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The *Ubuntu* approach to teaching international students in VET

Ly Thi Tran  
RMIT University, Australia  
lythi.tran@rmit.edu.au

Presentation Outline

- The study aims  
- Research design  
- Distinctive pedagogic approaches to teaching international VET students  
- *Ubuntu* approach
Research Aims

• analyse international VET students’ purposes for investing in their courses
• explore how staff adapt their practices to accommodate international students

Research Approach

• More than 150 semi-structured interviews with international students, teachers, support staff, managers and CEOs from 25 training providers
• Second interviews were conducted with a small number of students
• Email and phone dialogues
• Took part in student activities and visited them at their homes and workplaces
• Theory and practice class observation
Distinctive approaches to teaching international students in VET

- Perspective Transformation Pedagogy
- Value-added approach
- Intercultural approach
- Language and vocational learning integration approach
- Work-based learning
- Ubuntu pedagogy
- Flexible divergent pedagogy
- International VET pedagogy


- A sense of belonging is needed to motivate students to fulfil their learning potential
- A supportive environment is essential to nurture student self-directed learning
- An emphasis on attitudes over techniques (Steward, 2012)
Ubuntu approach

- Create a human bond and a positive learning culture
- Provide personalised support for student learning
- Develop interpersonal relationship and a sense of belonging to enhance learning

Making international students feel valued

- The way I'm treating them like a person with full respect. Ubuntu approach and it's a term that is used in South Africa and directly translated it means humanness, our people are but one another. You keep that human factor in your teaching, that humanness between one another. And also when you're teaching, everybody's job is important. Not only the best students, every single job is important... And even if he's the weaker student I still make him feel that what he's doing is important. He mustn't feel that he's just carrying along because this is what we do. And when you engage students like that I find it amazing. If you've got a teaching style where you can engage the students in such a way that they feel important and they feel that they want to come to TAFE then you've got a good learner. (Cabinet making, TAFE, QLD)
Ubuntu approach

- The affective dimension of pedagogy: learning is not viewed merely as an intellectual activity
- Focuses on not only understanding students’ needs but also recognising the work that international students are doing
- Make students feel valued within the classroom community
- Other ‘human’ factors in students’ life and other commitments beyond the classroom walls may impact on their study and emotional life away from home.

Creating a human bond

- And with the humanness in teaching, when you’re teaching them you create that human bond and you try to create a responsive learning culture (Carpentry, TAFE, QLD).
- Initially you try and help and you try and, you know, you try and probe a bit further into whether their life away from home is interfering with their study or whether their work commitments outside of the college are impacting on what they’re doing. You know, we’re human beings. We realize there’s a life outside of college. And sometimes outside life impacts on what you’re doing, particularly in your studies. And we try and recognize that and where possible, we make allowance. But likewise we try and encourage them down the direction we know they need to go rather than getting too far off the track. (Automotive, TAFE, QLD)
Developing interpersonal relationship among students and a sense of belonging

- It’s just easier with the internationals when they come in for me and me being an international as well, my class room is like a United Nations… And that class is almost like a family. They become buddies. I become buddies with them too, in the sense where I'll go out with them sometimes or we'll have a barbeque together. So they form like a close knit group and they help each other along the way too which is awesome. I love it as a teacher. We work really well together. (Cabinet making, TAFE, QLD)

- And the thing is that they need help to try and build up a network of support very quickly because they need it. They need a support system. (Bakery, TAFE, VIC)

Create a sense of belonging to the Australian community

- I think that for international students an important aspect is to having them here and giving them an education but part of that education must be teaching them about the things such as experiencing the city or the country, to make them part of it. I took them to the football… I keep on saying here that we really need to do more about getting the students out and seeing Melbourne and seeing Victoria. At least giving them, again broadening their opportunities of seeing what the State has to offer or what the country has to offer. (Hospitality management, Private college, VIC)
Core features of the Ubuntu approach

- Educating and engaging students not only through the formal curriculum but also through the informal curriculum
- Teacher responsibility as well as institute’s responsibility: extending far beyond merely providing students with vocational knowledge and skills
- Support students in their journey to mediate the complex cross-border world as well as to encourage their well-rounded development

Thank you for your listening!

Email: lythi.tran@rmit.edu.au

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Further information on the Ubuntu approach and engaging international students can be found in my article: