Leveling the (playing) field: How can we make inclusive field education a reality for international students?

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Background

• Professional degrees in the social & behavioural sciences typically include field practicum/externship/placement

• A focus on internationalisation of the curriculum within the classroom environment but limited attention to learning while on field practicum

• Increasing international student enrolments in Australian degree programs (21% of on-shore enrolments in 2011) (International Education Advisory Council, 2013)
International students in Australia – the norm rather than the exception
Challenges to learning on field practicum

• Sourcing *quality* field practicum experiences

• Managing *workplace culture*, being closely observed & having *practical work assessed* by a field supervisor (Harrison & Ip, 2013)

• Challenges intensified by *linguistic & cultural* differences, as well as *temporary resident* status (McCluskey, 2008; Nash, 2011; Patrick et al. 2008; Spooner-Lane et al. 2011)
Research project aims & overview

• Basis for a larger study to develop strategies & resources to make field education inclusive for international students across the social & behavioural sciences

• Comprised 2 phases:
  1) Needs analysis:
     • a literature review
     • perspectives of 14 academic staff responsible for field education & 9 professional field supervisors

  2) Application of the needs analysis & literature to develop:
     • principles for inclusive field education
Inclusive education

'Inclusion' applies to an arrangement where every student's entitlements have been designed in from the outset, as opposed to 'integration' which applies to the assimilation of students into a pre-existing arrangements (Simpson, 2011)
Needs analysis findings

Key needs were to:

• include all stakeholders, including professional associations & accreditation bodies
• build placement capacity in the field
• adopt a developmental approach to practicum preparation
• embed language competence in the curriculum in both the classroom & practicum
Needs analysis findings (cont’d)

The need to:

• understand international students as **individuals**
• actively **involve students** in promoting inclusive field education
• apply a **community of practice** framework to understand how students are socialised into the workplace
• **institutional commitment & support** to make inclusive field education a reality
Overarching & core principles of inclusive field education

- Ensure equitable access to field education/ build placement capacity
- Normalise and affirm international student presence
- Adopt a coordinated, multipronged approach to field education that is inclusive of all stakeholders
- Employ a developmental approach to preparing students for field practicum that targets critical stages of the student trajectory
- Recognise students' ascribed status as international students while acknowledging their individuality
- Promote students' meaningful participation in communities of practice
- Embed language and communicative competence into the curriculum in both the classroom and the field
- Involve international students in consultation, planning and monitoring of initiatives
Overarching principle

• Institutional commitment to inclusive field education:

  • Structural  
  • Sustainable  
  • Integrated  
  • Active leadership backed by resources & dedicated staff
1: Ensure equitable access to field education/build placement capacity

• Actively foster collaborative university-industry partnerships

• HEIs need to take the initiative in addressing barriers

• Address resistance to hosting international students

• Address prejudicial/deficit views & attitudes in the workplace
2: Normalise & affirm international student presence

• Build awareness of student & population demographics

• Normalise internationalisation as continuing trend

• Extend the internationalisation agenda to the field/workplace
3: Adopt a coordinated, multi-pronged approach inclusive of all stakeholders

• Need to engage university based staff, field staff, professional associations, accreditation bodies & students

• Recognise the different agendas of stakeholders

• Prepare & support practicum supervisors, as well as students
4: Employ a developmental approach to preparing students for practicum

- Target critical stages of the student trajectory: pre-departure, first semester of study, 1st practicum & program exit

- Start early, though scaffolded exposure

- Preparation should focus on both practicum & transition to the labour market

- International students/graduates could be involved in this preparation
5: Recognise students’ ascribed status as international students while acknowledging individuality

- International students are heterogeneous

- Complex multiple & intersecting identities

- Important to recognise individuality rather than ‘difference’

- **But** important to recognise the implications of holding the status of ‘international student’ particularly in the area of rights
6: Promote students’ meaningful participation in communities of practice

• The workplace is a ‘community of practice’; newcomers are gradually socialised into becoming full members

• Learning is only meaningful when students are given permission to participate in the community of practice

• May be necessary to assist existing members of the workplace develop a more global outlook

• What can we learn from each other?
7: Embed language & communicative competence into the curriculum in classroom & field

• EAL students require tailored assistance to make the transition from the classroom to the field practicum

• Language & communicative learning needs to be contextualised into disciplinary context

• Need to sensitise field supervisors to the issues faced by EAL speakers

• Recognise that there are many ‘Englishes’
8: Involve students in consultation, planning & monitoring of initiatives

• International students are active agents in their own learning

• International students who have completed field placements are a rich source of knowledge

• International students/graduates can act as consultants in planning & overseeing local initiatives
Where to from here?

Phase 2 will explore:

• Are the core principles applicable more widely across regions, types of universities & disciplines in Australia?

• What examples of good practice exist in particular disciplines, sites & stakeholder groups that might be adopted or adapted?

• What are the pros & cons of embedded & co-curricular approaches?

• Undertaken through a survey & interviews with representatives from all stakeholder groups in selected regions across Australia
References


Research project report

Available for download from: