

Chapter 1. The importance of positive intercultural exchanges for international students on work placements in higher education

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Abstract

Many students travel abroad to study in a different country with the expectation of it being exciting, new and positive. This is particularly relevant when international students' study programs include a work placement. Strong partnerships are required between the international student, the university and also the workplace. Open and clear communication and positive interaction are vital for success in work placements for international students. This often requires an openness to and awareness of appropriate intercultural strategies between the international student and other stakeholders. This introductory chapter explores a major Australian research project that aimed to improve the work placement component of study programs for international students. The project, known as *Work placement for International Student Programs* or WISP gathered a range of data including large scale survey, interviews and documentary artefacts related to the international student workplace experience. Results from this study are shared including a number of recommendations for improved practice

Introduction

The prevalence of international students studying in foreign countries has expanded substantially over the past few decades. In fact, it has been reported that over four million students studied abroad in 2013 (UNESCO, 2014). Many of the programs that international students undertake incorporate a work placement which is often referred to as work integrated learning, work experience, practicum or internship. International students are also interested in receiving an experience in various workplaces in order to improve their employability status as well as gain relevant career advice from their overseas partners (Garrett, 2014).

It is therefore important that these experiences are positive and productive for all parties, particularly given the importance of such partnerships in higher education contexts. Indeed, there is a lot at stake if these experiences are not successful for international students as well as their mentors. Issues such as those related to visas and relevant government policy as well as impact on the workplace environment can be negative if the workplace interaction is not effective.

Alternatively, if all stakeholders take the time to understand each other including issues such as cultural and linguistic background, previous experience in the workforce, and ways of representing knowledge and skills, then success is more likely to occur. Such an intercultural approach means that both international students and their mentors/supervisors can learn from each other if the learning/teaching connection is reciprocated.

This introductory chapter explores key concepts related to work placements and the international experience that all higher education contexts should be considering. We do this

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by referring to a major research project funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching's Innovation and Development grants system in Australia. The project known as the *Work placement for International Student Programs* or WISP project lays the base for this book along with other relevant projects related to international students and work placements internationally. The chapter then outlines the structure of this book along with brief description of each Part and consequential Chapters.

The international student experience

The Australian Government (2000) has established regulations for all providers of education to international students. The ESOS (Educational Services for Overseas Students) Act and National Code establishes legislative requirements and standards for the quality assurance of education and training institutions offering courses to international students who are in Australia on a student visa. ESOS provides tuition fee protection for international students. There are 15 standards which relate to the following:

- pre-enrolment engagement of students (Standards 1–4)
- care for and services to students (Standards 5–6)
- students as consumers (Standards 7–8)
- the student visa programme (Standards 9–13)
- staff, educational resources and premises (Standards 14–15).

Australia's National Strategy for International Education 2025 (Australian Government, 2016) aims to strengthen the country's reputation for high quality educating and training and aims to ensure Australian providers are globally engaged. The ESOS ACT and the National Strategy provide standards and codes to ensure quality programs and experiences are available for international students.

The onus is therefore placed on the provider to ensure “the development of an enhanced international student experience, recognising that experience extends from pre-arrival to post-graduation” (Griffith University, 2014).

Employability is being identified as an emerging and critical issue at many universities around the globe. In Australia, Griffith University (2016) has identified that increasingly, employability is acknowledged as the primary motivation for many internationally mobile students. Griffith University has developed a model of employability. This model of employability reinforces the connections between scholarly learning, work integrated learning and professional preparation. These linkages enhance student engagement and graduate success as students can see the relevance of their academic work and build career awareness, confidence and professional identity. Therefore, employability needs to be a strong partnership and collaboration between the university, the student and the employer. These partnerships often commence during work placements which also require such collaborations. The challenge for universities is to prepare the international student for their future employment either in Australia or internationally. Enhanced and successful work placements connecting international students with employers and a broad range of connections will assist in this challenge.

Further, Kinash et al. (2015) developed an employability framework. They believe graduate employability has ten elements which includes a degree, high grades, knowledge, goals, identity, matching employment and degrees, skills and attributes. As well they list the internship/work experience as an element. The final element is identified as co-curricular where they identify that students have opportunities to actively engage in a broad-based variety of experiences (relative to the needs and resources of diverse students) such as sport, volunteer work and student leadership positions. Higher education needs to support, embed and acknowledge these relevant activities in the program of studies. This also gives students contact with a wide range of contacts, such as Career Development Professionals and Professional Bodies.

Background to the development of this book: *The Work placement for International Student Programs (WISP) project*

With an increase in international students enrolling in universities across the globe, as well as a reported interest in workplace experience, career advice and employability for international students (Garrett, 2014) the *Work placement for International Student Programs (WISP)* project was timely. The research literature shows strong evidence of issues and concerns that international students face during the work placements within their study programs. However, limited discourse exists on successes and the strengths and richness that international students can offer in workplace contexts. With many universities developing Internationalisation and Employability policies and frameworks, investigating the work placement component of study programs in a range of disciplinary areas was necessary to improve the international student experience.

Aims of the project

The WISP project's main aim was to improve work placement components of study programs for international students. More specifically the project aimed to:

- Identify current procedures and practices in relation to work placement and associated assessment for international students in the discipline areas of Business, Education, Engineering, and Health in participating institutions
- Identify and understand challenges, concerns and successes for international students, their mentors (i.e., those people who are responsible for assessing and working with students during their placement) and coordinators (i.e., those people responsible for the coordination of placements, at both universities and workplaces) prior to, during and after the students leave and
- Develop and apply a working model of effective practice around internationalisation, workplace socialisation and reflection. This model will be used in support materials for current and prospective international students, their mentors, coordinators and relevant university staff.

These aims were met via an appropriate model and research design including the project approach and methodology.

Research design and methods

A number of strategies were employed to investigate work placements for international students across six university sites including the lead institution, Griffith University (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Universities and researchers in project

| | Business | Education | Engineering & Occupational Therapy | Nursing | Psychology |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|---|----------------|-------------------|
| Curtin University | | | Bennet Ferns | | |
| Deakin University | | Joseph | | | |
| Griffith University (lead) | | Barton Hartwig Cain | | | Jones |
| Monash University | | Podorova | | | |
| Queensland University of Technology | Larkin | Campbell Tangen | | | O'Connor |
| University of Southern Queensland | Kavanagh | | | Harvey | |

Initially, an annotated bibliography including a large database of relevant literature was compiled. This review identified a gap in the literature—that the intersection between the key conceptualisations of internationalisation, socialisation and reflection had not yet been explored.

Next a scan, collation and analysis of documents such as course or unit profiles, resources and materials, for example workplace handbooks, and past international student reports were carried out (over 250 artefacts in total). A large number of interviews were also conducted with international students, their supervisors and university staff including academics, placement and support staff across each university site.

In addition, a large scale survey was developed and distributed Australia-wide. With 340 students completing this survey important data was collected about international students' workplace experiences and self-perceived employability. Findings from each of these data sets informed the development of a model of effective practice for international students, their supervisors and other stakeholders related to work placements. This is outlined in Chapter 2 of this book.

Impact of the project

The most significant impact from the project was the collaboration across a number of institutions as well as disciplinary areas in working together to improve work placement for international students. The collaborations resulted in a number of dissemination activities including workshops, seminars and national and international conference presentations. Feedback from these events has been positive with participants commenting favourably on

both the relevance of the model of effective practice as well as the resources developed as a result of the data collection and analysis.

Resulting from the extensive data collection for the WISP project are important insights into international students' experiences before, during and after work placements within Australian University programs. Viewing international students' workplace experiences from a positive and strengths-based lens has also impacted greatly on the research literature, particularly as previous research has largely focused on challenges and negative aspects of international students in workplace contexts.

Of course, not all the chapters in this book result from the WISP project. Also included are a number of studies carried out internationally including in Canada, Finland and The Netherlands. Other insights resulting from particular authors' experiences have also played an important part in the book's final outcome.

Further work that impacts on systemic procedures and policies will be ongoing at each of the university sites. This includes but is not limited to: continued improvement of the delivery of learning and teaching practices that prepares international students in each of the discipline areas and sites; increasing the number of workshops and conference presentations delivered at other university sites across Australia as well as internationally; continued collaborations with the International Education Association Australia through events such as symposiums and the annual Australian International Education Association conference; and input into relevant and key policies and practices within higher education contexts. Key findings or recommendations from the project are outlined in Chapter 2.

Structure of this book

This book is presented in three parts. The first part includes Chapters 2–7 and investigates theorisations around the key concepts of internationalisation and interculturalisation, multi-socialisation and reflection and reflective practice with a focus on real world examples.

Chapter 2 has the entire team sharing the WISP Model of Effective Practice. The model was developed by exploring the above three theoretical areas. We argue that considering work placements for international students via these lenses, including where they intersect, is critical for enhancement and success. We share two case studies where international students in education and psychology respectively undertook two placements each. In these examples we apply the model of effective practice highlighting how each of the theories played out during these workplace experiences. Both students identified instances where they experienced both challenges and successes and related these to how they were treated by their mentors, how they responded to this treatment and also how they were able to ultimately reflect on these experiences in order to reconstruct their professional practice.

Chapter 3 authored by Gribble and McCrae investigate a global perspective of work integrated learning. They utilise a frame based on Bourdieu's notion of different forms of capital by unpacking barriers and challenges related to international students' experiences in Australia and Canada. The authors also explore what types of graduate attributes and outcomes international students attain as a result of their work integrated learning experiences. It is important for graduates to display certain aptitudes and capabilities but equally so, employers need to be mindful of the strengths international students may bring to the workplace context, even if more support is required around English language proficiency. Varying forms of capital can be drawn upon in a way to acknowledge rich cultural diversity.

Also social networks can be enhanced to enable positive outcomes for international students during their study abroad.

Harrison and Felton in Chapter 4 take a distinct approach by theorising professional field placements and inclusion in the social and behavioural sciences. The authors define inclusion firstly and consequently relate how this notion can be applied in field placement contexts. They argue that institutions need to make a conscious and explicit commitment to sustaining an inclusive approach to learning for international students in particular. As such, they offer eight principles that promote such inclusion that will ultimately benefit all parties.

In the field of education, Tangen and Campbell in Chapter 5 explore factors leading to unsuccessful field placements for international students by asking who fails whom? They present four case studies in education, framed by Lave and Wenger's idea of situated learning. The case studies show that both individual and systemic considerations need to be taken into account in order to success to be possible. Better relationships between the international student, their mentor and the university site is recommended as well as an effective model that people can refer to in their work in this area.

In Chapter 6 Barton and Ryan present a model to highlight the importance of reflection, and indeed effective reflective practice, in order for personal growth to occur in a professional context. They note that reflection can in fact be carried out differently depending on people's cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The model unpacks a number of questions that should be asked by referring to people's personal and professional histories. Such an approach requires both student and mentor to reflect together and independently with the view of improving and reconstructing practice.

Chapter 7 by Barton and Billett shows how an individual's personal epistemology, or approach to learning a particular discipline's nuances, knowledge and skills can impact on learning outcomes. They argue that not only do international students have to become familiar with particular work sites and procedures but also the cultural aspects surrounding their time in the new country. This engagement is often complex and requires explicit mediation acknowledging these complexities. Barton and Billett explore these issues by surveying the theories of disciplinarity, epistemology and interculturalisation. They suggest a number of recommendations for improved practice.

The second part of the book shares a range of empirical data resulting from the WISP project in the areas of: Education, Health—clinical settings, Speech Pathology, Psychology and Occupational Therapy.

Firstly, Barton, Hartwig, Joseph and Podorova—all teacher educators in the Higher Education Sector—in Chapter 8 present case studies from three university sites that offer international students initial teacher education programs. Using the frameworks of reflection and interculturalisation the authors present the case studies via an interpretative phenomenological lens and explore the main themes encountered through the data analysis at each site. A number of similarities across the sites are evident including: issues related to the relationships involved in a practicum experience, English proficiency and the impact of this on classroom practice, and time constraints that are a feature of schooling and professional practice. It was also evident that contextual factors, that is, the differences in the programs and universities impacted on the outcomes for international students.

Chapter 9 authored by Mikkonen, Pitkäljärvi and Kääriäinen from Finland, discuss issues related to internationalism in healthcare settings. In this Chapter it is reasoned that both international students and mentors participate in professional learning regarding cultural and linguistic differences. This, the authors contend, would improve the supportive environment required in clinical placements. Such experiences provide the opportunity for students to view different ways of thinking and solving problems. They can also improve the chances of international students gaining employment either in their own country or others.

Howells, Westerveld and Garvis in Chapter 10, share their experiences in the disciplinary area of Speech Pathology. A number of international students undertake a Masters level program and often face both challenges and enablers during their clinical placements. Issues such as understanding the cultural context as well as aspects related specifically to Speech Pathology practice impacted on the students' learning. Many of the students saw that being an international student was a benefit as they could identify any cultural nuances of their clients that perhaps other staff members could not. The students also commented on the importance and impact of the university academics in supporting them during their placements. The authors argue that learning from individual vignettes is highly recommended for practitioners as they allow people to reflect and observe various practices in a clinical setting.

In Chapter 11 Jones, O'Connor and Boag-Hodgson undertake a study in psychology. Similar to the previous chapter, the strengths and vulnerabilities of students are offered. First, an exploration of the importance of ongoing reflection and placement experience in the profession of psychology is shared. A thematic analysis of interview data reveals the importance of international students' life histories and identities on the work placement. Unless these are taken into account by the mentor the placement is at risk of being unsuccessful. The authors also note the importance of intercultural understanding and share ways in which to understand and practice this trait. A number of recommendations are included.

The final chapter in Part II—Chapter 12—written by Bennett and Ferns delves into the concept of employability by looking at functional and cognitive aspects. The cognitive domain consists of knowledge processes of factual, conceptual, procedural and meta-cognitive (also see Anderson & Krathwohl's revision of Bloom's taxonomy). The functional dimension involves remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating. Bennett and Ferns use these to analyse data from three Occupational Therapy international students across a number of work placements. Outcomes include acknowledging the need for individual autonomy and reflective behaviour as critical indicators of learner development—particularly for international students.

The final part explores a number of strategies for systemic change within higher education institutions related to work placements and international students.

Chapter 13 by Hartwig explores Study Abroad programs offered to domestic students studying in a Bachelor of Education degree. It was interesting to reveal that of the 53 Australian students involved in the three programs only six students had previously travelled overseas and in fact five students had never been on a plane before. Students completed pre and post surveys on their experiences and written reflections during the program. Presentations detailing their experiences and what they believed the participation in the Study Abroad experience had done for them were made upon their return to Australia. All students were hoping that the experience would improve their chances of employability and for many

the international experience had opened their eyes to new ways of teaching and was a valued and rewarding experience.

Stokhof and Fransen from The Netherlands, in Chapter 14, discuss the notion of globalisation with a focus on teachers. They firstly unpack the ideas of global teachers and global citizens and show how this is necessary for growth in professional practice in the current climate. Stokhof and Fransen continue by showing how they develop assessment items that expect international students to consider the intricacies of global citizenry and the importance of such a philosophy for beginning teachers. Through the use of creative mind mapping and reflections the students transform their practice while working with students in Dutch schools. Having a global perspective indeed had a profound effect on the ways in which the students considered their own professional identities.

Chapter 15 has Sonnenschein, Barker, Hibbins and Cain look at Chinese international students' experience in the Tourism and Hospitality industry. The chapter shares findings of a number of interviews including the fact that Chinese international students have clear expectations about the outcomes of the WIL component in their chosen degree. They also comment on their experiences in bridging theory and practice, as well as developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for employability back in their home country. A number of recommendations for university policy are also presented.

In Chapter 16 Bahr, Pendergast and Klopper set the scene by reporting on international education globally and then in the Australian context. A cross-institutional comparison is presented with attention given to specific policies surrounding the procedures for international students and admission. Using a frame of three pillars from a ten year plan the authors show a range of strategic directions for improvement of participation as well as the direct experience on international students in education.

Kelly in Chapter 17, explores how to assist international students in becoming more employable by transforming challenges into opportunities. She notes that there are a number of challenges that international students face, as espoused in the literature. However, these challenges can also be viewed as opportunities and strengths with further intercultural understanding. Such a strengths-based approach would ensure that all involved have more positive experiences.

In the final Chapter 18 we share personal reflections of our involvement in the WISP project in the hope that further and continued commitment to ensuring positive and productive experiences for international students are guaranteed across the world.

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