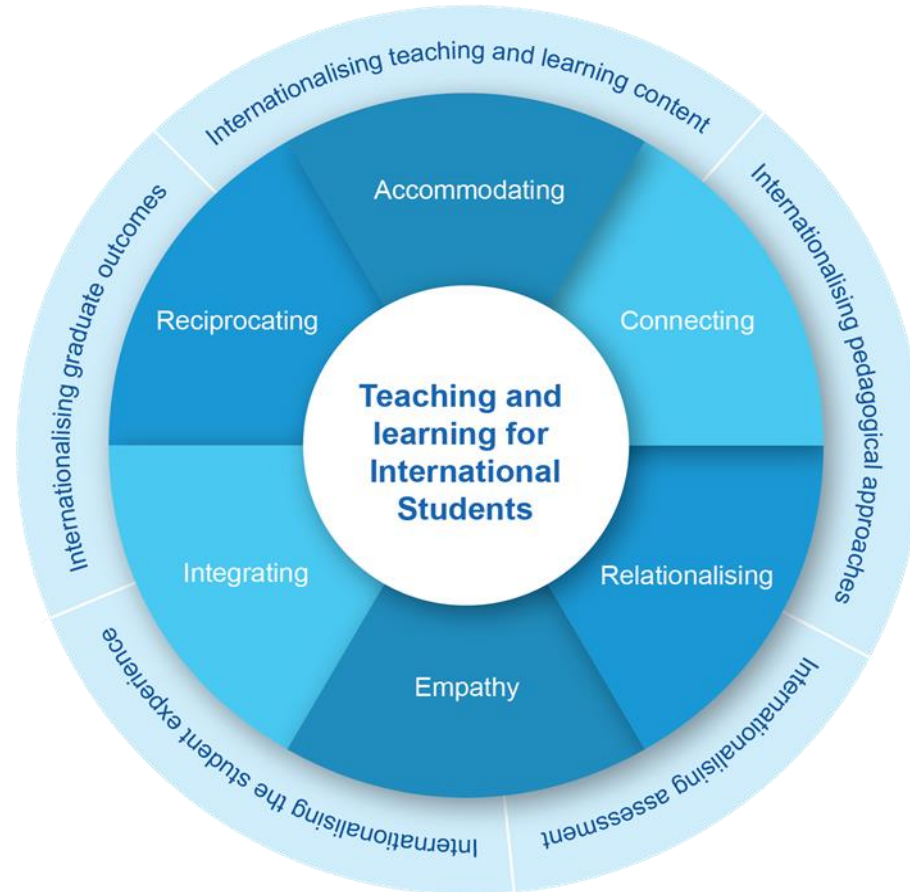
*“PD activities that help teachers **know more about the process of learning the subject in the country where IS are from**, their prior education, the family experience in their countries, their purposes for being here, if there is something behind the scene, greater awareness of their challenges and how we can support them better and **build on their potential**. **I try to imagine these but it’s powerful to hear from experts [in PD workshops]**” (Teacher)*

# Recommendations from IS coordinators and principals



- Vic state: good at welcoming IS to the state but local councils to do that – get local community to be involved
  - **Good practices need to be shared in a more holistic and systemic manner**
  - **Productive and inclusive** networks for mutual learning and support: Gov/related stakeholders should facilitate the networks among catholic schools or even schools in the local area: public, private and catholic schools in the area for network and exchange info about IS
  - invited to attend forum by gov, participate in activities and asked to share experience/opinion but never get feedback – not sure where these IDEAS GO – WOULD LIKE TO GET FEEDBACK
- *I was invited to participate in certain number of ceremonies and the sort of things that she was being recognised. It opened my eyes to the infrastructure that the government had in place around the international programs in government schools and so prior to that I was oblivious to it. I wasn't aware that it even existed. It wasn't really until we had a student who was being recognised at this level that I was even made aware that these divisions existed (IS Coordinator).*
  - ***I had no idea they even existed. They'd never communicated with me. I had no knowledge.** As a principal in the school I never been invited to a gathering of principals or a think tank or even just a get to know those sorts of forum. And that could purely be a sectoral thing you know, it might be that if I was in a government school all of those resources may have been made available to me and purely because of being in a catholic sector we weren't invited into those networks (Principal)*

# Framework for teaching and learning for international students (Tran, 2020)

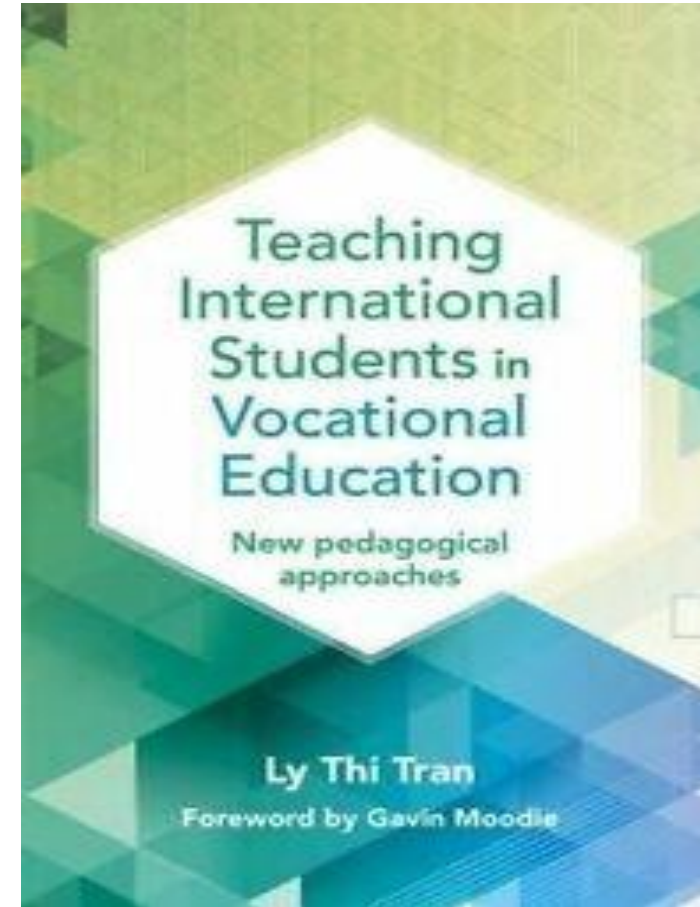


Good practices in teaching international students **enrich learning for all**

Book about good practice: Distinctive pedagogies to teaching and engaging international students in VET (Tran, 2014): <https://shop.acer.edu.au/teaching-international-students-in-vocational-education.html>



- Perspective transformation pedagogy
- Value-added approach
- Intercultural pedagogy
- English language and subject learning integration approach
- Work-integrated learning
- Ubuntu pedagogy
- Flexible divergent pedagogy
- International pedagogy



# Selected References



- Australian Research Council Discovery Project: International students in secondary schools. (ARC DP160103181). The research team comprises Chief Investigators J. Blackmore, L. Tran, C. Beavis, L. Rowan; Partner Investigator C. Halse, Research Fellows T. Mccandless, H. Bui, C. Mahoney and C. Moore. Doctoral candidates T. Hoang, M. Chou-Lee and A. Hurem.
- McLean, P., & Ransom, L. (2005). Building intercultural competencies: Implications for academic skills development. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all* (pp. 45–62). London: Routledge.
- Rizvi, Fazal. (2009). Towards cosmopolitan learning. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 30(3), 253-268.
- Rowan, Leonie, Beavis, Catherine, Tran, Ly, Blackmore, Jill, Mccandless, Trevor, Hoang, Trang, Hurem, Aida and Halse, Christine 2021, International students in the first years of senior secondary schooling in Australia: longing for belonging, *International journal of educational development*, vol. 81, pp. 1-10, doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102347.
- Tran, L. T. (2013). *Teaching international students in vocational education and training: The emergence of new pedagogical approaches*. ACER Press
- Tran, L. T. (2016). Students' academic, intercultural and personal development in globalised education mobility. In C.H. Ng, Fox, B. & Nakano, M. (Eds.), *Reforming learning and teaching in Asia-Pacific universities: Influences of globalised processes in Japan, Hong Kong and Australia* (pp.95-113). Dordrecht
- Tran, L. T. (2020). How to secure recovery of international student mobility. *University World News*. 20/06/2020.  
[www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200620071618800](https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200620071618800) <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200620071618800>
- Tran, L. T. (2020). Understanding the full value of international students  
<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200820103708349>
- Tran, L. T. (2020). Teaching and Engaging International Students: People-to-People Empathy and People-to-People Connections. *Journal of International Students*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i3.2005>
- Tran, L., & Tan, G. (2020). 90,000 foreign graduates are stuck in Australia without financial support: it's a humanitarian and economic crisis in the making. *The Conversation*. 23/04/2020
- Tran, L. T. & Pham, L (2016). International students in transnational mobility: Intercultural Connectedness with domestic and international peers, institutions and the wider community. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 46(4), 560-581.
- Tran, L., & Bui, H. (2020). Why host countries should support international alumni. *University World News*. 25/04/2020. HYPERLINK  
"<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2020042408542653>" [https](https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2020042408542653)
- Ziguras, C., & Tran, L. 2020 The coronavirus outbreak is the biggest crisis ever to hit international education, *The Conversation*

With thanks to the international and domestic students, staff and schools participating in this project!

The funding for these projects was from the Australian Research Council under the Discovery and FF schemes

*Thank you*