Empowering a new generation:  
The link between early intercultural experience and careers in international education

Amanda Daly: @ajdaly28
Emi Hall: @emikatehall
Kirrilee Hughes: @kikhug
International Education in Australia

• For a sector that’s worth $32.3 billion (ABS 2017) and creates an estimated 240,000 jobs, we know very little about our profession

• The international education profession are recruiting and supporting more international students than ever before 525,054 international students in Australia
International Education Industry
Past – present – future

HOW DID WE GET HERE
WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO
WHERE ARE WE GOING
HOW DO WE GET THERE
Graduates & international careers

• There is limited research on the factors that shape an individual’s interest to pursue a career internationally (Bozionelos et al, 2015)

• But what we do know:
  – Love travelling
  – Interest in learning other cultures (or a specific country)
  – Opportunity to use language skills
  – Previous experience*
Graduates & international careers (USA)

- IES: Study Abroad Impact (Dwyer, 2004; Norris & Gillespie, 2009)
  - 48% had worked/volunteered in an international context since their study abroad experience
  - Study abroad experience had moderate-significant effect on career of alumni
    - Influence to get a job overseas (17%)
    - Work for multinational organisation in the US (14%)
- SAGE (Franklin, 2010; Paige & Fry, 2009)
  - 24% had an international dimension to their career
  - 32% influenced by the study abroad experience

A longer experience is better!
Graduates & international careers (Europe)

• VALERA (Bracht et al, 2006)
  – 18% of ERASMUS students employed abroad 5 years later
  – 50% work for an organisation with international scope or substantial international activities
  – 1/3 see work as embedded in international context
WHY? Effects of studying abroad

• Acquire skill sets that influence career path (Dwyer, 2004; Franklin, 2010; Norris & Gillespie, 2009; Nunan, 2006)

• Establish relationships that become professional networks

• Intercultural competence (Bartel-Radic, 2014; Rundstrom Williams, 2005)

** 25% had study abroad experience PRIOR to the experience at university** (Norris & Gillespie, 2009)
Is Study Abroad the only way?

• Intercultural experience
  – Learning a foreign language
  – Hosting an international student
  – Travelling abroad
Learning in an international/ intercultural context transforms lives… how has it transformed the lives of International Education Professionals?
Career Decision-Making

- Career decision-making is not rational
- Serendipitous events (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996)
  - Professional or personal connection
  - Right place/ right time
  - Encouragement of others
  - Influence of previous work/volunteer experience
  - Unexpected exposure to interest area
Research Aim: To understand the role of early intercultural experiences on the careers of international education professionals in Australia

Research questions:
- How many international education professionals had an intercultural experience in their formative years?
- What role does an early intercultural learning experience play in the careers of international education professionals?
- How can we use this information to empower the new generation of leaders in international education?

Definition: We defined an intercultural experience as a structured program or planned experience based upon meaningful interactions of individuals from different cultures.
Methodology

• An online survey was created targeting professionals working in international education in Australia
• Survey live from 5 March - 28 May
  • Distributed through social media networks, EDMs, peak body newsletters and word of mouth
• 268 respondents
  • A further 51 respondents are interested in participating in focus groups (Stage 2)
Who responded?

And most studied degree…

Bachelor of Arts
(41% of respondents)
Our respondents were

Came from

**Australia (44%)**
followed by USA, UK, NZ, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil, Canada, France and Germany

71% from

**Higher Education** and VET (15%) and NFP (11%)
Key intercultural experiences of respondents

Top 4 Intercultural Experiences

- Studied a Language
- Hosted international students
- Study Tour to another country
- Studied in another country
Our industry is represented by a diverse range of people, but we found four personas through the research:

- **Long timers**
- **International grads**
- **Globe trotters**
- **Emerging leaders**
Those who have been invested in the industry for more than 20 years; may not have intentionally sought employment in our industry but have created a career in the sector.

Long timers

20%

‘I was offered a position assisting with newly arrived international students immediately upon my return from a student exchange experience in 1996. It was a no-brainer. It helped me with reverse culture shock, but I enjoyed the intercultural interaction so much I knew I wanted to engage further - which at that time was, supporting new international students to make the transition to Australia.’

(Survey respondent)
Industry personas: International grads

Former international students who studied in Australia and experienced Australian education; saw the potential impact they could make and are working in the sector.

International grads
10%

‘I arrived to Australia as an international student and then I start working in the international office of my university. Looking at the care and support that universities offer to students was a real highlight to continue in this sector.’
(Survey respondent)
Those with multiple intercultural experiences; includes Australians and those who have moved to Australia. Our industry aligns with their interests and passions.

Globe trotters
60%

‘As a migrant to Australia, I recognised the challenges migrants experience, not to mention what international students have to go through. I’ve always had a teachable spirit and wanted to use my personal lessons and insights to help make the journey for others less painful and empower them to face their challenges and in turn help others in future.’
(Survey respondent)
Emerging leaders
10%

Young professionals who are committed to making a difference and intentionally sought employment in international education

‘After my four global experiences during university I believed I could make the world a better place and that I could do that through intercultural connection and experiences so international education is the field I pursued at the end of university.’

(Survey respondent)
The **primary driver** for working in international education is a passion for interacting with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

98% enjoy interacting with people from other countries, cultures and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

71% reported that their **intercultural experience influenced** their decision to work in international education.
• 55% of respondents had an intercultural experience during their secondary education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of intercultural experiences</th>
<th>Motivation for intercultural experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61% studied a language other than English formally</td>
<td>64% were interested in other cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% hosted students from another country</td>
<td>52% sought a ‘different experience’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47% were exchange students to another country</td>
<td>43% were encouraged by a family member, friend or mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41% lived abroad or had extended travel abroad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
67% of respondents had an intercultural experience **during their post-secondary (university/college/TAFE) education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of intercultural experiences</th>
<th>Motivation for intercultural experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44% were exchange students to another country (+14% took a study tour to another country)</td>
<td>72% sought a ‘different experience’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45% lived abroad or had extended travel abroad</td>
<td>72% were interested in other cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42% studied a language other than English formally</td>
<td>31% wanted to improve their employability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Only 11% undertook an intercultural experience as a mandatory part of their course</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diving into the data…

- 74% of respondents had an intercultural experience after their post-secondary education (within five years of graduation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of intercultural experiences</th>
<th>Motivation for intercultural experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53% lived abroad or had extended travel abroad</td>
<td>68% sought a ‘different experience’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49% had an intercultural experience through paid work (+21% via work experience; +5% via an internship)</td>
<td>68% were interested in other cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% studied a language other than English formally</td>
<td>42% wanted to improve their employability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23% taught English abroad and 23% studied abroad</td>
<td>31% were earning money</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diving into the data…

Intercultural experiences are important
✓ 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their intercultural experience was transformative

Intercultural experiences are important for careers in international education
✓ 71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their intercultural experiences influenced their decision to work in international education
✓ 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the skills they learnt during their intercultural experiences gave them the tools to work in intercultural education

We like to connect… and stay connected
✓ 91% of respondents have remained connected to other participants from their intercultural experience
  → 64% have used these connections in their professional work in international education
Our career paths into international education are largely unplanned / unintentional

- 58% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their career path into international education was unplanned

Most of us were not ‘mentored’ into our international education professions

- 36% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their international education career path was prompted by a mentor or other person
- Respondents ranked ‘following a mentor’ as one of the lowest primary drivers for working in international education

And we want to stay working in international education

- 69% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their career path revolves around international education
Developing our profession

What are the opportunities for us to take action and develop our profession?

Career planning
- How to intentionally attract graduates and others into international education professions?
- What are the pathways into our profession?

Formal qualifications
How to train prospective staff for international education professions?

Mentoring and advocacy
How can we use mentors to attract, support and retain talent; or to promote our profession?

Career development
- What skills do we need to foster and develop within our profession?
- What is the delivery mechanism for this?
Questions and Feedback…

• What would have helped you in terms of getting your career in international education started?

• Do you identify with one of the four personas?

• How does your career in international education compare to your friends/contacts in other industries?
Connect with us…

For research updates and to participate in focus groups:

- Amanda Daly @ajdaly28
- Emi Hall @EmiKateHall
- Rebecca Hall @RebeccaHallAUS
- Kirrilee Hughes @kikhug


References