FOSTERING SOCIAL COHESION IN UNIVERSITIES: Bridging the Cultural Divide

by Don Smart, Simone Volet and Grace Ang

Asia Research Centre
Murdoch University
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Don Smart, Simone Volet and Grace Ang
Asia Research Centre
Murdoch University

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Australian Education International
Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
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Disclaimer: This report was written by Associate Professor Don Smart, Associate Professor Simone Volet and Ms Grace Ang of Murdoch University. The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of Australian Education International or the Commonwealth of Australia.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AACUHO</td>
<td>Australian Association of College and University Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEI</td>
<td>Australian Education International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIEF</td>
<td>Australian International Education Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVCC</td>
<td>Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEET</td>
<td>Department of Employment, Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELICOS</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFPOS</td>
<td>Full-Fee Paying Overseas Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERDSA</td>
<td>Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISANA</td>
<td>International Students Advisors Network of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>IDP Education Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSC</td>
<td>Overseas Student Charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMAP</td>
<td>University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

As we will elaborate below, Australia currently has on its campuses one of the highest proportions of international students of any country in the world. For example, whereas ‘foreign’ students comprise only 3 percent of US higher education enrolments, in Australia in 1999 they represented 12 percent - and were predominantly Asian. Unfortunately, our research, and that of others, reveals a fairly strong separation between the local Australian and the international students. The research confirms a fairly high level of disappointed expectations amongst international students who, in many cases, had anticipated greater mixing and establishing of friendships with Australian students. This paper works from the premise that increased interaction between these two groups is beneficial and desirable and the goal is to explore the dynamics of ‘the problem’ with a view to identifying and proposing solutions which enhance such interaction.

The paper is structured as follows: it commences with an examination of the evolutionary ‘shifts’ in official Australian policy towards international students; it next reviews the research literature on the ‘problem’ and also reports on students’ experiences and perceptions of the problem; it then reports our efforts to identify some Australian university initiatives which seem to have ‘worked’ in the sense of fostering interactions. These initiatives can be grouped into three main domains: the classroom; residences; and other social / institutional settings. Our initial search has identified some promising initiatives worthy of detailed case study. The next and as yet uncompleted phase of our project will be to undertake such case studies in these three domains. In doing so, we hope to identify some key principles, processes and strategies which institutions might be able to adopt or adapt as they search for their own particular solutions to this significant problem.

We conclude our article with some preliminary observations on what is being done, what kinds of principles / strategies seem to be important and offer some future directions for research.

1.1. Shifts in International Student Policy in Australia

1.1.1 From Aid to Trade

Since 1986, Australian education at all levels (university, vocational and school) has been increasingly caught up in the sea-change of internationalisation. When Federal Trade (and
subsequently Education) Minister, John Dawkins, introduced the full-fee paying overseas student (FFPOS) policy in 1985, he signalled an historic shift in Australia’s approach to international education and perhaps unwittingly, launched a dynamic change agent.

From the 1950s to the mid 1980s, Australia’s international students - of whom there were up to 10,000 at any one time - were essentially viewed as part of Australia’s Foreign Aid policy to the developing countries of the Asian and African regions. Such students were either totally funded under the Colombo Plan and other aid plans or their tuition fees were heavily subsidised by Australian taxpayers (Smart & Ang, 1993).

By 1979, the growing dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of this programme in meeting Australia’s foreign policy and foreign aid objectives - as well as the tendency for the programme to be exploited as a means for back-door immigration - led the conservative Fraser coalition Government to introduce an Overseas Student Charge (OSC) set at one-third of the average delivery cost of courses in tertiary education.

Continuing government dissatisfaction and concern with the overseas student programmes resulted in 1982 in the establishment by Fraser of two Commonwealth Committees of Enquiry: the Committee of Review of Private Overseas Student Policy (the Goldring Committee) and the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program (the Jackson Committee). Both of these committees reported to the incoming Hawke ALP Government in 1984. The two reports made somewhat conflicting recommendations on future overseas student policy (Boyd & Smart, 1987, p. 30). Goldring reviewed education of overseas students primarily within traditional Australian ‘aid’ terms, while Jackson placed much more emphasis on ‘trade’ and encouraged unrestricted access for a new group of ‘full-fee paying overseas students’ (FFPOS) as a market-based export (Throsby, 1985). In a global economic environment increasingly being influenced by Thatcher and Reaganomics, it was hardly surprising that the more radical and market-oriented Jackson Committee recommendations were the ones which were to have a major impact on Australia’s future policy approach to overseas students.

As a result, in 1985, the ‘aid’ perspective was replaced by an education as ‘trade’ perspective. In the recessionary aftermath of Hawke-Keating economic deregulation, amidst burgeoning balance of trade deficits, Trade Minister Dawkins searched for export salvation with the ‘Asian tiger’ economies. The FFPOS was seen as the ‘education export’ element within this strategy (Rhoades and Smart, 1996).
During the early ‘full-fee period’ from 1985-92, the Government’s policy focus was almost exclusively on economic issues. During this period, the occasional academic criticisms of the ‘crass commercial’ image and behaviour of Australian institutions (as reflected in some recruitment and classroom practices) went largely ignored. Typically, the Ministerial Discussion and White Papers on Higher Education in 1987 referred only to the growth and revenue aspects of international student policy (Dawkins, 1987).

One of the few official reports to highlight the non-economic benefits of international students during this period was the Garnaut Report (Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy, 1989). Perhaps not surprisingly, Garnaut was an academic advisor to the Prime Minister:

...It builds close interpersonal and institutional links that are important in economic, political and cultural relations with students’ home countries...and it is an important means of familiarising young Australians with their East Asian environment...

More typically though, in 1991, the most prominent Federal policy report touching on international students was the Industry Commission’s Exports of Education Services (Report No. 12, August 1991). Its main thrust was to recommend rapid expansion of international student recruitment on the grounds of its economic benefits. Amongst the interesting revelations in its pages was the fact that DEET (Department of Employment, Education and Training) - the paramount education policy organ of Federal Government - in its submission to the Industry Commission, argued that notwithstanding the perceived equity issues:

...universities should accept all qualified overseas students for whom they have a place. It recognises that as a consequence - equally qualified Australian students would be precluded from studying at a public university under current policy.

(1991, Report No. 12, p. 171)

This policy statement fairly accurately portrayed the then pro-privatisation position of Education Minister Dawkins and his bureaucracy as they encouraged the institutions to pursue international student enrolments – primarily as a means for supplementing Federal per capita funding for Australian students.
1.1.2 From Trade to Internationalisation?: Beazley’s Public Policy Shift

In 1992, partly to counter the widespread perception in Asia that Australia’s aggressive student recruitment practices were primarily financially motivated, the new Federal Education Minister, Kim Beazley, launched a major policy statement on international education which sought to ‘soften’ the image and re-orient institutions towards the goals and benefits of ‘internationalisation’:

...There has been overseas criticism that Australia’s approach was too narrowly commercial with insufficient recognition of student needs and of the benefits of international education. To prevent such problems, to shift institutions away from narrow economic perspectives and to assist the development of Australia’s international education and training community, it is important to focus on the internationalisation of education.

The Government recognises that international education is an increasingly important part of Australia’s international relations. It uniquely spans the cultural, economic and interpersonal dimensions of international relations. It assists cultural understanding of all parties involved. It enriches Australia’s education and training systems and the wider Australian society by encouraging a more international outlook...

(Beazley, 1992, Ministerial Statement, International Education)

Beazley’s statement was symbolically significant in that it signalled a policy shift towards a broader conception of international education for Australia’s universities. It emphasised that genuine international education was about much more than an ever-increasing one-way flow of students to Australia and involved a broadening and diversification of activities, reciprocal flows and arrangements and institutional partnerships. In support of these goals, Beazley highlighted new or on-going government initiatives in relation to: education quality and student support services; a strong geographical focus on the Asia-Pacific and cultural studies programmes; university mobility (UMAP); research exchanges, encouragement for the development of off-shore delivery and investment in offshore education infrastructure; the development of strong and expanding international education marketing representation (including the new Australian Education Centres throughout the region and an Australian Education Office in Washington).

Clearly then, the Beazley statement expanded the somewhat narrow local conception of international education and implied a maturing institutional responsibility and vision. It concluded:
Australia's international education community is consolidating and maturing. There is now a wider range of institutions involved in Australian international education and, as indicated by the development of codes of practice, a greater attention to educational quality and to the educational values normally applied in domestic education. These values include student welfare, ethical standards, and the perception of international education as a wide-ranging activity involving many facets in addition to educating international students in Australia.

(Beazley, 1992)

The Beazley policy statement represented a significant policy shift and a number of his goals and initiatives have borne fruit. However, there were and are still major obstacles to success in this area - particularly, we will argue, in relation to such goals as increasing intercultural understanding and the fostering of strong interpersonal relations and interaction between Australian and international students. Indeed, we will demonstrate below that Australian universities are faced with a serious on-going 'problem' or challenge in this area.

1.2 The Dimensions of International Student Growth

Undoubtedly, in economic terms, Dawkins' introduction of the FFPOS programme, the so-called 'Export of Education Services', has been a 'winner' for Australia (see Table 1). Education has become Australia's third biggest 'Service Export' - earning an estimated $3b, with Australian education institutions enrolling over 147,000 international students in 1998 (AEI, 1999). Recent estimates suggest that the education fees and living expenses of international students studying in Australia contribute around $1.5b each, to the Australian economy annually. As can be seen in Table 2, universities alone account for about half of all international students but the vocational (TAFE and private colleges) and English language sectors are also significant 'players'. Even schools - mostly private secondary (and often boarding) - now account for an estimated $136m annually in fees.
Table 1
Australia’s Full-Fee International Student Enrolment (All Sectors) 1987-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Student Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>7,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>21,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>32,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>47,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>47,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>52,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>84,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>99,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>120,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>143,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>151,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>147,130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistics for 1987-1992 taken at 31 March each year. Statistics for 1993-1998 taken for the year; statistics for higher education taken at 31 March each year. Higher Education student numbers include approximately 15,800 students enrolled in offshore campuses of Australian universities in first semester 1998. In 1998, there were approximately 25,000 additional international students studying in Australia short term who did not require a student visa.

Source: Australian Education International.

Table 2
Full-Fee Overseas Student Enrolment by Sector 1993 - 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Vocational Education</th>
<th>School Education</th>
<th>ELICOS Colleges</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Percent)</td>
<td>(Percent)</td>
<td>(Percent)</td>
<td>(Percent)</td>
<td>(Percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>36 448</td>
<td>20 006</td>
<td>9 835</td>
<td>18 382</td>
<td>84 671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>41 244</td>
<td>24 199</td>
<td>10 979</td>
<td>23 544</td>
<td>99 996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>47 834</td>
<td>29 608</td>
<td>12 706</td>
<td>29 853</td>
<td>120 001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>54 315</td>
<td>38 021</td>
<td>15 437</td>
<td>35 938</td>
<td>143 711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>64 226</td>
<td>40 865</td>
<td>15 937</td>
<td>30 122</td>
<td>151 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>73 383</td>
<td>37 328</td>
<td>13 878</td>
<td>22 541</td>
<td>147 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(43.0%)</td>
<td>(23.6%)</td>
<td>(11.6%)</td>
<td>(21.7%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41.3%)</td>
<td>(24.2%)</td>
<td>(11.0%)</td>
<td>(23.6%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(39.9%)</td>
<td>(24.7%)</td>
<td>(10.6%)</td>
<td>(24.9%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(37.8%)</td>
<td>(26.5%)</td>
<td>(10.7%)</td>
<td>(25.0%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(42.5%)</td>
<td>(27.0%)</td>
<td>(10.5%)</td>
<td>(19.9%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(49.9%)</td>
<td>(25.4%)</td>
<td>(9.4%)</td>
<td>(15.3%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Statistics for 1993-1998 taken for the year; statistics for higher education taken at 31 March each year.
Higher Education student numbers include approximately 15,800 students enrolled in offshore campuses of Australian universities in first semester 1998.
In 1998, there were approximately 25,000 additional international students studying in Australia short term who did not require a student visa.

Source: Australian Education International.
1.3 The Manifestations of FFPOS Policy on Campuses

To date, it is on Australia's university campuses where the impact of this dramatic growth in international students has been most profound (see Table 2). Indeed, we frequently now refer to the 'internationalisation' of our universities. The outward manifestations of this process are highly visible: in some of Australia's most successful Business Schools, international students may constitute close to 50 percent of enrolments; large well-appointed International Offices and substantial student support services have sprung up on campuses; almost all universities have mission statements highlighting internationalisation as a goal and have also created senior positions such as Pro-Vice Chancellor International / Dean of International Programs; student cafeterias conspicuously cater to Asian cuisine; large apartment blocks - often specifically targeted to international students - have sprung up adjacent to campuses, and so on.

The upshot of this major financially driven policy shift, then, has been that Australia now has on its university campuses one of the highest proportions of international students of any country in the world. For example, whereas ‘foreign’ students currently comprise only 3 percent of US higher education enrolments, in Australia in 1999 they represented 12 percent and were predominantly Asian. We can be justly proud of our record in attracting very large numbers of students against intense competition from the US and UK. However, we need to become much more aware of the problems faced by many of these students – and the associated opportunities for both Australian and international students to benefit from a serious addressing of these problems.

To oversimplify, our review of literature and our own research reveals a picture of two parallel streams of students proceeding through university - the Australian and the international - within close proximity but, in the majority of cases, with little or only superficial contact and interaction. A variety of exit and other surveys confirm this fairly common experience and record repeated expressions of disappointed expectations by international students who had hoped to meet and form close friendships with Australian students, visit Australian homes and experience the local culture at first hand.

In our view, this is a growing problem which has possibly been exacerbated as total student numbers on our campuses have grown. There is a range of good reasons why it is in the national and institutional interest for it to be addressed now. From an international, economic and political perspective, it is important. If our international student-clients are
dissatisfied, they will spread the word and damage future recruitment and export income. Arguably, as a country somewhat notorious in the Asian region’s media for its xenophobic past (the ‘White Australia’ policy) and its racist One Nation Party (the name of the Party’s leader, Pauline Hanson, has been one of the most recognised Australian symbols in the region), we have a vested interest in securing our reputation as a safe and friendly haven for students and visitors.

But there are more compelling reasons which move beyond national economic and political self-interest - and these are the educational reasons at the core of the mission of our universities. Why should the experience of so many of our Australian and international students be the diminished one of parallel stream non-communication? In educational terms, surely we are wasting an enormous resource and opportunity for personal, social and cultural growth and enrichment. All our students ought to benefit from more diverse interactions and experiences. Similarly, if our central mission is to prepare Australian and international students for a global workforce, then it is crucial that they better understand each other’s cultures, learn to communicate, socialise and work together and to network. This paper is a preliminary effort to explore the research field so far and to suggest ways forward.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Overseas Research

Early research on the social experience of international students in their host countries dates from the mid 1960s. Most of that early research was conducted in England and the United States, and focused on the psychological adjustments of foreign postgraduate students, the main sojourner population at the time. The issues addressed in this early research included culture shock, stress and anxiety, but also social networks and friendship patterns. One of the earliest publications reporting international students' own accounts of their social experience in the host country is a book by Tajfel & Dawson (1965) entitled "Disappointed guests".

The most extensive body of research on the sojourn experience, and in particular on the significance of social support and friendship networks, was conducted by Bochner, Furnham and colleagues (Bochner, 1982; Bochner, McLeod & Lin, 1977; Bochner, Hutwick & Furnham, 1985; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Furnham and Alibhai, 1985) as well as by Church (1982). That research related the sojourn experience to the wellness of the individual and stressed the importance for social adjustments of the friendship networks developed by sojourners in the host country. Based on research on foreign students in Hawaii, Bochner et al (1977) presented a functional model for the development of international students' friendship patterns. Their distinction between three types of social networks is useful for understanding problems of cross-cultural communication and developmental issues in promoting intercultural communication competence: monocultural network of sojourning compatriots; the bicultural network with host nationals; and the multi-cultural network. The first is seen as the primary supporting network of close friendships for adjusting to a new environment, the second for the functional purpose of getting about in the new system, and the third and weakest network provides companionship for recreational and social activities. With regard to the host-guest interactions, Bochner et al noted that "bi-cultural (foreign student-host national) bonds should be expanded to reach beyond their initial task-orientated and instrumental function. This often happens spontaneously, and ways and means should be found to capitalize on this tendency" (p.292). In their review of sojourners' adjustments, Church (1982) argued that international students have adjustment problems stemming from stress and anxiety when crossing cultures in academic and social situations, and that social networks contribute to reducing that stress by providing individuals with useful information and emotional support.
Among the American studies that examined foreign students' social adjustments in the host country, a number noted the lack of interactions between foreign and local students. Already in 1971, Miller et al noted minimal foreign student-host relationship for both Asians studying in the United States and Americans studying in Asia but such empirical studies are scarce. A recent study by Liberman (1994) showed little change since the early 1970s. In his study of the perceptions of Asian students about American university instruction, he found that Asian students experienced difficulties in their personal interaction with Americans. Furthermore, a number of studies on minority groups on US campuses have reported that students from different ethnic backgrounds did not mix easily (Loo & Rolison, 1986; McClelland & Auster, 1990). Similar findings have been reported in the British context. The early publication by Tajfel & Lawson (1965) documented international students' disappointment with their social experience abroad, and perceptions that their hosts were reserved, patronising and unfriendly. Similar reactions are still noted today, with McKinlay and Pattison's (1996) research indicating that 38 percent of international postgraduate students found British students unfriendly.

Evidence of relationships between the nature and degree of interaction between international students and their hosts, and students' social adjustments in the new environment has been noted. Two early studies (Sewell & Davidson, 1991; Cook, 1962) cited by Furnham (1997), report significant relationships between the degree of personal interactions of international students with their hosts, and their satisfaction with their sojourn. International students with at least one host national friend experienced fewer problems and had more positive attitudes towards the host country. More recent research by McKinlay and Pattison (1996) reveals similar findings, by highlighting a relationship between students' expectations and experiences, and homesickness. Although social support from co-nationals is widely recognised as critical for students' adjustments, according to Bochner (1982) and many others, the social support from the host national network is of even greater importance.

Acknowledging the significance of lack of intercultural contact between American and foreign students, Pederson (1991) argued that enhancing the amount and quality of their social interaction requires carefully structured favourable conditions. A striking characteristic of the "social adjustment" literature is the implicit underlying assumption that effective social interactions between local and international students are dependent on international students' "adjustment" to the host culture, and that once they have adapted, the two groups will happily interact and mix with one another. Bochner, Hutnik and Furnham
(1985) questioned that view by arguing that students living in close proximity do not naturally get to know each other and that long-standing cross-cultural friendships seldom develop - as posited in Williams (1947) 'cultural contact hypothesis' - simply through intercultural contact. Furnham and Bochner (1982) acknowledge that both groups have a responsibility in that regard. They suggest that "... the distancing of the foreign student from the host culture may be a two-way process. There is no doubt that part of the problem is due to the insensitivity, indifference and perhaps even hostility of host members towards the strangers in their midst" (p.193). This latter comment strikes a strong chord with our Australian observations and research findings.

Studies in inter-cultural communication competence are also relevant to an understanding of the interactions between sojourners and host parties. That research has stressed the view that promoting an understanding of contrasting cultures (Irwin, 1996) is a less ethnocentric approach than fostering an understanding of the otherness of cultures (Beattie, 1977). The significance for individuals involved in cross-cultural encounters (whether as guests or hosts) of developing an understanding of the dynamics of different cultures and intercultural communication has been emphasised but there has been little empirical research investigating the significance of that concept to the interactions of local and international students, from an intercultural communication conceptual perspective.

Research in the social experience of international students in their host country has also been conducted in other countries, for example, Japan and Singapore. Tanaka, Takai, Fujihara and Minami (1997) examined how international students organise themselves into supportive social networks in cross-cultural transition. Based on her ethnographic study of the experiences of Indonesian postgraduate students studying at a Japanese university, Arikawa (1993) argued that understanding social situations and cultural practices in Indonesia as well as those in Japan was crucial for understanding their processes of socialisation within the new culture. Her research revealed that the sojourners' experience of grappling with a new culture is complex, dynamic and personal. Her discussion of significant cultural differences between the Indonesian students and the Japanese professors and students' ways of thinking and expectations in social interactions stresses the importance of the concept of cultural distance. According to Ward & Kennedy (1993; 1996), cultural distance refers to differences between the home and the host culture. Based on the results of their comparative study of Malaysian students studying in Singapore and in New Zealand, they claimed that the smaller the cultural distance between international students' home and host culture, the smaller the social adjustments.
2.2 Australian Literature

In Australia, the early literature on international students relating to issues of intercultural interactions emerged in the mid 1980s, although earlier unpublished work is to be noted (e.g. Au, 1969). The early Australian research was generally initiated by staff, working in academic support units, who were concerned about the loneliness experienced by many international students. Much of this literature involved surveys or anecdotal reports of students' experiences. The main purpose was to draw the attention of administrative and academic staff to the plight of international students. In line with that overall purpose and with the implicit assumption that the amount and quality of interactions would be enhanced once students had adjusted to the new culture, hardly any of these studies have examined the issue of interaction from the point of view of local students.

A number of broad surveys on the adjustments of international students at university in Australia included one or two questions related to social interactions between local and international students. For example, Burke (1986) found that only 15 percent of overseas undergraduates at the University of New South Wales surveyed in 1984 counted Australians amongst their close friends. For 45 percent of the students, close friends were people from their own country and two-thirds of the students said that their circle of close friends consisted of co-nationals or other overseas students. A Western Australian survey revealed similar findings (Gillett, 1985). Almost half of the respondents (45 percent) reported mixing mainly with people who either came from the same country as themselves or had the same ethnic background. Although more than one third of the respondents (39.5 percent) said that they mixed with people from a variety of national and ethnic backgrounds, only 15.5 percent of students mixed mainly with people who came from different countries than their own or with Australians. More recently, in a survey exploring the stress and academic problems experienced by overseas students, Burns (1991) found that 34 percent of the overseas student respondents to an open-ended question on “what are the major problems or pressures on you in your university life” mentioned “loneliness; little contact with other students; want Aussie friends; need better mix in tutorial groups and in social events”.

To date, few studies have looked at the issue of social interaction from the local students' point of view. An early survey (Wrightson, 1988) asked local students about their views of international students on campus. They found that local students were mostly “in favour” of overseas students on campus but it also appeared that students overestimated the number of international students actually studying on their campus.
In line with the recent shift from aid to trade in international student recruitment policies, recent surveys have addressed the issue from a "customer satisfaction" perspective and with policy development in mind. In their study on 'pre-purchase expectation and post-purchase satisfaction', Romm, Patterson and Hill (1991) concluded from in-depth interviews with international students that although the academic element was rated as more important to overall satisfaction, social interaction with local students was a major source of dissatisfaction for them. The international students reported great difficulty in communicating and/or establishing any meaningful relationships with the local students. Another survey, using in-depth interviews, gauged international student satisfaction with their courses and with university services (Briguglio, 1998). A significant finding was again the lack of mixing between students of different nationalities and that international students were not learning very much about the local culture.

Similar research has been conducted in relation to international students studying at TAFE (Volet & Pears, 1994) and in ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) classes (Volet & Pears, 1995). Volet & Pears (1994) found that 60 percent of TAFE international students thought there were some opportunities for social interaction between local and international students on their campus but they also reported a feeling of mutual discomfort regarding these interactions. Students thought that TAFE should organise more activities for international students to get together and to meet with local students. Similarly, an open question eliciting ELICOS students' thoughts and suggestions regarding what could be done to improve their ELICOS classes, revealed that the most common suggestion was the provision of increased opportunities to interact with native speakers and, in particular, Australian students.

In addition to surveys, a number of recent empirical studies have documented these issues from a policy development perspective. Some of these studies document the overall experience of both local and international students whilst others look only at international students or only at local students. For example, Coughlan (1996) examined Australian students' perceptions of teaching and learning alongside Asian students in a TAFE college. Within the university context, Briguglio (1998) conducted in-depth interviews with postgraduate international students to examine their needs in linguistic, cultural and educational areas. Pe-Pua (1997) also looked at the cross-cultural experiences of international students. The study documents international students' interactions within their own ethnic/cultural groups, with locals and with other ethnic groups. Choi (1997) focused on the adjustment difficulties of Korean students in cross-cultural communication in
academic settings. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents in the study by Choi were not satisfied with their relationships with Australian peers and fifty-six percent mentioned that they had difficulty establishing and maintaining contact. In contrast, Pittaway, Ferguson & Breen (1998) investigated the perceptions of local undergraduate students with respect to studying with international students on campus. Based on a combination of questionnaire and interview data, they found that the majority of local students reported some personal and academic benefits from the presence of international students on campus.

Other studies have focused on other types of experiences in the host context, for example, in student residences or with regard to recreation activities. Nesdale and Todd (1993) surveyed both local and international students’ perceptions of intercultural contact in coursework, accommodation and leisure activities. They found variations as well as similarities in the perceptions of the two groups of students on the issue of intercultural contact. Sorola (1993) looked specifically at the impact of ‘social engineering’ on intercultural interaction at a student residence and concluded that housing office practices are a “significant causal agent” which can shape intercultural interaction.

Several articles have addressed the issue of interactions, as part of a larger study focusing on international students’ adjustments, problems or needs. Kennedy (1995), in a study exploring the needs and concerns of international students, noted that the attitude of Australian students to international students was a ‘problem’. Similarly, Mullins, Quintrell & Hancock’s (1995) investigation of the experiences of international and local students at three Australian universities highlighted the issues of prejudice and racism, and the difficulty experienced by international students in mixing with Australian students. Sixty-six percent of the international student respondents indicated that mixing with their Australian peers was a problem (15 percent of these rated it as a serious problem). Barker et al (1991) and Edmond (1997) also report international students’ difficulties in their interpersonal relationships with their local counterparts.

Overall, the implicit assumption reflected in this type of literature, is that the lack of interactions between the two groups is due to adjustment problems experienced by the international students. In other words, it is assumed that international students find it difficult to make friends because they have social adjustment "problems". This view is supported by anecdotal as well as research evidence that international students tend to create co-national sub-cultures as their major source of support (Pedersen, 1991; Nesdale & Todd, 1993; O’Donoghue, 1996). The mutual role of local students in social encounters is
hardly mentioned, nor the characteristics of the local environments which may inhibit interactions between the two groups.

Interest by Australian educational psychologists in the issue of intercultural contact between international and local Australian students is only recent. The emerging research is theoretically grounded and employs more rigorous methods of enquiry. Volet and Ang (1998) explored local and international students’ cognitive and affective appraisals of their experience of completing group assignments in mixed groups. In another study, Volet (in press) measured attitudes about the completion of assignments in mixed groups of: Australian students born in Australia; Australian students from Chinese-ethnic background born in Singapore or Malaysia; and Chinese-ethnic international students from Singapore or Malaysia. She found that those with the most positive appraisals of mixed groups were the students with a bi-cultural personal background. Further support for the significance of substantial personal experience of cross-cultural mixing was found in the membership of self-generated small groups. Nowak, Weiland and McKenna (work in progress) are exploring the concept of loneliness and the degree of perceived loneliness for international students from the perspective of international and local students. Their work incorporates notions of culture shock, in-groups and out-groups, and individualism and collectivism.

Finally, an interesting body of theoretically grounded research is emerging from Honours and postgraduate international students themselves. That research spreads across different disciplines, ranging from anthropology to education, psychology and sociology. For example, Ti’s (1997) PhD dissertation, on the attitudes of Malaysian graduates towards Australia, directly addressed issues of interactions between local and international students. An Honours dissertation by Anita Tan (1991) explored cross-cultural differences in communicative and linguistic competence in local and international student populations. Finally, Paul Tan (1996), in his ethnographic study of Singaporean students in Perth, discussed the nature of interactions between the two groups in different recreational settings.

This brief review of the literature has revealed clear evidence of lack of interaction between local and international students. Some inhibiting factors have already been identified. The need to address the issue of ‘unsatisfactory’ intercultural interactions between the two groups is highlighted throughout the literature.
2.3 The Australian Case for More Interventionist Strategies

The idea of social intervention is relatively new in the Australian university context, and the literature remains dominated by the view that interventions should aim at helping international students ‘adjust’ to the host country. For example, Kennedy (1995) proposed such interventions with international students in order “to facilitate their transition to a new environment”.

As early as 1991, an unpublished study undertaken by the Department of Management, University of Wollongong (Romm, Patterson & Hill) argued that:

...following the experience of universities in other countries, perhaps the time has come to divert more resources to designing and implementing programmes that will help integrate overseas students more effectively within their ‘new’ social environment. In doing so, Australian universities will not only achieve a higher degree of overseas students’ satisfaction but a higher quality internationally based education for the local students who are now benefiting little from this booming export industry. (p.26)

Two years later, Nesdale & Todd (1993) asserted:

...if international students and Australian students are to benefit fully from the presence of each other on Australian campuses, strategies need to be devised to promote meaningful contact which will result in the development of real awareness, understanding and acceptance between the two groups. (p.200)

Similarly, Burns (1994) argued for the organisation of informal activities where students of all groups can meet and make cross-cultural friendships. He declared that:

...a considerable effort on the part of Australian students to understand the cultural shyness and perceived introversion of many overseas students will be needed as well as learning to respect the upbringing and attitudes of overseas. Likewise overseas students need to realise that Australian students are not all unprincipled beach bums and that they too must make an effort to meet the Australian students half way. (p.42-43)

More recently, in an address to the International Students’ Advisers Network of Australia, Volet (1997a) argued that:

...educating students from Asia alongside Australian students presents a unique opportunity for Australia to ensure that the next generation of Australians and Asians alike are prepared and committed to develop and maintain reciprocal long-term relationships.
She also stressed the view that this issue would be best addressed as an integral part of the internationalisation of higher education curricula. Framing the approach within an overall educational perspective makes it possible to integrate intercultural learning as part of the development of the generic skills “necessary to live and work productively, harmoniously and responsibly in a global interdependent world”. The development of “culturally sensitive emotional intelligence for building and cultivating positive relationships with diverse social groups” in the community and the workforce are viewed as critical for the future of international relations (Volet, 1997b).

Yet, as Nesdale & Todd (1997) acknowledged, these opportunities have not really been exploited to date. Nowak, Weiland and McKenna (work in progress) make the same point by stressing the missed opportunities on Australian campuses because of lack of interaction.

To our knowledge, most of the interventions implemented so far to enhance the amount and quality of interactions between local and international students in the Australian context have been initiated without a research-base. One exception is Nesdale & Todd’s (1997) experimental study - described later - of the impact of an intervention strategy on intercultural contact between international and local students in a residential college.

At the practitioner level, a number of initiatives, either embedded within teaching (structured activities directly related to study) or social activities (eg mentoring programmes, peer pairing programmes, residential integration programmes, etc), have been implemented across a number of universities. Some of these initiatives have been documented in unpublished reports or conference papers presented at HERDSA, ISANA or IDP Conferences. They will be discussed below in the section entitled ‘What is already happening?’.
3. Students' Views on Interaction Between Australian and International Students

Interviews were conducted with seventeen students studying at Murdoch University to elicit their views and experiences on interaction between Australian and international students. The sample comprised nine Australians and eight international students. The students were from a range of programmes of study including media, education, physics, chemistry, computing, environmental science, law, psychology, economics and commerce. The interviewees were selected mainly through personal contacts, generally through a unit that they were doing with one of the researchers or friends of one of the interviewers. The majority of Australian students in the sample were selected on the basis of their appointment as student representatives at the Student (residential) Village.

The eight international students (two male, six female), with the exception of one from Kenya and one from the Maldives, were from Southeast Asian background - five from Singapore and one from the Philippines. All the Australian (six male, three female) students were living at the Student Village at Murdoch University at the time of interview. The Australian students were mainly from rural backgrounds. Four of them were courtyard co-ordinators and two of them were residential advisors. The international students were studying at the university for their degree and were enrolled here for their entire course of study.

Interviews were conducted in an informal setting, usually over a cup of coffee. Interview times were set around students' study commitments. Generally, interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. On two occasions, they were conducted in groups of two; on one occasion in a group of three and another in a group of four. The interviews were semi-structured in nature. A set of questions was devised for the interviews but interviewers took note of leads from students and discussed any other related issues as raised by the students during the interviews. The interviews sought to elicit from students: their pre-arrival expectations and subsequent experience in regard to interaction between local and international students on campus in academic, social and residential settings; their views on what inhibits intercultural communication; their opinions on 'social intervention' by the university to promote intercultural interaction and their suggestions for enhancing interaction between local and international students.

This section discusses the views, expectations and experiences expressed by these seventeen students. A few additional quotes were extracted from other studies, when useful, to
support a point. The source of reference to other materials is fully acknowledged in the text. Given the small sample, there should be caution in generalising from these results.

3.1 Interaction Between International and Local Students - Expectations vs Experience

This section describes students’ (Australian and international) expectations and experience in intercultural interaction on campus. Both Australian and international students reported experiencing minimal actual interaction between the two groups of students. However, they differed in their prior expectations about intercultural interaction.

All the international students interviewed declared that, on arrival, they had high expectations of interacting with Australian students. They expressed a strong desire to interact with their local peers and to feel part of the total student body. However, many felt that this was not appreciated by the university, faculty, lecturers, tutors and Australian students.

The university and lecturers think that international students just want an Australian degree - they are not catering to the need for mixing. (International - Female)

Almost all the international students interviewed had expectations of meeting and befriending lots of Australian students during their study here.

I thought that I’ll have lots of local friends and fun. (International - Female)

I thought we will have lots of local friends, both long term and short term. (International - Male)

Australian students, on the other hand, did not appear to be as interested in interacting with international students. One student commented:

I had heard that there were a lot of Asians attending Murdoch, but it did not worry me. I didn’t have any expectations for interaction with them. (Australian - Male)

One Australian student, from the country, appeared to feel as “foreign” as the international students and did not have any specific expectation about interacting with them.
I didn’t know what to expect from the international students, since I’m from a country town with few international residents. (Australian - Male)

Another Australian student expected the international students to be forthcoming in the interaction with local students:

I expected to interact with Asian international students. I thought that they should accept our culture since they are in our country. They should interact in this culture. I did expect them to interact... (Australian - Female)

Interaction between Australian and international students, in this student’s view, was expected and acceptable as long as the international students were the ones to do the adapting. Such cultural chauvinism was also reported by Volet & Ang (1998) in their study of culturally mixed groups.

Whilst the international students’ expectations were to have lots of Australian friends, most were disappointed.

I was prepared for change but was disappointed that I could not penetrate the Australian circle of friends and am stuck with Asian friends. (International - Male)

When I first came, I had the expectation to meet many Australians but did not. Only hi-bye friends, not close friends. (International - Female)

...it didn’t happen. (International - Male)

The international students’ desire for intercultural interaction did not seem to be reciprocated by the Australian students. Certainly the Australian students confirmed the lack of interaction between Australian and international students.

I don’t think that on campus there is as much interaction between Australians and Asians as people would like. (International - Female)

All the international students indicated that despite 12 months (generally more) in Australia, they still had no Australian friend that they could write to when they returned to their home country. They considered this a missed opportunity for themselves and for the Australian students too. Most of them had not even stepped into an Australian home during their course of study here.
Many of them clearly desired the opportunity to interact with Australian students at a level beyond a mere ‘Hi’ or ‘Bye’.

Invitation to movies, homes will be GREAT! (International - Female)

I know this Indonesian guy who has been here for 8 years. He did high school here and has a large group of Australian friends. He goes out with them for movies etc. and I think WOW! How exciting! I sometimes have lunch with him and his friends and it’s great... (International - Female)

Some international students appeared to have made an effort to meet local students but still found opportunities lacking.

We do not have much interaction with the locals. We would like to mix more. We are not the shy sort but there are no opportunities to mix. (International - Female)

When my friends and I go clubbing, we don’t go to a particular one because it’s an Asian hangout. (International - Female)

Another student believed that Australian students should make the first move in fostering interaction between international and local students.

The move should come from Australians. We cannot invite ourselves into their homes. (International - Female)

The higher expectation, amongst international students, of mixing with local students is understandable, given that they have chosen to study in a foreign country. For them, intercultural interaction is part of the total experience of studying abroad. Hence their disappointment when they find that such interaction is not forthcoming. Unlike international students, Australian students did not echo the same disappointment about the lack of intercultural interaction. Perhaps it is because they are on homeground and are comfortable in their environment and do not wish to venture out. This needs to be explored further.

3.2 Factors Inhibiting Interaction Between Local and International Students

This section presents students’ views on barriers to intercultural interaction between Australian and international students. Two broad categories of inhibitors were identified in students’ accounts. The first relates to characteristics of students and the second relates to the context that students operate in.
3.2.1 Student-Related Inhibiting Factors

Students' personal views of factors inhibiting culturally mixed groups in the area of academic study have been reported by Volet and Ang (1998). Based on students' accounts, Volet and Ang identified four factors: cultural-emotional connectedness, language, pragmatism and negative stereotypes. The present study extended the investigation to include residential and social aspects in culture mix. The results of the present study are divided into three broad aspects: cultural differences, differences in sporting interests and lifestyle, and negative stereotypes, ethnocentric views and apathy.

• Cultural Differences. This was one of the most frequently mentioned inhibiting factors to intercultural interaction by local and international students in Volet & Ang (1998). Lack of common interests was reported as making conversation across cultures difficult as indicated in the following quotes:

   It's like strangers. With local students, we would normally just say hi and then bye. And there may be small talk, but we are not close. We still stick to our own culture and friends and especially when you come from that country and know people from there, then you are comfortable with them.

   (comment from an international student)
   (Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 10)

   ...Asians are on the same wavelength.

   (comment from an international student)
   (Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 11)

   Sometimes it's easier to talk to people who come from the same country.

   (comment from an Australian student)
   (Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 10)

The reluctance to interact with international students as a result of cultural differences was also mentioned by some Australian students in our present study.

   I think there is little interaction between local and Asian students, probably because Australians do not understand Asian culture and don't try to understand it. (Australian - Male)

   ...you feel more comfortable with your own people... (Australian - Female)
As far as my own difficulties of interacting with others, perhaps lack of awareness of other’s culture and religion. (Australian - Male)

...Being in the “same boat” situation does help [interaction]...you feel more comfortable and secure with those in the same nationality. (Australian - Female)

It would be interesting [to work with international students], but I think we are more like similar culture, like more fit together. Our team is more together, do you know what I mean. There’re very few conflicts if any.

(comment from an Australian student)
(Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 11)

Other cultural differences, in particular differences in sporting interests and lifestyle, were reported by Ti (1997). They were found to present social and cultural barriers for cross-cultural interactions.

Things like, they like to surf, they like their beach, they like to sit under the sun and not the shade.

(comment from a Malaysian graduate who studied at an Australian university)
(Ti, 1997, p. 161)

And then, if my kids go outside the apartment, for example, my kids should be quiet. And then, after five, everything is closed. And the Australians, they socialise in pubs or whatever. I do not socialise in pubs. The only place I would socialise with Australians is probably in their homes, which I was not invited... As I said, it is lifestyle, because they drink, I don’t drink. So, either I join them in drinks or they stop drinking and join me. Always a difficult choice.

(comment from a Malaysian graduate who studied at an Australian university)
(Ti, 1997, p. 167)

Both Volet and Ang (1998) and Ti (1997) also identified the ‘boozing culture’ of Australian students as an inhibiting factor to intercultural interaction. This alcohol culture was perceived by international students as a deterrent to closer interactions between the two groups of students.

...in my friend’s flat, there are Australians and there are some who like partying all night, boozing all night and she doesn’t know what to talk to them, she doesn’t have anything in common with them in that sense.

(comment from an international student)
(Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 11)
They go out. They go to pubs or this type of place. Maybe because of my family background, I do not like to go to pubs. So, in that circumstances, I don’t have the same likes as them. So, if they go somewhere, I don’t join them in those sorts of things.

(comment from a Malaysian graduate who studied at an Australian university)  
(Ti, 1997, p. 160)

The ‘boozing culture’ of Australian students was also noted by one Australian student in our present study:

Personally, I interact more...with Americans, when drinking and such. I like to have a good time, and this is usually with other Australians or Americans... but not so much with the Asians... (Australian - Male)

- **Negative Stereotypes, Ethnocentric Views and Apathy.** Negative stereotypes were also found to be major stumbling blocks to intercultural interaction between Australian and international students. The following comments made by Australian students interviewed in our present study reflect the negative stereotypes that some Australian students have of international students:

There are functions for the whole of Student Village. Asian students don’t come; they make excuses when they are encouraged to come. (Australian - Female)

Asians tend to lock themselves away in their rooms... (Australian - Male)

Some people won’t interact because they are here solely to get a degree and go back home. They aren’t concerned with a social life. (Australian - Male)

...the French people seem very arrogant and ignorant. It is hard to communicate with them because of this. Some people don’t talk much as well. It is hard to start conversation with these people. (Australian - Female)

The Australian attitude is that they have tried to include the Asians in the past, and they have now given up on including them - they expect a negative response. (Australian - Female)

These directly conflicting perceptions of blame suggest that there is probably a great deal of mutual misunderstanding and mis-attribution of motives. However, our general observations suggest that Australian students may, in general, be somewhat complacent and disinterested in mixing - perhaps partly because they are on their ‘home turf’. A number of
them admitted that apathy and ethnocentricity on their part was inhibiting intercultural interaction between the two groups of students.

What inhibits interaction is lack of self-motivation to interact...personal attitudes...contribute to lack of interaction...Also, in Australia, there is a lack of acceptance or effort to get other people involved. It is “cliqueier” and less venturing happens. (Australian - Female)

What gets in the way of interaction is ignorance and people being racist. But I think it is mostly ignorance. (Australian - Male)

Another Australian student pointed out that it is easy to put the blame on the other group of students for the lack of interaction.

One thing that inhibits intercultural interaction is that, as an Australian, it is the natural reaction to think that others are inhibiting interaction, but I know it’s me too. (Australian - Female)

Most universities are vaguely aware of the student-related inhibiting factors described above but few have seriously addressed the problem. Nevertheless, there are signs of stirring. For example, some initiatives such as cross-cultural seminars have been developed for both Australian and international students to address the issues and facilitate social interaction. We need to recognise, however, that these factors constitute only one side of the coin. The other side which has also received inadequate attention from universities relates to their institutional practices and the potential for ‘reform’.

3.2.2 Context-Related Inhibiting Factors

This category of inhibiting factors relates to the context that students find themselves in. Students’ accounts highlighted two areas which they believed were inhibiting intercultural interaction. The first relates to the nature of orientation programmes and the second to educational practices.

- **Nature of Orientation Programmes.** As international enrolments grew, Australian universities developed separate orientation programmes specifically for international students to help them settle in. Overall, the international students appreciated the fact that the university helped them to settle into a new environment by making them feel at home with people from their own countries and assisting them with the many administrative tasks
required of international students. They emphasised the importance of overcoming culture shock and feeling secure in a new country.

International students tend to stick together because they are in a new country and they need to feel secure. The American students do that too. (International - Female)

Introduction to the Australian culture should be gradual because of culture shock when we first arrived. A little bit of building up of confidence with our own people eg. we need to be able to talk to someone who can understand what we are going through, who have the same silly questions like how to take a bus - and then introduce to the Australian culture. (International - Male)

However, many felt that the initial orientation must go beyond meeting these needs and should also foster interaction between international and local students from the outset. They argued that holding two separate orientations only helped segregate international and local students:

They were all international students only at the lecture theatre during orientation. Student helpers were themselves Asians too. Orientation should be with locals, for everybody. (International - Female)

When we first came, we were met by the International Office. We did lot of administration and the orientation programme made international familiar with their own group but this tended to segregate international students from the local students. You need to set the pace right from the start. We are told about the Australian culture by Australian people but there are no group activities with Australian students. Maybe we can have local people to welcome the international students, have coffee, social activities... (International - Male)

Orientation should be with local students instead of just international students. (International - Male)

Not only do separate orientations for international and local students serve to segregate the two groups of students from the beginning, they also make international students stay together. As one student commented:

At orientation, the Aussies and international students are separated. There were administrative stuff and they brought us around. From Day 1 of the orientation to the start of the course, we did not meet a single Aussie. The programme organised for the international students make us stick together. (International - Female)
Some students pointed to the importance of people met and friendships formed during the ‘first instance’ - a point reinforced in McInnis et al’s study of *First Year on Campus* (1995).

The people you meet in the first instance is very important because you make friends there. (International - Female)

They suggested that the friends made during orientation tended to be carried over to classes when lessons began. So if international students had made friends only with international students during orientation and locals only with locals, then they tended to work together when lessons started and the chances of interaction between the two groups would diminish further.

Based on students’ comments, it seems that universities will need to seriously consider the advantages and disadvantages of separate versus joint orientation programmes and to consider other strategies for early mixing. This issue will need to be further explored.

- **Classroom Practices.** In line with their expectation to mix with local students, international students expected the classroom to provide the natural social forum for them to mix. One international student went to the extent of looking for classes with more local students to create for herself the opportunity to meet more local students.

  When I signed up for tutorials, I looked for classes with the most local names. (International - Female)

However, it appears that interaction did not happen as reflected in the following comment:

  ...But then I felt lonely and left out so I stopped doing that. (International - Female)

This student’s experience primarily reinforces our scepticism about the cultural contact hypothesis. It seems evident that interaction between international and local students does not happen simply because the two groups of students are in close proximity. We have argued elsewhere (Volet and Ang, 1998) that lecturers and tutors will probably need to consider more interventionist approaches and to give more thought to course programming, activities and structuring the class if intercultural contact and communication are to take place.

The international students interviewed at Murdoch reported that international students, new to the system, often experience difficulties in tutorials. As in other studies (Renshaw &
Volet, 1995; Volet & Kee, 1993), students stressed the need to adjust to different teaching
styles and expectations and overcome cultural differences in the classroom. They noted that
some international students found the Australian classroom intimidating and had difficulty
participating in class discussion. Like the students in the Volet & Kee (1993) study, they
felt that this tended to fuel the perception that international students are generally quiet or
do not speak up or have a language problem which serves to inhibit interaction between
international and local students.

In tutorials, sometimes we feel dominated and intimidated, more so in the
beginning. There are different expectations. We are not used to the system.
We think of something but feel it's stupid and not worth discussing but then a
local will bring up the same idea and it is actually okay. (International - Female)

One international student suggested that:

Making the local students understand what international students go through
will help interaction. (International - Female)

Students' accounts showed that tutors attitudes, actions and strategies could be instrumental
in facilitating or inhibiting interaction between international and local students in class. One
international student suggested that tutors should make the tutorials less intimidating for
students. She gave the following account:

Tutors must facilitate interaction in the class. There is a tutor who stops the
class to let a student finish her point of view or what she is saying. She does not
ask a student a question to make her speak up because it's intimidating and she
believes a student will learn anyway whether she speaks up or not. But she
observes the students closely and if she notices that a student has something to
say, she will encourage it and let the student, local or international, finish what
she wants to say. She does not allow the other students to stop this student in
mid-sentence. No interruption is allowed when someone is talking. (International - Female)

The effectiveness of such a strategy was also endorsed by an Australian student:

I had a great tutor who asked everyone's opinion and did not let one nationality
dominate the conversation in class. (Australian - Female)

In contrast, tutors can also make the tutorials very intimidating. As one international
student recalled:

Tutorials, which start with work, are very intimidating. Everybody is a little
judgemental and each is waiting for another person to speak up first. For eg. in
XXX tutorial, we were not introduced at all. From the very first lesson, the tutor started asking questions about the readings. There was no social thing at all. We only know the one or two persons who speak up all the time. Ice-breaking is very important. (International - Female)

Indeed, many of the students interviewed agreed that 'icebreakers' are important in creating a comfortable atmosphere, which will facilitate the social integration of international and local students.

There is this tutor who breaks the ice at every tutorial. Everybody must say something, anything but not related to the unit. It can be what you did this morning... it gets everybody talking and is less intimidating. Doing the social thing first is very useful. It gets people talking. Then we talk about work. We need a comfortable atmosphere and to know that people are different. (International - Female)

In XXX, we have a very comfortable group. We know everybody. (International - Female)

Food was frequently cited by students as an effective icebreaker.

Overall, it was clear from these seventeen students' accounts that many believed their experience of social interactions with local students was minimal and that some forms of proactive 'social intervention' by lecturers and tutors could effectively transform the classroom into a social forum much more conducive to intercultural interaction.
4. Do Universities Have a Responsibility to be Proactive in Fostering Cross-Cultural Interaction?

Although it is clear, from the point of view of both international and local students, that there are few interactions between the two groups of students, a major question is whether universities should be responsible for promoting intercultural interaction between students. Some academics as well as students may argue that fostering cross-cultural interactions is not directly related to academic study and thus should be left to students themselves to work out. Yet, such a view is clearly framed within a conceptualisation of academic study that emphasises individualistic learning and ignores the significance of social forms of learning in knowledge acquisition and understanding. Recent research on learning in higher education has stressed the critical role of cooperation, teamwork and collaborative learning activities in enhancing the quality of learning outcomes (Volet, in press; Bosworth, 1994; Jackson, 1994). If students are not prepared and confident to work with all their peers (local and international), then the benefits of collaborative learning will be reduced. In addition, fostering interactions would be viewed as essential by those who see the presence of international students on Australian campuses as providing the ideal social forum for all students "to learn about each others' culture and value systems, and to develop the intercultural skills necessary to work productively and live harmoniously in a global environment'' (Volet, in press, p.1).

This section examines the perspectives and views of various key players on this issue, including those working in service units within institutions, the students and policy makers. Until relatively recently, the most vocal advocates of this position have been staff working in service support organisations such as teaching learning units, international offices or counselling services. Students themselves have become more vocal in recent years, and policy makers hopefully will follow suit. The growing chorus of academics and researchers’ voices in recent years have already been discussed in the literature review.

4.1 Service Support Organisations

Service support organisations on campus have long been aware of the very limited contact between international and local students. Burke (1990) described the situation:

...it seems that the mere presence of students is insufficient to promote contact and develop mutual understanding. Situations need to be structured to foster this process.
He went on to conclude that:

Unless people are actively encouraged, and provided with ways of making more meaningful contact, they will take the easiest way and stick with the familiar and comfortable.

Burke’s (1990) views have been expressed repeatedly by many staff working in the area of international student services. Informal discussions with participants at conferences organised by the International Student Advisers Network of Australia (ISANA), IDP Education Australia, and Australian Association of College and University Housing (AACUHO) confirms the widespread view that universities should pay attention to the issue of interaction between international and local students.

In a recent workshop on ‘Integrating International Students with Australian Students’ at the 12th Australian International Education Conference organised by IDP Education Australia, over twenty participants at the workshop from universities across Australia stated that their reason for attending the workshop was that they were keenly aware that interaction between the two groups was a problem and that they thought their institutions should do something about it. Most of the participants were from support units at their institutions. The workshop was designed to share information about what initiatives other institutions were implementing to promote interaction (see website www.idp.edu.au).

4.2 Students

Students' personal views about whether universities should play an active role in promoting interactions between local and international students during study or outside classes were elicited. We found that the large majority of students, both local and international, were supportive of the notion of ‘interventionist strategies’ by the university.

Most of the international students interviewed believed that it is the responsibility of the university to foster interaction between international and local students. Their reasons ranged from simply getting students to mix for a more healthy campus life to preparing a more global workforce.

I think it should be the responsibility of the university. It will help. Considering the large number of Asians here, it won’t be very healthy if the two groups are
segereated. More should be done than what is being done now. If students remain segregated, something would be missing. (International - Female)

University has the responsibility to encourage integration in line with globalisation. University study is not only book knowledge but also to promote social interaction. (International - Male)

From the business point of view, it is important for Australian students to mix, to be aware of Asians, to be sensitive. (International - Female)

Many of the Australian students interviewed agreed with the international students that it is the university’s responsibility to promote interaction between the two groups of students. Their main reasons for interaction centred on cultural exchange and reducing friction on campus.

I do think that the university has a responsibility to promote interaction among local and international students. (Australian - Female)

I am in favour of the university promoting interaction. It is always good to meet people of a new culture. The positives outweigh the negatives...it is in their best interest to do so, or there will be a lot of conflicts and problems. (Australian - Male)

Yes, I think the university does have a responsibility to promote interaction. It promotes the cultural exchange from other countries. (Australian - Male)

I do think that promoting interaction is a responsibility of the university...It is ethically proper for a university or place of this nature to promote this. (Australian - Male)

It could be argued that increasing competition for the recruitment of international students means that Australia must heed its fee-paying clients’ expectations. To quote several international students:

Most international students have expectations to mix with local students, so the university should meet this expectation. (International - Female)

To be successful academically, we have to be happy socially and also to have our expectations met. (International - Male)

The importance of word-of-mouth was also noted by an Australian student:

With this [interaction], they [the university] need at least make an effort to make people comfortable, or they will not want to come back, and they will spread this reputation to their friends. (Australian - Male)
This stark reality was confirmed by a Singaporean student:

We get seniors feedback in Singapore that we won’t meet many Australians here, so we already have these preconceived ideas and hence we do not reach out to meet Aussies. (International - Female)

Overall, these international students' comments reveal that they not only see their roles as students but also as customers of a service organisation, where the ultimate satisfaction of the customer is critical.

Students believed that some initiatives ought to be implemented at faculty level, within regular instruction. Some argued that lecturers are the key link between international and local students and that they have an important role in enhancing social cohesion between the two groups of students. Most of the international students believe that group work is an excellent means of fostering interaction between international and local students. They believe that there are many benefits to be achieved from this exercise:

It’s a good idea to have group work where people mix. It gives you different perspectives, an idea of how people think and behave. Widen your ways of thinking. It is a valuable experience, a part of learning. Locals will also be learning if they mix. (International - Female)

Group work is good. It makes you share. It gives you a glimpse of who people are. (International - Female)

There is not much mixing in the first and second years. There should be mixed group work earlier. (International - Female)

A number of international students argued that more interventionist strategies would be necessary to ensure mixed group work actually occurred:

Pairwork or group work where people are forced to mix is the only way to get students to mix. (International - Female)

Tutors should intervene and specify local and overseas students to work together and so start out on the right footing right from the start. (International - Male)

The tutor allocated the grouping - it has to be a mix with at least one Australian or one from another country. I think it is a great idea. We stick together for all the assignments [for the unit] and I got to know this Aussie guy better. This is the first time I have a mix group. (International - Female)
From the perspectives of these students, then, interventionist strategies are a legitimate means to establish the ground for intercultural contact and social cohesion between local and international students.

4.3 Policy-Makers

While we have not, to date, specifically surveyed the views of senior policy-makers in government or on campuses about this question, we are not sanguine about their likely responses. Based on the dearth of policy statements about this issue and the informed observations of the participants (mostly International Office) at the IDP Workshop (Integrating International Students with Australian Students, October 1998) – it is our strong impression that many senior bureaucrats and senior university officials within institutions are largely unaware of the issue under discussion. For example, the issue does not rate a mention in the recent West Report on the Future of Higher Education (1998). Similarly, in a major AVCC paper, ‘Setting the Foundations for the Internationalisation of Australian Higher Education’ (March 1998), the issue was not raised. The only acknowledgment of ‘socio-cultural’ issues seemed largely to be concerned with its utility in public relations terms:

    The AVCC has long espoused the benefits of promoting Australian education in a broad socio-cultural setting. This acknowledges the fact that in many Asian countries education and culture are inextricably linked. Such an approach can play down the commercial motives of student recruitment activities. It can also help to counteract the misleading impression of Australia presented by representatives of some minority groups.

In a December 1998 survey by AEI of institutions’ priorities for international education research - in which all universities were contacted by AEI - senior university representatives ranked research into promoting social cohesion as a relatively low priority.

More encouragingly, however, a recent policy speech by Federal Education Minister David Kemp (July 1999) indicates that he views the issue as a very important one to be addressed. We would argue that raising awareness of the issues of social cohesion amongst university and policy elites will be an essential ingredient of any national strategy for tackling this major problem.
5. What is Already Happening?

A number of initiatives which aimed at promoting interaction between local and international students have already been implemented by various universities but mainly in an ad hoc fashion. Below, we have provided a sample of the kinds of programmes which have been and are being attempted in the academic and socio/residential domains.

Most of these initiatives have come from practitioners (International Offices, academics) concerned with the lack of social and intercultural contact between the two groups of students. Some of these initiatives have been documented in internal reports within their institutions; others have been presented at conferences (eg ISANA, IDP Education Australia, HERDSA or AACUHO). Few have been formally evaluated.

A number of researchers (Quintrell & Westwood, 1994; Nesdale & Todd, 1997) have undertaken interventionist research in this area, introducing initiatives aimed at fostering social interaction between Australian and international students in a natural setting. For example, Quintrell & Westwood (1994) studied the impact of a peer pairing programme on the experience of first year international students and their use of students’ services. Nesdale & Todd (1997) devised and then studied the effect of an intervention in a residential college. It was designed to promote interaction that would extend from the residential setting to further across campus and to increase intercultural knowledge and acceptance. Interestingly, the latter intervention seemed to have the desired outcome with Australian students but made little impression on international students.

5.1 Peer Pairing

A number of peer pairing and buddy programme initiatives which promote contact between the two groups of students have been reported from various universities. Some are initially classroom (or even unit) specific while others are more generalised, combining both social and academic spheres (see website: www.idp.edu.au).

Legge (cited in Patrick, 1996) reported a peer pairing programme at RMIT which has been established as an assessment activity in the Context Curriculum subject Culture, Communication and Language. The peer pairing programme was designed to provide opportunities for international students to share their cultural knowledge in a structured
way. The most commonly expressed benefit from this exercise was the greater social contact among students who undertook the task.

In an attempt to increase ‘intercultural competence’ for both international and Australian students, a programme in the form of a new elective subject, *Managing Across Cultures*, was offered for the first time in 1993 as part of the Masters of Business Administration (MBA) degree in the Graduate School of Business at RMIT (Bigelow, 1996). The subject used the concept of ‘peer pairing’ in which an international student, new to Australia, was paired with an Australian student from the second or third year of the MBA programme. The main vehicle for inter-cultural interaction and learning was the research project. Each student identified a project of interest as long as it was centred around their peer-partner’s country and culture. Written and verbal feedback from students had been positive. Benefits of the programme as highlighted by students included: an insight into cross-cultural management, an understanding of (partner’s) culture and values, and cooperation beyond the boundaries of the elective.

5.2 Internationalising the Curriculum

Over the past five years, there has been a growing interest in ‘internationalising the curriculum’. This has proceeded on most campuses in a sporadic and ad hoc fashion, though in recent times there has been some evidence of a more systematic approach on some campuses (Back et al 1997; Volet, 1997a). In most cases, this process has been largely restricted to altering the subject matter content to make it less exclusively Australian and more relevant to the global environment to which all our students are being exposed. While such content ‘reform’ at programme level is beneficial, we believe it is likely to be in the area of instructional methods and classroom intercultural interaction (mixed group work etc.) that the most promising innovations will emerge (Volet, 1997b). To optimise success, however, we believe such innovations will require a willingness and commitment to adopt fairly proactive and interventionist strategies.

5.3 Examples of Interventionist Strategies

We have chosen to describe briefly, below, two examples of institutional efforts to improve social interaction by interventionist strategies – one on a whole of school academic programme basis, and the other on a campus residential basis.
5.3.1 Addressing Issues of Cross-Cultural Communication Across A Programme -
The Curtin University School of Design Approach

It is evident from students’ accounts that lecturers and tutors have a pivotal role to play in
the classroom. It seems they can markedly improve inter-cultural learning (for students,
Australian and international, as well as the staff themselves) especially if they “get the cross-
cultural issues out first” and use multi-cultural collaborative processes. The School of
Design at Curtin University of Technology provides a good example of such an initiative.
We are grateful to Peter Efford and his colleagues - especially Mike Pearson - for sharing
their very successful experiences with us and allowing us to quote from and summarise their
report of that experience (Efford, 1996).

Interestingly, the School of Design has viewed its survival as dependant on attracting a
significant international enrolment (by 1997, one third of its 300 students were non-
Australian fee-payers) and has, effectively, tackled ‘internationalisation’ holistically and
‘head-on’ rather than resisting it.

Somewhat fortuitously, this whole of school process was triggered in 1995 by Efford’s
receipt of a cross-cultural curriculum development grant designed to explore and develop
cross-cultural concepts and meanings in design. In his submission, Efford had asserted:

that no matter how much the curriculum is internationalised... the context and
values will be received and retained through a cultural filter. ...The processes
of learning will be impeded unless the issues of communication on a cross-
cultural basis are addressed within class groups.

Efford sought to pilot a course which would ‘provide (Australian and international) students
with a basic entry into the issues of cross-cultural diversity’ – and would do so in a way that
enabled them to feel at ease while exploring and expressing themselves through their
cultures.

The experimental approach adopted was very much an action research one in which the
tutorial groups (15) recorded, analysed and evaluated their responses to the content, design
and format of the programme. Efford was trying to gauge its effectiveness in developing
their ‘appreciation of cross-cultural issues’ and especially ‘their understandings of the
distinctions of cultural meaning in images and design’.
This ‘picture postcard’ introductory course in cross-cultural concepts and meanings in design proved very popular with students:

The first programme session was a fact-finding exercise in which students exchanged anecdotes and learnt about each other’s language, culture and ancestry. In the second session, the students discussed examples of advertising they had brought in, looked at instances of cultural ambiguity, and analysed the range of meanings available in the examples. Working in pairs for the third session, the students shared cultural distinctions, and reported back to the group. Students prepared for session four by going out with another member from the group and participating in that other student’s culture. They then reported back to the group on their experiences. The fifth session featured a visit from an ex-student of Anglo-Chinese background who works regularly in Singapore and Perth, who shared valuable insights into working in Southeast Asia. For the sixth and final session, the students brought in specially-prepared “culture boards” – collages of images related to their cultures – and descriptions of some of the cultural distinctions they had identified.

(Efford, 1996)

For Efford, the crucial key to its popularity and success was that it ‘allowed all of the students to introduce themselves as members of their own culture’. Too few orientation programmes, he asserts, give all students from all cultures this crucial opportunity to represent and express their own culture – yet it is an inherently interesting topic which inspires curiosity and discussion.

The School of Design capitalised on this successful foundation by introducing in second year a practical design assignment involving deeper exploration of the issue of the internationalisation of images.

Partly as a result of their initial success and the imperative for survival, Efford, Pearson and their colleagues, between 1995 and 1998, have undertaken a fascinating ‘whole of school’ internationalisation process using a strategy of internationalising the curriculum – with associated funding support from the Curtin Administration. The School of Design’s highly successful ‘re-engineering’ exercise is one which provides a model for emulation. Its cross-cultural emphases provide a very rewarding milieu for the mutual development and interaction of Australian and international students.
5.3.2 Murdoch University - Student Village

It has long been known and understood that university residences where students live and share together are potentially ideal locations for fostering enhanced bonding and social interaction. However, several Australian studies suggest that even in these circumstances, close proximity of living is not necessarily sufficient to promote more than superficial contact between domestic and foreign students. More interventionist strategies and policies, however, can produce strong positive outcomes in terms of mixing and friendships (Nesdale & Todd, 1993; Sorola, 1993).

With the cooperation of an on-campus residential college, Nesdale and Todd (1997) devised an elaborate intervention, including the training and subsequent involvement of college personnel in structuring group activities. While the outcomes were apparently neutral for international students, there was an increase in the disposition of Australian students to mix and to pursue inter-cultural involvements well beyond the immediate college environment.

Similar positive outcomes have been reported from Murdoch University’s Student Village – where an interventionist policy appears to have fostered increased social interaction and long-term friendships (Sorola, 1993; Smart, forthcoming).

The university requires students who seek accommodation at ‘Student Village’ to accept its obligatory policy of placement in 6-8 bedroom flats which have shared common-room / kitchen / bathrooms. Students are deliberately mixed by race, gender and nationality and are not able to choose their flatmates. Despite initial uneasiness by students (and sometimes the parents of female students), the results of this policy in terms of student reports of long-term friendship formation, removal of racial stereotypes, and general social cohesion are very positive and approving. What seems clear, however, and it may be equally true of mixed group formation for classroom assignments – is that students report they would not have voluntarily entered such groupings at the outset. We do know that students are more open to forming new friendships and interactions in the very early phase of their sojourn on campus and in the early part of the study unit / semester (Volet & Ang, 1998; McInnis et al, 1995).

Thus it seems logical that we may have to put more effort into creating interventionist circumstances in which students of different backgrounds are ‘pushed’ into opportunities where serious interaction can occur or develop. Interviews and observations concerning
residential colleges also confirm that interaction between students can be inhibited or promoted not only by the availability of social opportunities but also by physical structures. Thus the layout, furnishings and provision of facilities can increase or decrease opportunities and scope for interaction. To take just one simple example, a laundry facility large enough to house multiple washers and driers – which also has space for a large table and chairs is more conducive to communal interaction than a small cramped facility. Similarly, attention to provision and location of suitable common-rooms, amenities rooms, barbecues, table-tennis and other facilities can reap large rewards in terms of promoting opportunities for interaction. Too often, too little attention is paid to this kind of commonsense planning (Smart, forthcoming).
6. Some Tentative Conclusions

The forgoing account is essentially a preliminary overview of an important but neglected field of research and practical policy. While we are not in a position to make comprehensive or definitive policy recommendations until more detailed case studies and policy analysis are undertaken, we can briefly summarise some of the tentative conclusions and principles which are emerging from our research so far.

We can state confidently that there is a relatively low but accelerating level of official and academic awareness of the problem of lack of social interaction on our campuses. To date, the institutional response has been largely the emergence of isolated and ad hoc initiatives by practitioners to ameliorate the problem. While these initiatives span the academic, social and residential realms, we see the need for much better research input combined with much more integrated whole of institution attacks on the problem - ideally with strong leadership and coordination from the top. To be successful, the programmes and strategies will often need to be proactive and interventionist in nature. It is clear that international students are disappointed with current levels of interaction and would welcome strategies which enhanced mixing. While most Australian students appear to be indifferent and disinterested, we have argued that there are good social, vocational and economic reasons why universities ought to adopt more proactive strategies on behalf not only of all their students / clients but also the national interest.

In terms both of fostering social interaction between local and international students and promoting a strong international ethos, it is our impression that the most successful institutions are those which promote an institutional culture of support which is backed by a ‘whole of university’ approach to internationalisation. Such institutions typically coordinated efforts which linked such elements as:

- the university mission statement and university leadership
- explicit policies of internationalisation and cultural diversity
- staff development (cross cultural teaching and learning)
- residential policy
- student support and orientation programmes
- internationalisation of curriculum / teaching
- campus social / cultural / sporting / guild activities
Similarly, our observations suggest that the following principles are usually evident in successful programmes:

- the programmes are part of a culture of international education within tertiary institutions (the ‘whole of university’ approach);

- they are structured as part of ‘regular’ tertiary education – offering students the opportunity to develop cross-cultural skills and knowledge in addition to their specific discipline / study areas rather than simply offering the opportunity to socialise (structured contact being more likely to be successful than unstructured contact);

- they are, as much as possible, embedded and integrated into the formal curriculum of the institution and offered for credit points. “The more a programme overlaps or coincides with the full range of a student’s daily routine, rather than being a limited or separate activity in itself, the more likely it is to be successful” (Nesdale and Todd, 1997);

- they are explicitly designed (and promoted) to benefit both Australian and international students – and have well defined and tangible outcomes of perceived direct benefit to the international students and the local students (this might be credit points for an academic unit, a certificate or other benefit such as anticipation of improved academic performance or increased fluency in a language);

- they are developed by multicultural teams and in collaboration between international and Australian students – students need to be positively involved, committed to and take ownership of the programmes. Programmes need to involve tasks to be performed by international and local students that require equality of status, are meaningful, involve conjoint preparation, and need cooperation in their enactment;

- they are developed (overall framework, presentation and language) in such a way that they appeal to students, moving away from the patronising ‘help’ mode initiatives to more attractive, practical programmes which emphasise the mutual benefits of interaction through concepts such as ‘partnerships’ and ‘internationalisation’;

- they receive the highest possible support and recognition at the institutional level – and the participation of senior staff;
• their success can and should be evaluated from multiple and multi-dimensional perspectives.
7. Suggestions for Future Research

At this stage, still far too little is known about the dynamics of interaction between international and Australian students on our campuses. We have some ideas about programmes in a range of domains that seem to foster increased social interaction. However, in very few cases do we have rigorous evaluations or detailed case studies which could help us establish the underlying principles and dynamics that would be likely to enable design and implementation of more universally applicable initiatives. For example, there is a strong case for detailed cross-campus studies which would enable comparative assessment of approaches to processes such as orientation and peer pairing. Such comparative analysis should permit valuable policy insights and understanding of the dynamics of interaction in different cross-cultural settings.

In addition, there is a need for longitudinal studies which can monitor and explain changes in both students' attitudes and interactions and in institutional practices over time. We believe that both governments and institutional leaders could do much more to support the development of innovations and initiatives on campuses. There is, as yet, far too little research being undertaken in the development of appropriate classroom strategies, and in the provision of staff development aimed at improving social cohesion between local and international students.
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