Finding common ground: Enhancing interaction between domestic and international students

ALTC funded project

The University of Melbourne
RMIT University
VU University

Why has this become an issue?

Growth in the numbers of international students has outpaced pedagogic understandings of effective teaching and learning practices.

Practice has ‘run ahead of theorisation and empirical research’ (Marginson, 2007: 7).

Was left to happen by osmosis

International student issue - Local students often are left out of the discussion.
Locating interaction in teaching and learning: Internationalising the curriculum

Dimensions:
- Content
- Learning and teaching processes
- Building communications skills

The interaction conundrum

We know it is important but how do we do it?

Where does interaction fit into content teaching?

What are the benefits and obstacles?
The Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded Project

**Focus**
- exploring the benefits of interaction, the obstacles and examples of practice
- investigating practices that can enhance interaction within the learning environment

**Data collection**
- online survey of academic staff
- academic staff and students interviewed

**Outcomes**
The development of the *Interaction for Learning Framework*

**Suite of resources:**
- The DVD - *Finding Common Ground*
- *The Guide for Academics*
- Background paper: *Finding Common Ground: Challenges and opportunities for interaction between domestic and international students*
- A flyer for students
Principles underpinning the Framework

– Acknowledges and capitalises on student diversity as a resource for learning and teaching

– Engages students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds within the learning context in a variety of ways

– Embeds interaction in curriculum planning and links to teaching, learning and assessment

– Promotes peer engagement through curriculum-based activities

– Recognises the variety of ways that interaction can be utilised across different learning contexts

Benefits

• increased awareness and understanding of different perspectives - enriched learning experience

• preparation for the workplace - workplaces have the same cultural diversity as that of university classrooms

• improved English language skills of international students

• greater feeling of belonging - development of personal relationships
Obstacles - teaching

• lack of time to foster interaction because of large class sizes
• intense teaching content requirements
• lack of planning in the curriculum

Obstacles - learning

• The level of international students English language skills
• Work commitments and limited time spent on campus
• Lack of common ground for sustained interaction between students
The Interaction for Learning Framework

1. Planning interaction
2. Creating environments for interaction
3. Supporting interaction
4. Engaging with subject knowledge
5. Developing reflexive processes
6. Fostering communities of learners

My friends and I talk about a TV show and that excludes international students and also popular culture and movies. They wouldn’t understand and have a blank expression on their face. I just don’t interact with them enough because I have no stories we can share.

Domestic student
The Interaction for Learning Framework

I seek out international students who speak Mandarin. It helps to improve my skills in the language and I explain things to them in English. It’s good for me and for them.

Domestic student

The Interaction for Learning Framework

I want to talk to Australian students but after I say hello I don’t know what to say. I don’t know about AFL [Australian football] and they don’t like my football [soccer] so nothing to say.

International student
Findings from the project

1. Finding common ground was considered a major obstacle by students
2. The framework can guide academics in developing peer interaction across diverse student groups
3. The framework can be used to document good practice for performance reviews
4. The international/domestic distinction is not useful in current higher education context
5. Fewer examples existed in the last two dimensions of the framework

The suite of resources will be available at the end of October at:

www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/projectsites/enhancing_interact.html