

Looking beyond the laboratory: Finding time to encourage development of global perspective in a content-driven biology unit.

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Internationalisation of the curriculum is central to the core values and strategic direction of many modern universities. Among science-based academics, a global perspective is often considered to be inevitable, given the multinational nature of modern scientific collaborations and the widespread international mobility of professional scientists. Unfortunately, these realities are often distant from the undergraduate science classroom, particularly for non-mobile students. More worryingly, explicit instruction in cross-cultural engagement and communication skills, essential for working effectively in a multinational team upon graduation, is commonly absent from tertiary science courses. This study addressed one major challenge to promoting cross-cultural competence among undergraduate science students: finding time to scaffold such learning within the context of content-heavy, time-poor units. Utilising the 'Interaction for Learning Framework' developed by Arkoudis et al. (2012), small changes aimed at enhancing global and cross-cultural awareness were incorporated into existing assessments and teaching activities within a second-year biomedical physiology unit. In student surveys, 40% of domestic and 60% of international student respondents articulated specific learning about interaction in cross cultural groups resulting from unit activities. Many students also identified specific examples of how cultural beliefs would impact on the place of biomedical physiology within the global community. In addition, staff observed more widespread benefits for student engagement and learning. It is concluded that significant development of cross-cultural awareness and a more global perspective on scientific understanding can be supported among science undergraduates with relatively minor adaptations to course content.