

**Students in transition: Needs and Experiences of
International Students in Australia**

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Abstract

This seminar presents case studies of international student experiences of Australian higher education. The paper provides insights into ways of understanding various implications of international students' transition into their new Australian study environment. The paper will explore aspects of enculturation, socio cultural adaptation, adjustment, language, communication and/or any learning difficulties encountered by the students. The seminar explores how students negotiate these aspects into their ethnic and cultural identities as well as their academic learning practices.

Finally, the paper will discuss how best to cater for international student needs within the context of cross-cultural sensitivity and academic quality assurance directives. It hopes to raise discussion about curriculum innovation and the implementation of multicultural education principles.

Keywords

Transition, enculturation, student experiences, internationalisation, reflective teaching and learning

Introduction

The internationalisation of Australian higher education has been one of the most successful initiatives in the implementation of cross-cultural matters. The fact that international students make up a large proportion of Australian universities today is becoming an expectancy rather than an exception. The internationalisation of the academic program has proven so successful that currently 18 % of the student population in Australia consist of international students (IDP Education Australia, 2002). While Australia, as a teaching institution, has a high reputation internationally, calls for maintaining the high quality and levels of services are requested by the international student body. I refer here to discussions raised at the recent IDP student conference held here in Tasmania, 8 August this year. This student request raises the question of quality assurance in educational provisions for international students coming to this country. It seems that there is a need to hear the student voice in discourses that regulate the international program offerings. This paper is an attempt to contribute qualitatively to this focus of dialogue. By adding to the collection of previous studies (see e.g. Cannon, 2002; Ramburuth & Mc Cormick, 2001; Sanderson, 2002) this study builds upon the need to explore ongoing developments from the perspective of the student group.

Whilst coming to a new and foreign country is often times an exiting and rich event, the experience can be constrained by uncertainty and disorientation of finding your way around new cultures and social expectations. This paper sets out to explore in particular, some of the constraints within the new and unfamiliar cultural and academic domains that international students may find themselves in, upon enrolment in an Australian international education program.

I refer here to the concept of 'transition' in the context of shifting between familiar and unfamiliar learning environments. In other educational discourses this shift is reported on as 'the first year university experience'. Studies in this area of higher education (McInnis, 2001) have found that learning is most yielding when the transition into a new academic environment incorporates positive and rewarding student experiences that account for the needs of the student (Krause, 2001).

The idea for this paper emanated from conversations with international students and their lecturers of an 'ill fit' between expectations before, and the ensuing experiences after the commencement of studies in Australia. It is also aimed as a response to some of the current academic and scholarly debate vesting an interest in student matters in internationalising of Higher Education curriculum (see e.g. Reid, 2001, Ramburuth, 2001).

The paper takes the premise that systemic documentation of the student experience provides valuable insight into the pragmatics of international educational offerings. This is relevant for example, in those circumstances where culturally specific politeness discourses of non-western institutions prevent such information to be directly communicated to the international education organisations and administrators. In other words it provides educators with useful insights into otherwise unavailable viewpoints on which to review the higher education curriculum, as well as the quality assurance aspects of its delivery.

There seem to be inconsistencies in the discussions between groups of academics and students about what the transition into a 'foreign' international curriculum entails. The rhetoric signals a reasoning that internationalisation of the curriculum belongs to someone 'other' than the self (Leask, 1999) resulting in fruitless reflective teaching practice regardless of large numbers of new 'foreign' students in our classrooms. Further, there seems to be little or limited mutual understanding among academic staff and the student body of the kinds of cultural and socio-adaptive challenges that a new and oftentimes alienating education setting places on students (but see Ramburuth, 2001). The consequential confusion seems to be leading into a less amicable transition between old and new study environments

among incoming international students. There is concern among academics that this may subsequently lead to reduced academic learning opportunities and achievement levels.

Biggs (2001) provides an extensive review of research examining beliefs about international students' learning difficulties and provides evidence for misleading information based on stereotyping of incoming students' culture. There are a number of stereotypes leading to false assumptions made about students from so called 'Asian' countries in relation to cross-cultural integration into 'western' style classroom dynamics and cultures. Some of the problematic issues listed are difficulties in the transfer from 'passive' ('Asian' or 'other') versus 'active' ('Western') learning styles; no participation in argument and debate; frequent plagiarising; and that 'they' have difficulty adjusting to local learning environments and cultures. Biggs (ibid) provides a comprehensive account of the research that has refuted such assumptions as based on stereotyping that is grounded in, what he terms, the (global) assimilationist migration policies of the nineteen fifties and sixties (in which the host culture dictated the norms into which all others ought to 'assimilate'). Biggs cites contrary evidence based on the fact that international students from 'Asian' cultures remain in the top achieving range across many of the academic discipline areas. He argues that this would not be possible without their successful integration into 'Western' learning cultures.

The aim is not to place blame on either side of the teaching and learning continuum, that is, the academics nor the students. Rather, the aim is to explore the workings of the interplay between the student body and the academic institutions in order to locate the pragmatic procedures that lead into experiences of certain kinds. It is from this insight that we may begin to locate alternative ways for easing into the international student transition process.

Some comments on method

The current paper draws on a small sample of materials collected for an ongoing larger study from interviews with international students at an Australian University. The students are enrolled across a range of academic disciplines and postgraduate levels of study. For this presentation of commentary and examples of the kinds of issues encountered in the transition process to a new study environment, we draw on the narratives from interviews with nine students. Complying with the University's guidelines for ethical conduct in research the interview data was coded and transcribed to eliminate any information that would identify the interviewee. Due to the confidentiality promised the interviewees, no reference will be made to their actual course of study. In cases where identifying students' country of origin is considered as possibly compromising their anonymity, no reference will be made to their ethnic background or in some cases a fictitious first name or country will be given.

The interpretive method of analysis involved listening to the interviews to locate commonly occurring themes in the talk that is representative of the issues of educational transition relevant to this study. Once the common themes were identified, specific features in the talk which in particular ways characterised the types of descriptions about cultural, social and educational transition were identified. This process certifies that the commentary selected for documentation is representative of the student sample.

The data signifies talk by speakers of English as their second or other language. In order to maintain truth value of the opinions held by the interviewees, the excerpts of talk have not been edited and/or corrected, but are presented as they were uttered by the speaker. Thus, any inconsistencies in grammar and linguistic structure have been left in the accounts of talk. However, in order to allow for a flow of comprehension of the raw data transcripts, some methodical adaptations have been made.

The methods for transcribing the interview talk are adapted from Hellstén (1998) and others. In sum, inaudible segments of talk are coded as (---), the researcher's guess at decoding an unclear word or words as (word?), un-timed pauses in speech as "...", and an interruption by another speaker as //. We launch the documentation of the international student experience at the beginning of the endeavour, namely, from the initial query or idea harboured by students living in countries elsewhere, to take their study career to Australia.

Dreaming the dream

One of the interesting questions in the exploration of student views about international study in general, was their choice of country for their overseas candidature. While Australia is not the most popular destination for international studies, its reputation in attracting students from foreign countries has gained popularity in recent years. This is also reflected in the significant overseas advertising and marketing campaigns afforded by Australian universities. It seems, at least peripherally, that we have succeeded (IDP Education Australia, 2002).

In building on the notion of how overseas students view Australia as a potential destination for study, we asked the participants to describe the expectations of their endeavour before coming here. We later compared this description with how they have experienced the transition after having spent some time in Australia.

The meaning which some students vest in a higher degree from an Australian university is translated into providing better career opportunities in their home country (cf. Cannon, 2002). Another expectation is of increased intercultural exchange for the benefit of improving professional and language skills, especially for those placed within the language industry. In many cases students' decisions to take their studies abroad involve a careful consideration of what benefits this will bring to them personally and professionally. In most cases the expectations of improving 'life opportunities' are aspired to in conjunction with an overseas study plan. Below are some examples of student accounts and their interpretive themes.

Table 1. Expectations about study in Australia

1. Culture bound expectations	<p>“We’ve got a lot of stress in (home country). And other people, not me, relatives, my mother my father, many relatives, they expect me to really... high... to master this one, ‘cause you graduate university. So you can get a good job and can make a lot of money. This is the expectation. So it is a little stressful.”</p>
2. Language based intercultural contacts:	<p>“ Because it’s Australia, English speaking country. So if I study (languages) in Australia I will have much much more advantages, because I am in that community. So I expected um, relationships with Australian people. But actually I don’t have any.</p> <p>I: Do you expect that when you are here longer you will meet Australians?</p> <p>P: Yes, I have already started some club activities run by other communities. So I started a discussion club, but it’s just been one week.”</p>
3. Personal investment:	<p>“I came to Australia to study English. I want to improve my English better than now. So, I stopped working, drinking, smoking (laughter) because I really eager to study English. So I will study very hard in Australia until I finish my course</p>

here. (---) But now I already married and I have a child, so I have responsibility for my family. So I have to study very hard. Because I give up everything. So that's why I want to study very hard."

4. Language improvement and social problems

"Before I came here I think uh, if I go to Australia I will improve my English skills really very fast. But it's just a dream. I must do everything (I can to achieve this). Every day I practice practice practice for this. Many that are younger than me, they drink too much (alcohol) here because they feel alone. They can't talk. And the younger people they don't know how to relieve their stress."

5. Change

"I expected a really good place. And (that) I learn a lot, everything. But now I'm living here... so I changed a little.

We can infer from the above examples that the risk involved in taking up overseas studies is weighed up against the values of personal, professional, monetary, social, cultural and linguistic investment. There is, in other words, a great deal 'at stake' in embracing the overseas study endeavour for the interviewees of this study. What the comments show is that whilst this seems to be a common sense assumption made about study preparation generally, the risks seem to be more carefully considered by incoming overseas student.

A collective theme in the expectations described by the participants was that of cultural integration (enculturation) into the new study environment. The expectation is that cultural and social integration into the Australian community may bring about the effect of achieving faster learning outcomes. The assumption is that of receiving social and community support for the accomplishment of new learning outcomes at speed. This is imposed by the monetary constraint of the candidature. Hence, there is an expectation of cooperation between the home culture and the host culture along the path to achievement in the Australian educational program. The reality of this not being the case is (negatively) contrasted against it.

Thus, the 'dream' of gaining a degree which would open doors to better life opportunities is met by a reality whereby expectations about what studies in Australia can provide have not been met, as illustrated in the third excerpt. Here the educational aspirations clash with social and cultural constraints brought upon by finding oneself, instead, in an isolated and marginalised existence. This isolation is then associated with other social problems (drinking) precipitated by stress and language difficulties.

Integration into the Australian community is explained as coming at the expense of leaving one's 'own' community behind. It is from this premise that we then are able to understand the last (5) example of commentary. There is a sense that personal change is negotiated into the transition from home country to the new Australian learning environment.

In sum, the expectations held by students planning to enrol in Australian international education programs are characterised by the expectation of cooperation between the home and host communities. The pathway to an international degree is viewed as a cooperative achievement with stakeholders expected from both the home and the host country.

The expectation of being ‘taken care of’ by the host community and institution is prevalent among the student interviewees in this study. As one participant mentioned:

“There’s a need to um, (for) teachers (to) give more, um, the chance to ask questions. So, I want teacher to encourage that, and like a mom and dad... yes, to take care of them a lot. Because they are really shy and they sometimes they don’t understand. But, ... just to say ‘OK’. I want our teachers to know that.”

International students wish for staff of the host institution to be ‘caring’ here coined in the metaphor of ‘parenting’. It provokes an inference of ‘caring’ as a form of making students comfortable and encouraging of general questioning of issues. In other words, it articulates a need of support that currently is felt lacking from the student experience. This type of authoritarian support can be associated with the sense of community responsibility, of parental responsibility towards incoming new students. We will discuss the implication for this later in the paper.

In order to ‘make sense’ of their transition into the Australian educational environment students generally made comparisons with the familiar cultural practices of their home country. It was from this intersection that they then seemed able to evaluate their current experiences as more or less amicable.

When questioning students about what the experience has been like thus far into their study career we encountered a contrasting picture. Here again we meet the need for a sense of community spirit in the student experience. Over and above how well the institution was seen as being able to provide the required resources, including human resources, the academic experience was described in relation to qualitative factors imposed by the wider Australian community. Below are some examples of positive views:

Table 2. Experiences after arrival in Australia

6. Quality of life	“Anyway, quality of living is higher here. Yes, I like it. My wife also (likes it) a lot. We had a lot of stress in Korea.”
7. Cost and reputation	“So far it’s been good. My experiences are just um, go to lectures, and then... go to (student) spot, eat lunch, go home, study. Oh, there are many programs arranged by (The) University like computer skills, and many other sports lessons, so I can enjoy them at a very low price and that will be good. And (The) University was nominated in the one hundred in the world universities, so (laughter) so that’s cool.”

The first two excerpts (6 and 7) in Table 2 show a positive evaluation of the student experience as hinging on environmental factors such as the ‘quality of life’, the relative cost of services and the reputation of the university internationally. We also received commentary that depicted disappointment or negative experiences of the initial transitional period in Australia:

Table 2 continued

8. Attitudes/ availability	“When I do some inquiry or want any information like this about my situation, uh, ... the most time I felt, they do generally not helpful to me// I: they’re not helpful? P: yeh. sometimes they, .. I have felt that is because of them. Most of my friends have said their attitude to international students// I: is not very good?”
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P: Yeh, but I don't know how is the (rest of the) international office, but I feel not very helpful... to us. If I have trouble with the course or process, I don't (want?) to discuss with *them*. Rather I want to discuss with my lecturer or teacher. But... not easy to contact."

9. Resources

"P: Have you seen our classroom?

I: No.

P: Mm... we don't have any classroom. Just a light container. They make a container. Yeh, we paid a lot of money.../

I: And you get just a container?

P: Yeh, container! I'm really surprised. I complained to my agent. It's not classroom. Is, you know, the container has, you know air conditioner, but it (does not?) work. You know, container is made of iron. So a lot of sunshine, its hot, like a chicken (laughter) or something. Yeh, really, really hot. Yeh teacher say that; really hot. So maybe university say that they will start building our classroom, but I don't know. They just say.

We just (have) a container, far from a toilet. We're just given um.. ten minutes break time... I can't do that, I must running. So I'm late."

Negative evaluation of the experience is substantiated on the basis of failed provision of resources and services by the host institution. Some of the common themes that surfaced in association with this rhetoric were the issues of what the host institution offers 'in value for money'. The provisions received do clearly not meet the expectations which are evaluated against the outlay invested. Excerpt eight gives one example of such commentary. Here the expectation of the availability of staff and services is again raised. Excerpt nine is an example of comments made about the apparent disappointment of being placed in less than adequate building facilities which in turn creates distrust in the system. Such student views seem to stem from a belief that the learning conditions provided are ill-fitting with the expectations relative to the financial investment made. This is then seen as contributing to very practical learning problems (e.g. hot classroom). The example of being late for class as a result of distances to toilet facilities is one case in point.

In sum, the experience resulting from entry into the international program is evaluated in terms of the scope of (personal or material) investment made. For most students who commented on their sense of investment, the inference was that the amount invested was substantial in comparison with the outcomes. Learning circumstances and outcomes were weighed up against the value of the investment, and in some cases there was negative affect towards what had been provided.

Cultural differences

Learning the culture of the host institution is a major element of the successful transition into a new learning environment (Biggs, 2001; McInnis, 2001; Ramburuth, 2001). The process of enculturation into the academic knowledge and implicit disciplinary 'know-how' is often perceived as unavailable to new students (Ahola, 2000; Krause, 2001). It is a process which is acquired by 'trial and error' rather than explicit learning.

There is widespread awareness of the enculturation process among international students. Discussions with participants before the interview sessions reveal that for some students it is this very cultural experience which makes the international student candidature more significant over and above any other academic learning

experiences. While the student commentary generally indicates curiosity and interest in undergoing the enculturation process into the ‘Australian way of life’, there are some unfamiliar cultural assumptions which create disbelief and may contribute towards a perceived culture shock (see Ramburuth, 2001) and therefore a less smooth transition.

P: I saw a lot of peoples (students). Especially, the French and the Germans. They are really off mind. They say anything in class! When we’re in class in (home country) we always like... in (the) military. But here, French and Germans they uh... did everything they want! Say anything, sometimes, cross legs, drinking water, and ... then whenever they want to go out they hang around and... So first my impression, ‘a very naughty (boy)’. (laughter)... Really! But nowadays: - ah! They have any right to decide on his uh, mental problems or physical problem. They... can’t concentrate, so they need the fresh air, they go out. As if... really! I can’t do that.

I: You still can’t do that?

P: In my Korean class, I can’t do that. But, foreign teachers... it’s OK: “excuse me I wanna go now. – OK.” But in Korea they’d change their face colour. Really change colour, so I can’t do that (laughter).

I: So, it must have been a shock when you came to Australia?

P: Yeah, I can’t believe. Now is... I’m comfortable.”

In the above dialogue we see the transition process at work in a feature of politeness discourses of the classroom setting. This student provides an account of his initial shock at the ‘sanctioned behaviour’ of the classroom. He is clearly not familiar with such manners and rejects them as an acceptable form of classroom behaviour. In interpreting the behaviour he makes a distinction between norms prescribed by ‘his’ native culture and that of Australian culture. The distinction in normative behaviour in the two settings is made clear. For example, he acknowledges that it is acceptable cultural practice to leave the classroom in mid-session in the presence of an Australian (here characterised as ‘foreign’) ‘teacher’, but this is not an acceptable form of practice in the setting where he and his teacher share the same cultural heritage.

Foreign Students in Alien Classrooms

As a final example of the cultural constraints reported as impacting on the transition experience we document commentary on international students’ awareness of cultural differences in teaching styles. Recall from the introduction that a general belief in the “west” is that students from ‘Asian’ backgrounds are more familiar with the (passive) Confucian approach to teaching and learning than the more problem based and interactive ‘western’ style (Biggs, 2001:125). This style incorporates methods of discussion and argument, as well as critical thinking. The overall trend in the students’ commentary support this assumption.

Table 3. Comments about cultural differences in teaching styles

10. Difference	“In Korea we just have left or right. So it’s very simple. If the teacher or lecturer say “is yes”, - yeah, then the answer is ‘yes’. We don’t need to think about the answer as in Australia. It’s more flexible. And we should think about (the answer?) again. We should use our brain. Quite different.”
11. Receiving passively	“You know, in China there are.... a lot of vocabulary and I think really good grammar. But... we can’t speak for ourselves. We never tried it. And just, uh... our education system... put everything in my brain, not participate. There’s only one way. My teacher say. I listen. That’s it. So I never say. So I can’t speak very well before...(coming here).

12. Debating as challenge

“Here, for example when I was in university in Korea the lecturer tell... just to give lecture to the student. But the students, they didn't have any chance to... take part in the discussion, we just receive. But here I can take part in it. Sometimes I do the part of a lecture (by) presentation.

I: You don't do presentations back in Korea?

P: We do, but it's not active. Just to... I have to do (it) because of mark (laughter). But here I want to do it. It's very good challenge. Here's debate and discussion.”

The commentary documents that some students are not accustomed to the problem-based style of teaching and learning preferred in the Western world. The difficulties in transition into this ‘western’ style of learning are clear from the above comments. They may be seen as adding to existing speech and comprehension difficulties of newly arrived English as Foreign Language (EFL) speakers. However, contrary to the generalisation that students from ‘Asian’ backgrounds may lack the *ability* (for discussion, see Biggs, 2001) to take part in this style of teaching, the interviewees seemed interested in learning this method and showed particular curiosity and motivation in mastering it. This is in agreement with other findings on the motivation by students from ‘Asian’ backgrounds to learn in typically ‘western’ learning styles (e.g. Volet & Ang, 1997). However, our inherited cultural practices are difficult to alter. Therefore, it may feel an impossible task to adopt a ‘new’ behaviour one considers as conspicuously ‘rude’ and ‘impolite’, (such as sitting cross-legged) even though the host culture may invite this as the ‘accepted norm’.

It seems apparent that the transition between ‘passive’ (non-Western) and ‘active’ (Western) classroom cultures coupled with the insecurity imposed by adverse cultural know-how and less than adequate competence in language skills carries a particular kind of vulnerability. In light of such uncertainty, one may find oneself a silent participant of a critical classroom discussion regardless of one's preferential teaching/learning style.

Implications for merging with the student experience

We began this paper with the exploration of what ‘dreams’ may lie behind the intention to take up an international study career in Australia. This intention was considered with respect to Biggs' (2001) claim that the evaluation of ‘all things new’ is manifest against the knowledge of the familiar, or the way they “were at home” (p.124). Similarly, the incoming Australian international student experiences are made sense of only in relation to conditions and experiences in the home country.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, the data presented here consists of unedited student accounts of their experiences of the international education offerings. As such, the accounts are subjective and may therefore not hold relevance to the factual educational provisions. Therefore, in reading the student experiences it is important to focus on how students *perceive* the educational program offerings and their subsequent enculturation with the new system. Such perceptions are highly informative of the kinds of understandings that underpin the motivation and initiative behind the international student agenda. This understanding and reasoning has implications for how the program offerings are subsequently put into practice by the international student body and within the various culturally constrained academic practices. In such ways, the beliefs, values, assumptions, reported attitudes and cultural reasoning practices recounted by the students are

later translated into 'real' actions in the academic teaching and learning interactions. As such they provide truth value to the data presented here.

A summary of the overall experiences provided by the student talk described that before embarking on the overseas study venture, students carefully consider what is 'at stake' for them in implementing the study plan. For most of the students in this study, the stakes are knowingly high and exceptionally high stakes bring high expectations. Expectations are then placed upon an affiliation between the home and host communities. An assumption that the host society takes responsibility of the newcomers in the transition process in terms of 'care and parenting' is made. An additional assumption is based on the role of cultural integrations between the home and host countries. When these assumptions fail to crystallise, the transition experience is attributed, in a cause and effect fashion, to social problems, isolation and feelings of marginalisation.

Students seem generally aware of the cultural conventions and norms governing the Australian learning discourse. Enculturation into the accepted ways and practices seems however, to be slow, if not characterized by a sense of resistance. The sense of 'difference' is ever present among students.

"I think it's more the fact that I'm here, because being here and have such a society, Singaporean... it's a unique sense of society because it gives you a sense of belonging in relation that you are different. You want to feel that you belong somewhere. And everywhere you go, like I said it is the concept of 'the others', and 'the others' is always there."

Implications

It is obvious that the commitment to internationalising the higher education curriculum requires ongoing revision and implementation of policies and procedures in strategic and planning areas. While this is not the focus of the current paper, the student comments seem to leave scope for negotiation between teaching and learning providers and receivers which in turn are effecting the area of management and administration. A simple but somewhat unrealistic solution to the problem is increased funds for (re-) development. It is clear that further funding in the areas of international teaching and curriculum development are called for. Addressing funding shortages is, however, not the aim of this section. In contrast, we attempt to provide initiatives for in-house solutions which are manageable if reviewed and/or redistributed within current teaching and learning budgets. Some ideas and implications are listed below.

Communication

In responding to the need of students to communicate and make contact with staff of the host institution, professional development initiatives may be set up. Simple solutions to teaching methods based on inclusive educational practices are particularly pertinent in this regard. However, the rhetoric of inclusive education is riddled with ambiguities among academic scholars across disciplines. There needs to be recognition of opportunities for exploring the concept of inclusive education as encompassing the dynamic of negotiation as opposed to domination. In other words, the presence of students from different cultural backgrounds in Australian universities requires that we all change our ways to accommodate each other.

The idea of a 'facilitative working group' which coordinates relations and invokes debate between the international student body and the host institution is useful here. One such example is an 'infusion' approach currently underway in South Australia (Leask, 1999). This approach has been developed for the inclusion of international content within teaching curriculum and methodology. The 'infusion' approach requires that the staff of the institution develop "new knowledge, skills,

attitudes and values” (p.2) and thus ‘exploding’ some of the myths and stereotypes surrounding the concept of international education.

This framework offers strategies for quality assurance initiatives. The quality assurance perspective hinges on the need to provide transparency between the information distributed to students and the subsequent everyday practices that directly or indirectly result from them. In particular, the exploration of pragmatics of hidden cultural conventions at work between members of the international and host communities, is at the forefront of the generation of new knowledge about internationalisation. A documentation of the student experiences as provided in this paper is a small contribution in this direction and has implications for professional development in the direction of, for example, reflective teaching practice.

Resources

The final implications of this study focuses on the reported learning experiences of ‘foreign students in alien classrooms’. There seems to be a need for an international student facility that is established especially for incoming international students. This facility could house resources that would meet the call for ‘caring’, and ‘being available’ for new students. Links between the ‘staff working group’ and the ‘student facility’ can be established to mediate communication between delegates to be networked further into faculty and department levels. To this end we may draw on the experiences of so called, ‘student mentoring’ programs established around many Australian universities. The effect of these programs is the availability of guidance provided by more experienced students who act as ‘mentors’ to incoming new students. This is an effective and low cost strategy implemented at the ‘grass roots’ level which can be transferred effectively into the international studies environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the internationalisation agenda is still in its infancy, leaving scope for further development and implementation of curriculum planning, design and practice. However, this paper joins others (eg. Leask, 1999; Ramburuth, 2001) in encouraging the adopting of responsibility for the internationalisation of the higher education curriculum. It supports the shift from rhetoric that this responsibility belongs to someone else, as stated by Leask (ibid.) Exploring the international student perspective in terms of what the educational offerings mean for them, is one direction taken towards assuming responsibility. It is from this intersection that we may expand pathways towards effecting the content and focus of our international curriculum offerings.

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