

Ambivalence or short-sightedness: Why are we ignoring the needs of our international tutors?

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The number of international postgraduate students enrolling in Australian and New Zealand universities is steadily growing. Many of these students come from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and face challenges beyond those of local students when they commence their postgraduate studies. An increasing number of these students also undertake the teaching of undergraduate students in their disciplines, usually in a tutorial or small group environment. These teachers often have to address a combination of linguistic, cultural, academic, social and financial issues as they acclimatise in their new environment. In particular, the linguistic and cultural differences between them and their students may create a mismatch of expectations that can undermine their students' learning experiences. Further, the demands of teaching, often without any previous experience and with little or no familiarity of the Australasian tertiary context, places additional stress on them and impacts their own postgraduate studies. While this potential problem has been recognised for many years in North America, little evidence exists of systematic, dedicated development programmes for international tutors in Australasia. This paper will describe a programme implemented at The University of Western Australia which is designed specifically to address the development needs of international tutors, by addressing aspects of teaching preparation as well assistance with language and culture. A community of practice is fostered amongst participants in the programme which is further assisted by a mentoring component within the programme. The theoretical frameworks underpinning the programme, the challenges and the outcomes of the programme to date will be outlined.