International Students

A Wasted Resource?

Robyn Thomas, La Trobe University, Australia

Abstract: More than ever graduating students will need to have developed the cognitive and communicative skills to work in new forms of organisations and ways of conducting business on a global scale. Hundreds of thousands of students from Asia, South America, Europe and to a lesser extent from the Middle East and Africa enrol in higher education courses in Western countries every year. It would take thousands of dollars and several years for an individual to make contact with such varied ethnic and national groups. These international students should be a valuable teaching resource. Yet, it seems they are largely viewed by Western governments and educational institutions as a cash cow, rather than offering the potential to promote cross-cultural understanding and to contribute to a more unified and peaceful world. Given that less than 5% of Western students undertake any part of their course in a foreign country, it is time to include the knowledge and experiences of international students in our classrooms to ensure all students benefit from a truly international curriculum.

Keywords: Internationalisation at Home, International Students, International Curriculum

Introduction

Students in the 21st century face a very different political, economic, cultural and social world to those of the previous century. Cultural and political divisions exemplified in the growth of terrorism, and the social and technological changes in an increasingly globalised economy are some of the most obvious differences. More than ever graduating students will need to have developed the cognitive and communicative skills to adapt to rapidly changing conditions, as well as “to contribute to a social, economic, and political environment that is global, interdependent, and multicultural” (Gacel-Ávila 2005, 127). The student population on university campuses in English speaking Western societies represents more foreign countries than ever before, so it would seem, at first glance, that educational institutions would be leading the way in fostering these cognitive and communicative skills.

Hundreds of thousands of students from Asia, South America, Europe and to a lesser extent from the Middle East and Africa are enrolled in courses in countries such as the U.S., U.K. and Australia (IIE 2005) [Appendix A]. However, despite encouraging government policies and some financial compensation, the vast majority of students in Western countries do not study outside their own borders. Less than 1% of Australian students participates in study abroad and study exchange programs (Gallagher cited in McInnes et al. 2004, 7). Explanations for this low figure include: financial cost, difficulties in gaining credit for subjects completed in a foreign university; a potential extension of time taken to complete the degree, lack of competence in languages other than English and a mismatch of semesters with northern hemisphere countries. The picture for students in the European Union (2%-5%), Canada (2.4%), the U.S (1%) and the U.K. (1.35%) is little better (McInnes et al. 2004). Furthermore, in the case of U.S. students, two-thirds of them choose to study in Western Europe, “yet 95 percent of the world’s population growth in the next 50 years will occur outside of Western Europe” (Simon 2003, ii). Likewise, 70% of Australian students who study abroad choose to go to North America and Europe (McInnes et al. 2004).

In the Western countries, the local students sit in lectures and tutorials with their international peers who should be a valuable resource for promoting cross-cultural understanding which would give all students a truly international perspective. It would take thousands of dollars and several years for an individual student to have the opportunity to make contact with the various ethnic and national groups represented on the university campuses, yet there is evidence that very little interaction takes place either inside or outside of the classroom (Heggins and Jackson 2003; Otten 2003; Thomas 2003a,b). Both the governments and educational institutions have clear policy statements that extol the value of having international students on campus, but what does their presence contribute to the knowledge and understanding of other cultures? This paper proposes that the way the majority of Western countries view international students, essentially as cash cows, is a failure to recognise the opportunities for increased global
prosperity and social and political harmony that the influx of international students offers.

Nomenclature

There is a large body of literature on international education and for the purposes of the argument in this paper there are a number of key terms that are commonly used but which need to be clarified. These are: globalisation, internationalisation, internationalisation at home, diversity and difference.

Globalisation is generally accepted as: “a relatively uncontrolled process” (Wachter 2000, 8) carried out for economic profit based on a belief in free market processes. The resulting interdependence of countries means the “social, political and economic connections … decisively condition the fate of those living within each of them” (Giddens 1993, 528).

Globalisation and internationalisation should not be used synonymously. As noted by a number of authors (Gacel-Ávila 2005; Giddens 1993; Marginson 2000; Wachter 2000) “globalisation does not tend to respect differences” (Gacel-Ávila 2005, 124) in its pursuit of bigger and more profitable markets. It is fuelled by new information and communication technologies and the increasing dominance of the English language as the lingua franca of business (and by default of education). Globalisation implies a sameness of beliefs and values. The connection between globalisation and internationalisation of education is generally talked about in terms of the global work force and the skills that students will need to successfully compete for jobs in the global market or at least to operate under globalised working conditions. Some observers believe globalisation has lead to an increasing commodification of education and the spread of hegemonic western educational discourse (de Vita and Case 2003; Gacel-Avila 2005; Rizvi and Walsh 1998).

There are many references to internationalisation of education in the literature. In some cases the term is defined by the authors, in others it is left open to interpretation. A number of sources (Leask 2003; Wachter 2000) use Knight’s (1999, 16) definition:

Internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the research, teaching and service functions of the institution.

“Integrating” and “dimension” are the crucial words in this definition. The integration may be partial or holistic stretching from the university’s mission statement and objectives through all aspects of the curriculum to the non-academic student activities. The dimension may be interpreted in various ways ranging from offering foreign languages or study abroad as part of a degree or subjects with the word “international” in their title or, in the best possible outcome, it may be an integral part of the educational institution’s policies and practices.

Not new, but relatively unused, is the term Internationalisation at Home (IaH). It is defined by Wachter (2000, 4) as: “Any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student and staff mobility”. In particular, some members of educational institutions in the EU promote the integration of an international element into every facet of educational institutions (See generally EAIE and Nuffic websites). Despite the intentions of the proponents of IaH, like internationalisation, IaH can be interpreted in a holistic sense or limited to some form of window dressing.

Two other key terms used in the literature on internationalisation of education are diversity and difference. Diversity is another much used word (like internationalisation) in the publications of both governments and educational institutions. Hegyvary (cited in Cook and Cullen 2000, para. 2) states that diversity is “a way of thinking, a world view that not only tolerates but values differences”. Rizvi and Walsh (1998, 10) challenge the value of the term diversity, believing that “diversity is tolerated only so long as it does not challenge the dominant cultural norms and social order”. They prefer to use the term difference, noting that “differences occur within and among groups, and should not be seen as absolute, binaristic or irreducible, but as always socially and culturally relational” (10).

Putting Rizvi and Walsh’s objection to one side, the rapid growth in the “international trade in higher education services” (Tilbrook 2003, 3) has been hailed by Western governments and educational institutions as a means to embrace diversity (Knight 1999; NAFSA 2003). At least, that is the rhetoric. But how much has the entry of international students broadened the outlook and understanding of the local students? What do the majority of Western students know of the living conditions of many people in developing countries; of the economic policies that prevent the provision of cheap pharmaceuticals to relieve illness like HIV; of the grain in world stores that could feed those facing starvation; of the need for “a large-scale transfer of production resources (for example, agricultural machinery and the means to run and repair it), which would create more effective methods of indigenous agriculture”? (Giddens 1993, 536).

However, a glance at most government websites shows the value of international education as mainly measured in dollar terms. For example, the Australian Education Institute, an Australian government website, has a section labelled “Items of Interest” with headings such as “Australia-Mexico Economic Relations: Calls for submissions” (17 February 2006).
The focus of the item is on negotiations on a possible free trade agreement with Mexico.

**International Trade in Education**

“International trade in education” is an appropriate substitute for the misnomer “international education”, in the West. The latter phrase is used to describe the largely one way educational experience that is provided by Western governments and their increasingly funding-depleted public educational institutions. International students bring in about 13.3 billion dollars into the US economy (IIE 2005) and a recent survey in Australia estimates that international students “inject $109 million a week into the Australian economy on non-fee goods and services” (IDP 2005). The trade balance is also shifting. International student enrolments in the U.S dropped by 2.4% in 2003/2004 (Johnson 2005), while Australia’s has increased by nearly 7% (AEI 2005). The U.S. Government is concerned about the declining enrolments not only from a financial point of view, but in the wake of September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq, it also sees international education as a way of exporting American culture in a bid to improve its international image. Statements such as those by President Bush, when he says in reference to “foreign leaders who have studied in the USA, ‘It makes it so much easier to conduct foreign policy and diplomacy when you’ve got that common ground’” (Marklein and Slavin 2006, last par.) clearly indicate the focus of American interests in international education. Supporting this view are the comments of Republican Senator Jim Kolbe (NAFSA 2005, last para.),

…a successful foreign policy depends on our being able to educate future leaders from around the world about our way of life, our system of government, our culture, our political system.

This reflects a parochial view, that West is best. What seems to be left out of this equation is the experience of international students in their host country and the degree of exchange of views, knowledge and understanding that should be occurring.

**The Experiences of International Students**

In Australia, students, on completion of their graduate degree, are asked by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) to fill out a Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) in which they rank their satisfaction with various aspects of their courses. The CEQ results for 2002 showed that international students were less satisfied with their course than local students (Tilbrook 2003, 8). Unfortunately, the report does not explain which aspects of their experience they found to be unsatisfactory. Perhaps the literature on international students’ experiences can shed some light on the reasons.

From the 1980s when international trade in education began in earnest, there was generally a negative attitude by Australian academics towards the different learning styles of the (mainly Asian) international students that were present in their classes. Stereotyping of Asian students’ learning style depicted them as: rote learners; uncritical thinkers; slavish note-takers; having a poor understanding of referencing conventions; non-participants in tutorials; and demanding of lecturers’ time. Research studies based on academics’ and students’ experiences resulted in a range of advisory pamphlets and books on how to deal with these problems. (See for example, Ballard and Clanchy 1991, 1992). The deficit model of international students seems to have permeated the entire thinking of Western academia. This attitude no doubt has been and continues to be keenly felt by the students themselves, because despite more recent studies (Volet and Renshaw 1996; Watkins and Biggs 1996) whose conclusions run counter to the earlier stereotypical picture of Asian students, the beliefs associated with the deficit model certainly persist in Australia.

This has lead to considerable neglect of the experiences and knowledge that the international students bring to the host learning environment and the ways in which their knowledge could be used to internationalise the curriculum and engender intercultural understanding. (This is also true of the experiences of children of immigrants and other minority groups in the educational system). There is anecdotal evidence that some students feel the course content is not relevant to their experience or to the environment they will return to work in, and postgraduate international students may feel that their previous expertise goes unrecognized. Most of the literature on international students focuses on the key factors that are necessary for their adjustment to Western campuses and academic conventions. Universities have orientation programs for international students, but as Otten (2003, 20) notes, “In contrast, there is little attention for a systematic preparation for intercultural settings for domestic students and faculty”. In Australian university settings, difficulties in intercultural communication and understanding often occur when local and international students have to work together on group assignments. Otten (2003, 15) stresses:

…that intercultural encounters do not automatically increase the intercultural competence of students. They can even reinforce the stereotypes and prejudices if the experiences of critical incidents in intercultural contexts are not
evaluated on cognitive, affective, and behavioural levels.

Otten (2003, 15) defines intercultural competence as:

a long-term change of a person’s knowledge (cognition), attitudes (emotions), and skills (behaviour) to enable positive and effective interaction with members of other cultures both abroad and at home.

Volet (2003) has conducted a number of studies on what determines the degree of interaction between Australian and international students. Her conclusion is that students from monolingual and monocultural backgrounds have the least positive attitude towards working in mixed cultural groups. Furthermore, when allowed to self-select group members, “two-thirds of the Australian students who were members of mixed groups had a bi-cultural background …[and] only 8% in the Australian-only groups” (Volet 2003, 5), showing that local students need activities that will assist them to interact.

The social networks (or lack of them) that students have to support them play an important role in the value of their educational experiences and intercultural competence (Chapdelaine and Alexitch 2004; Otten 2003; Teekens 2005; Ying 2003). Social isolation can be particularly acute for research based postgraduate students who do not attend classes (Thomas 2003a,b). There are a range of reasons why many international students find it difficult to mix socially with local students: personal attributes such as a lack of self-confidence; poor grasp of (English) social language skills; living in student accommodation that only houses international students; lack of time for social activities because of the need to study for longer hours; and racial prejudice (Marginson 2002; Thomas 2003b; Volet 2003). Personal experience of most educators will support the notion that it takes less effort to communicate with someone from the same language background compared to someone with a “foreign” language. Disappointment in the lack of contact with the host culture may lead to social cliques based on country of origin which can have the effect of further alienation of local from international students. Because of these factors, local students are missing out on the opportunity to learn more about other cultures that could be invaluable in their future professional careers.

Social interaction is not a peripheral activity in the development of competent graduates and a major part of fostering that development should be intercultural competence. But intercultural communication is not easily achieved. It “entails the discovery and transcendence of difference through authentic experiences of cross-cultural interaction that involve real tasks, and emotional as well as intellectual participation” (De Vita and Case 2003, 388). And if genuine sharing of world views is to take place, “intercultural encounters, which inevitably will lead to misunderstandings, conflicts and frustration [should not be] rejected or suppressed” (Otten 2000, 13).

Global consciousness entails a respect for pluralism. This requires development of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and understanding. More than ever, countries all over the world are experiencing intercultural and inter-racial tensions. One possible argument based on this phenomenon could be that the move from assimilationist policies to multi-culturalism in the 1980s and 1990s has led to ethnic enclaves within Western countries so that pluralism has resulted in further divisions within societies. However, if the example of Australia is anything to go by, the multiculturalism as practised did not include a desire to understand the “others”; it barely included tolerance of their differences. And now, as then, ethnic minorities are forced to rely on their own group. This says much about the way that international students are viewed by host countries and their institutions. The very use of the term “foreign” students which is still current in some of the literature implies that these students are “outsiders” and alien, instead of fellow citizens of the world.

Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) research in the field of cultural differences and their dynamics in organisations clearly demonstrates that culture is a product of socialisation processes of which people are largely unconscious. Socialisation occurs from the moment of birth and is reinforced by family, schooling, working and the prevailing ideas and values projected within countries. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) note, the failure of higher educational institutions to equip their graduates with intercultural competence has lead many corporations to send their staff to intercultural training courses so they can work in their global operations. But it is questionable whether a half day or seven day course is sufficient to engender more than a veneer of intercultural competence.

Their research on the values of IBM employees located in different countries revealed similar problems in each country, but solutions reflected different cultural values. The main dimensions of these differences were reported as: power-distance (between the individual and an authority figure); individualism and collectivism; gender roles; and the avoidance of uncertainty. They outline three phases for the acquisition of intercultural communication: awareness of one’s own cultural beliefs and values through introspection; knowledge about other cultures’ symbols, heroes and rituals; and skills based on the awareness and knowledge that allows a person to satisfactorily live or work in the new environment. Certainly the
first two phases should be achievable for both international and local students, but what is actively being done in educational institutions to ensure graduating students are interculturally knowledgeable and competent communicators?  

The Western Educational Curriculum  

Increasingly, academics from within most disciplines are calling for change in the teaching or instruction educational paradigm that dominates Western educational institutions. Their argument is based on the widely accepted notion that knowledge is historically, culturally, socially and politically constructed. Howe and Martin (1998) and Case and Sylvester (2000) discuss the inappropriateness of contemporary management texts in business fields such as marketing, organisational and human resource management that are dominated by Anglo-American theories. They note that best practice in one culture is not universally transferable into other cultures. Perusal of more recent texts in a university bookshop reveals that they include case studies outlining transference of Western corporations’ operations into developing countries and refer to the need to understand cultural differences, but rarely discuss how to develop intercultural competencies. Many of them refer to Hofstede’s work, but they seldom do more than outline his major findings. Nor do they reflect that, “what is ‘rational’ and what is ‘ethical’ depend on cultural value positions” and that “in politics value positions are further confounded by perceived interests” (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, 373).

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 373) remind their readers that, “There is a strong tendency in international politics to use different ethical standards toward other countries than toward one’s own”. They nominate The Opium War between China and Britain in the 19th century and the sale of arms as examples of this double standard. As a further example, currently in Australia, the government, its ministers, business and diplomatic personnel have been exposed as participating in unethical behaviour relating to wheat sales to Iraq (under the UN sanctioned oil-for-food program), that have included $A300 million kickbacks to Saddam Hussein. The latter not being approved by the UN. Self-reflection is a necessary component to developing intercultural skills. “It requires...a great deal of criticism of our individual and national thinking and behaviour” (Mestenhauser 1998, 25) which governments always seem to find difficult to do.  

Moghaddam et al. (1993, 9) state that culture “should have a central role in social psychology including research on groups within societies”. They argue that since social psychology is dominated by U.S. researchers, their ethnocentrism means that many “established findings … do not stand up to the test when assessed in cultures outside North America” (11). Furthermore, they believe that most research fails to address minority groups’ perspectives within Western countries (13). These views are reinforced by Weinfurt and Moghaddam (2001) when examining the validity of one particular research instrument used in cross-cultural research. Similar concerns about methodological assumptions are expressed by Murphy and Ivinson (2003) and Leatherwood and Archer (2004), as editors of a British education journal, when explicating the rationale for the range of articles as attempts to expose “[t]he persistence of inequalities of class, race and gender (across national boundaries)” (Leatherwood and Archer 2004, 10). Social and educational psychology espouse in many ways the assimilationist ideology, that is, “if racial and cultural groups give up their heritage culture, a culturally homogeneous society will arise” free of “racial and cultural conflict” (Moghaddam et al. 159). It appears this ethnocentric view was also extended to include students from other countries.  

Ketefian and Redman (1997) raise similar questions to Moghaddam et al. about the dominance of Western knowledge and the types of methodologies used to research and frame nursing practice. In Australia, there were approximately 9,500 international students enrolled in nursing courses (DEST 2004). Several thousand more were enrolled in off-shore Australian courses in Asia). Their concerns include the relevance of Western nursing theory to other cultures in that graduating nurses and postdoctoral students may fail to be effective in their home country if they try to impose Western practices. For example, there are distinct communication differences between Asian cultures and Western cultures that include verbal and non-verbal mores (Ketefian and Redman 1997). This ethnocentrism is evident in the content of the nursing journals, which implies that the findings are universally applicable. There is awareness of this shortcoming and, for example, the editor of one journal (Hegvary 2005), recently had a series of Questions and Answers regarding the need to increase the international component of the journal. There is also debate about whether the call for a move towards “the development of culture-specific theories of nursing” (Kikuchi 2005, 303) will result in nurses having “no objective moral basis for intervening when they encounter cultural practices that they know are injurious to human health” (305). Kikuchi (2005) believes that. “[u]ltimately…[nurses] must be humanly responsive to the needs of people as human beings, not simply as cultural beings” (306).  

These examples from widely varying disciplines indicate the general disregard by Western educational
curriculum for the experience, knowledge and values held by non-Western cultures. This attitude indicates a failure to recognise the need to develop intercultural competence in the student population. Clarke (2004), in a survey of college students in the U.S., found that despite 60% of the students having studied a foreign language and 73% a course in foreign culture, of the group, 60% and 52% respectively said they would not study or work in a foreign country. Furthermore, 71% (85% of the white students) believe that the U.S. culture is superior to others, and 48% support an isolationist policy. Although no similar study of Australian students’ attitudes was located, a recent study of Melbourne’s Year 10 and 11 Catholic school students’ attitudes towards Muslims showed similar prejudices (Leung 2006, 2). For example, nearly half had learnt something about Muslims and Islam at school, but one third said they had learnt nothing. Twenty-nine per cent did not want their schools to teach them more about Islam (34% did not care). Only 36% believed Muslims are smart (62% believed Christians are smart). More than 50% think Muslims behave strangely (Leung 2006, 2). The ignorance and bias revealed in these two surveys are probably the tip of the iceberg. The socialisation process means that these students’ views reflect the prevailing ideas and values of their families and the majority of the general population living around them. Twelve plus years of education has done little to prepare these students for living and working in a multi-cultural world. It seems unlikely that further higher education as it is now framed will change their attitudes, which means the political and professional leaders of the future will be ill-prepared and possibly unwilling to embrace global citizenship.

**Education for the Future**

“Education is about the future, not the present” (Bowden and Marton, 1998, 19). World economics and politics are ever changing. The old paradigms and ways of doing things mean that the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle must be reconfigured to form a new picture. The new picture is not predictable, but it is certain to be linked to global processes so that students need “skills of enquiry and analysis rather than a set of facts about globalisation” (Rizvi 2000, 4). Barr and Tagg (1995) and Bowden and Marton (1998) are critical of the teaching/instruction paradigm and place emphasis on the word learning. Learning they argue is essential to prepare students to deal with the unknown (future). Learning involves:

…developing new ways of seeing (situations, phenomena) [which] is, of course, not the only form of learning, but it is the most fundamental and neglected form of learning. The reason is that once we have developed certain ways of seeing, they become taken for granted: we believe that what we see is the world as it is, and not the world as it is seen by us (Bowden and Marton 1998, 278).

The instruction paradigm that is the basis of most Western educational processes is passive; the learning paradigm is active. The learning paradigm recognises the plurality and cultural boundedness of the sources of knowledge. It offers the opportunity to move away from the ethnocentric Western dominance of most disciplines. This is important if students are to develop a heightened sense of global consciousness. They need to understand the interdependence between cultural, local and global processes. For example, racial tension and environmental damage are issues that have to be addressed at local, national and international levels. This requires development of the critical skills to enable them to question sources of knowledge, “assess claims of its validity and legitimacy…determine its uses and applications and speculate about how it might be challenged and refuted” (Rizvi 2000, 5). This means they must have “the capacity to determine how knowledge is globally linked, no matter how locally specific its uses” (Rizvi 2000, 5). In view of this, according to Bennett (cited in Gacia-Ávila 2005, 127), the six objectives of an internationalised curriculum should be:

…understanding multiple historical perspectives; developing cultural consciousness; developing intercultural competence; combating racism, sexism, prejudice, and all forms of discrimination; raising awareness of the state of the planet and global dynamics; and developing social action skills.

Yet the implementation of international education remains fragmented and incongruous and it lacks a sound theoretical and empirical research base (Gacia-Ávila 2005; Mestenhauser 1998). This is evident from its varied and broadscale definitions. Just how complex a task it will be to develop a theoretical underpinning to its practice is indicated by Bennett (2001) who identifies twelve genres of research in regard to multicultural education that have evolved from the four genre clusters of social equity, multicultural competence, pedagogy of equity and curriculum reform.

There are many reported examples of internationalisation of education that include interdisciplinary courses; on-line exchanges between students located in different countries; deployment of Western academics to teach in off-shore courses; problem-based learning; and employment of academics from outside of the host country. But these activities underline the ad hoc and isolated nature of attempts over the past
decade to internationalise Western educational experiences. There are international education special interest groups such as Nuffic (Netherlands), within the European Association for International Education (EAIE), NAFSA Association of International Educators (U.S.), IDP (Australia) all with extensive web sites and networks, but they still operate within Western cultural and national educational paradigms. UNESCO (1995) has stated principles on “Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace”, but this is not enough. Governments of Western countries need to take the lead and to initiate widespread debate that includes people from many different cultural backgrounds on what should be the key objectives of an internationalised educational experience. They must seek the views of the local community as well as the international community. International benchmarks must be set to evaluate the learning outcomes of an international education in terms of cognitive and affective skills.

For educational institutions, writing mission statements and objectives are not an end in themselves; they are just a backdrop to the main action. Internationalisation cannot work as an add-on to their activities. Internationalisation should be the principle underlying all the activities of educational institutions. To make this change needs an idealistic view of the future, determination and a willingness to challenge the status quo and to promote change. Working out an internationally integrated framework for revision of educational institutions’ policies, curriculum reform and academic staff development is essential and must involve all staff, all students and all aspects of the educational experience. Managerial support from the top down is needed to bring about procedural changes and curriculum innovation.

“The role of academics is crucial” (Teekens 2005, 6) in the day-to-day interface with students. Many proponents of internationalisation believe that academic staff should have experience working in other cultures (Ellingboe 1998; Mestenhauser 1998; Nilsson 2003; Teekens 2005). Part of the responsibility for bringing this about lies with the financial stakeholders (government and education institutions). The “business” of education requires a global outlook and like any global corporation, its staff needs financial support to move home in order to work and conduct research in a different country.

Finally, the students, both local and international, need activities that are embedded in their educational experience that will engage them in exploring the knowledge, views and values of others. This will only occur if the main players in the economic, political and educational fields lead by example.

**Conclusion**

Historically the values inherent in Western educational curriculum have dominated many disciplines. As a consequence, international students have been expected to adopt Western values. Nor has increasing awareness by many within the disciplines of the Western ethnocentrism of the educational curriculum brought about much significant change or accommodation of the views of those traditionally not represented. International and local students frequently seem to move in two parallel streams with little encouragement or desire to share personal experiences; academic teaching staff generally ignores the opportunity to expand the knowledge and understanding of other cultures by including the international students in their classes as an integral part of their lessons. International students have a great deal to contribute to the dynamics of a future oriented and globally focussed curriculum.

International education should be synonymous with intercultural understanding. Instead the field of international education is hazy with multiple interpretations of its meaning and a lack of internationally accepted practices and means of assessing outcomes in terms of the students’ intercultural competence. The narrow view of international students as cash cows persists and means lost opportunities for increased global consciousness, respect for pluralism and for self-reflection by staff and students.

Despite the rhetoric of national governments and their educational institutions, for local students the experience of study abroad for 6-12 months, attempting to learn a foreign language or taking a subject with international content, will not of itself develop intercultural understanding. And currently only a small percentage of students take up such options. Furthermore, the students to a large extent are powerless to initiate and implement change; it is the political and educational leaders who must take up the challenge of engendering genuine internationalisation of education that will provide the graduating students with the cognitive and communicative skills to peacefully coexist and prosper in a global environment. If Western governments genuinely believe, as they appear to, that education is the key to a prosperous and peaceful future, then they need to reconsider the current direction they are taking in regard to international education. Dialogue with people from widely differing cultures should be initiated and the voices of minorities heard. Change only comes about after critical reflection and the limitations of a Western education provide much to reflect upon.
References


European Association for International Education (EAIE) http://www.eaie.org


———. 2003b. Unpublished data from the research included in the aforementioned paper.


### Appendix A


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of International Students (top 6%)</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Japan</th>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>South Korea</td>
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About the Author

**Robyn Thomas**

Robyn Thomas has worked as a language and academic skills adviser for 24 years and has taught in industry and community classes, as well as working with Technical and Further Education and Higher Education students. Currently, at La Trobe University in Australia, she is responsible for supporting postgraduate and undergraduate students. Approximately half of the students she works with are international students. Her work includes running seminars and workshops on writing and critical thinking and providing individual consultations to students who seek advice on a range of academic skills such as critical reading, dissertation structure, referencing conventions and developing clear and concise writing.