International student connectedness with local teachers and peers: Insights from teachers

Ly Thi Tran and Lien Pham

Abstract

The mobility processes associated with the dynamic formations of locality shape and reshape international students' connectedness with teachers, peers, families, institutions and the broader community. The majority of research on international student engagement concentrates on the higher education sector. This chapter reports on a study that investigates the academic and social connectedness of a growing but often-neglected group within the field of international education – international students in vocational education and training (VET). This research includes 155 interviews with international students and staff as well as fieldwork in 25 Australian dual-sector universities and VET colleges. The chapter draws on Vertovec's (2001) idea of transnationalism and Hall's (1996) notion of identity to examine international students' connectedness with teachers and peers in international VET classrooms. The findings of the research point to the ways VET teachers view their relationships with international students and among all students through a functional lens. Placing the functional goals of developing students' vocational and cultural skills and hands-on experiences at the centre of their pedagogy, these teachers engage in practices inside and outside classrooms to connect with international and domestic students. The research found that meaningful connectedness in international VET spaces moves beyond the mere condition for interaction between domestic and other international peers to the real opportunities for international students to share, negotiate and contribute to building practical hands-on skills, vocational knowledge and cultural experiences on a more equal basis. This process enhances not only vocational capabilities but also mutual learning and transnational vocational development for all.

Introduction

Connectedness is at the centre of international students' educational, social and cultural experiences in the host country (Rosenthal, Russell & Thomson, 2007; Cheung & Yue, 2013; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Connectedness occurs in different ways. International students often maintain physical connectedness with spaces, landscapes, objects, friends and families. They can also have virtual connectedness that helps them to reinforce a sense of belonging to a particular group or place. Connectedness can involve a range of social, cultural, interpersonal and intellectual engagement and learning. However, research on international student connectedness largely concentrates on the issue of intercultural

interaction and engagement (Rienties, Heliot & Jindal-Snape, 2013; Rienties et al, 2013; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Bennett, , Volet, , & Fozdar, , 2013).

In the field of international education research, intercultural connectedness is often viewed with respect to the relations between international and domestic students and among international peers (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Jon, 2013; Rienties et al, 2013; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). The majority of existing literature tends to position international students as sojourners in the host community who should take the onus in building connectedness with others. Much less research closely examines the relationships between local teachers and international students and between international and domestic students from a holistic view that sees all members as equal participants in building and nurturing connectedness. In particular, little is known about how local teachers as a key stakeholder in transnational academic and social fields see their relationships with international students and the relationships between domestic and international students. Teachers' perspectives on these aspects play a key role in influencing their ways of appropriating pedagogy and curriculum for international classrooms.

This chapter responds to this gap in the literature by analysing how teachers view the nature and meaning of their relationships with international students as well as intercultural relationships in the classroom and how such understanding impacts on their pedagogical practice. The chapter is derived from a four-year research project funded by the Australian Research Council. Data sources include 50 interviews with staff and 105 interviews with international students together with fieldwork and observation notes from VET and dual-sector institutions in there states of Australia: New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (QLD) and Victoria (VIC). It uses Vertovec (2001) idea of transnationalism and Hall's (1996) notion of identity to analyse the interview data with teachers. The findings of this research suggest that VET teacher participants perceive a link between pedagogical practices and students' life experiences, which fosters their connectedness with students and the connectedness between international and domestic students. This is not often the case in higher education, where many lecturers and tutors might not see themselves as well connected with international students (Dalghis, 2006; Sawir, 2011). The focus on vocational skills development and hands-on experiences in VET links teaching and learning practices to students' practical application in their jobs. This in turn appears to be essential to building and maintaining connectedness in international classrooms. This linkage appears to be less clear in the higher education setting. The chapter highlights how VET teachers view their roles and relationships with international students through a functional lens whereby all involved parties, teachers and international and domestic students, may co-construct connectedness with each other. Their pedagogical practices thus involve developing students' intercultural relationships via connectedness with practical and cultural skills, and gaining hands-on experience related to their prospect professions.

International students in Australian VET

International education is Australia's largest service export, contributing over $18 billion to the national economy annually (Pyne, 2015). Over the past two decades, VET colleges in

Australia have invested in increasing the volume of full-fee paying international students to generate revenue in response to the decrease in public funding. Of the 464,787 international students enrolled in 2014 in the four major education sectors (VET, Higher Education, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students and Schools), about one fourth are in VET courses (AEI, 2015). The Australian VET sector currently ranks second, behind the Higher Education (HE) sector in volume of international student enrolments, with a total of almost 150,000 (AEI, 2015). Since 2009, VET has emerged as an important player in international education in Australia. International students have diverse and shifting purposes in undertaking a VET course in Australia. These include using VET as a means for skill enhancement or personal transformation, a pathway to higher education and a stepping stone for migration (Tran, 2015; Tran & Nyland, 2011). Some are motivated to study VET for dual or multiple purposes.

The considerable growth of international students in VET over the past decade has significant implications for teaching and learning in VET. Research evidence suggests that the diverse learning needs and characteristics international students bring to Australian VET classrooms have created challenges as well as possibilities for teachers to appropriate pedagogical practices (Tran, 2013). New pedagogical issues in teaching international students have arisen and teachers are required to engage with and develop new pedagogical skills and knowledge (Nakar, 2013; Pasura, 2015; Tran, 2013a; Tran & Nyland, 2013). Within this context, a more nuanced understanding of how teachers view their connectedness with international students and the implications for pedagogical practices is essential to optimise teaching and learning in cross-cultural classrooms.

Relationships and pedagogies in international classrooms

Research on teaching international students in international classrooms appears to focus on three key themes:

(1) the challenges faced by teachers in dealing with unfamiliar characteristics and diverse needs of international students (Peelo & Luzon, 2007; Kingston & Fordland, 2008; and Dippold, 2013)
(2) strategies to enhance intercultural interactions between domestic and international students (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Jon, 2013; Rienties et al, 2013; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009; Tran & Pham, 2015; Pham & Tran, 2015)
(3) pedagogical practices to effectively engage with and use the diversity of cultures. knowledge and experiences to optimise learning for all (Leask, 2009; Ryan & Viete, 2009; Tran, 2011; 2013)

International classrooms provide the opportunity to enhance intercultural interactions and relationships. However, existing research evidence suggests the development of intercultural relationships and capability does not automatically happen when having students of diverse cultures in the same classroom (Crose, 2011; Ryan and Viete, 2009; Tran & Pham, 2015; Pham & Tran, 2015). Tran and Pham (2015) pointed out that without purposeful and appropriate pedagogical practices, intercultural interaction might simply occur at a surface

level only and reciprocal learning for those involved is limited. Building meaningful interactions and relationships conducive to teaching and learning in an intercultural classroom is often seen as a challenge to all involved parties and the institution. Key factors that might preclude meaningful relationships between local teachers and international students include cultural mismatch, misinterpretations in communication and different expectations (Owens, 2008). Furthermore, existing studies indicate that not all academics have the motivation or see the value in building interactions and relationships with international students, thereby seeing it unnecessary to appropriate their pedagogy in teaching international students (Dalghis, 2006; Sawir, 2011). Such attitudes preclude the development of meaningful relationships and pedagogies that can foster intercultural learning and capability for all in cross-cultural classrooms.

Ryan and Viete (2009) examined of the types of academic literacy and pedagogical practices in the English-speaking academic environment in which international students' knowledge and experiences are undervalued, that results in international students' disengagement. They found that such a common practice is often rooted in the notion of a native-speaker norm in the English-speaking academy, which "exercises tacit power in pedagogy and assessment" (p.303). The findings show that these pedagogical practices affect the international students' self-identity and self-esteem as they operate in unfamiliar linguistic and cultural environments in which they play a less equal role in knowledge construction as compared to their domestic peers and reciprocal learning is not nurtured. In a similar vein, research by Collett (2007) also finds that international students were often excluded in international classrooms by their lack of familiarity with the rules of engagement of the Western style. The findings also show that "the unintended use of rank to maintain a status quo prevents any consideration of the experiences of those with differing cultural understandings" (Collett, 2007, p.21). These factors are central to the marginalisation of international students.

A significant stream of research in the field of international education is concerned with the notion of culturally responsive pedagogies and offers various suggestions to develop such pedagogical practices (Hellsten, 2008; Leask, 2008; Ryan & Viete, 2009; Tran, 2011; 2013; 2013a). Authors who advocate culturally responsive pedagogies in international classrooms highlight the need to develop and appropriate pedagogies not only to accommodate the needs and learning characteristics of students from diverse cultural and language backgrounds but importantly to validate their diverse knowledge, cultures and experiences as a useful recourse for learning (Leask, 2008; Singh & Han, 2010; Tran, 2010). Within this line of argument, the incorporation of cultural responsiveness and inclusivity is closely connected with active productive pedagogies (Singh & Han, 2010, Tran, 2010). Another fundamental aspect of culturally responsive pedagogies suggested in the literature is anchored in the purposeful inclusion of case studies, examples, ways of doing and professional practices from diverse cultures in teaching and learning (Hellsten, 2008; Leask, 2008; Tran, 2013).

Conceptual framework

In this chapter, we draw on Vertovec's (2001) idea of transnationalism and Hall's (1996) identity construct of "differences" to analyse teachers' views about intercultural relationships within classrooms as a transnational social field. According to Vertovec (2001), the literature on transnationalism underscores the fact that there are large numbers of people now living in social worlds that are stretched between or dually located in physical places and communities in two or more nation-states. The diverse habitats and the experiences gathered in these settings comprise people's cultural repertoires, which in turn influence their construction of identity, or indeed multiplicity of identities. The term "transnational social field" (Gargano 2009) refers to a multi- focal world with a set of conditions that affect the construction, negotiation and production of social identities. These identities play out and position individuals in the course of everyday life within and across each of their place of attachment or perceived belonging. This is an intimate connection between belonging, identities and social fields. According to Vertovec (1999), transnationalism and identity are concepts of juxtaposition, because transnational networks of exchange and participation are grounded upon some perception of common identity. Yet identities are constructed and negotiated within the social worlds that span more than one place and take shape by accounting for the person's present, past and future.

To deconstruct this juxtaposition, and to enable us to look into the experiences of teachers and their perception of their relationships and practices with international students, we draw on Hall's (1996) theory of identity. According to Hall (1996), identities are constructed within, not outside discourse. In other words, people construct their identities within specific discursive formations and practices, by engaging in specific strategies. Identities emerge, not just from the habitats of physical space, but within people's social relations, and thus are product of differences. Hall's (1996) idea of identity recognises heterogeneity and diversity which is implied in transnationalism, by the conception of identity as lived through rather than naturally constituted.

In a transnational social field, identities are understood through people's place in their relationships with others who come from different cultures. According to Mead (1910), people's behaviours are produced in regards to their perception of their "selves" and others' behaviours, and draw on their cultural repertoires to make sense of these interpretations of behaviours. Despite the contextual differences between the present time of international education and the historical setting from which Mead's premise arose, his work is still relevant to this research as it is centred on how individuals' self-consciousness and consciousness of others influence ways of being and doing. Thus transnational identities comprise representations which provide an imaginary social identity, or a convergence of "differences" to come to a common point of identity. It is through understanding how this common point of identity might arise that allows the thinking of transnationalism to go beyond the physical space to enter a kind of virtual connection, through the minds of people in transnational fields, through cultural artefacts that they bring with them, and through their shared imaginations. In our analysis, we draw on Vertovec (2001) to theorise a typology of transnationalism and the conditions that affect transnationalism. We look at transnationalism through the idea of connectedness as how people see themselves with others in a

transnational setting, and explore how social relations and practices affect their sense of connectedness. We analyse the data from perspective of teachers: how they see their relationships with international students (social relations and identity); and how they accord their practices in line with such relationships (practices and connectedness). The focus is on the meanings held by teachers about teacher-student and student-student relationships, and their practices in light of the context of their college environment.

The Study

The research reported in this chapter includes 50 interviews with VET teachers and professional staff and 105 interviews with international students. In addition to interviews, fieldwork and observations took place over the four year period from 2009 to 2013. The directors of international programs in different VET institutes were asked to circulate an invitation to participate in the study to staff involved in teaching and working with international students. The interviewees were from a range of fields including cookery, hairdressing, hospitality management, law, finance, accounting, building and carpentry. Semi-structured interviews with open ended questions were chosen as this method provides participants with space to elaborate on their responses to the questions formulated by the research as well as to issues they see important to their professional practice. The interviews focused on teachers' perspectives on how they see themselves as teachers of international students and how they have appropriated their teaching content and pedagogy to address the learning characteristics of international students. Ethics approval was sought prior to data collection from the University Human Research Ethics Committee where the researcher is based. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms of their names and institutes are used in this chapter.

The face to face interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and then analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis was inductive and aimed to identify emergent themes and patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher read the interview transcripts several times and coded interview data using NVivo 10. The principal features of intercultural relationships perceived by the teachers were interpreted using Vertovec (2001) idea of transnationalism and Hall's (1996) notion of identity as discussed above.

Findings and discussion

The teachers in this study seem to view their relationships with international students through a *functioning* emphasis. The term *functioning* is used here to include both the competency goals associated with the subjects they are teaching (*functional goals*), and the types of teaching practices (*functional practices*) that teachers engage in to achieve these goals. Along the line of Mead (1910), teachers view teacher-student and student-student relations as inherently tied to the functional goals which determine their functional practices within those relations: as people take on multiple roles depending on their positions in society, they create meanings to accord with those positions and functions.

The *functioning* relationships that these teachers position themselves within align with Hall's idea of identities as "becoming" rather than "being". It is becoming because they constantly engage in functional practices that shape how they see themselves, their being. Similarly, how teachers construct international students identities, as cultural workers, producers, or learners, and how they fit in with the college and their workplace, broader community and with other local students depend on the functional roles they attribute to the international students. Teachers' sense of fitting in with students' worlds and students fitting in with their worlds would shift depending on the specific contexts, the functioning roles and how well equipped the teachers and students are to perform that function. This means that both teachers and students (international and domestic) are participants in constructing connectedness in their relationships with each other because they try to fit in with the other person's world. Their worlds are common because of their functional roles.

Through the functioning lens, these teachers seem to recognise 1) points of divergences or differences between international students and domestic students and even themselves as learners and teachers, 2) points of convergences or similarities because of common functional goals; and 3) points where divergences can be negotiated or bridged, or points of a common identity. For these teachers, the functioning lens allow them to situate themselves in social relations but also to practically recognise students' divergent skills sets (competency and cultural). Closing these gaps between students is how they connect to their students. When local students and international students can share common space of vocational skills, language and cultural understanding, they can find the connection with each other. This analysis allows us to understand in more depth the juxtaposition of transnationalism and identity that Vertovec (2001) talks about. The analysis points to the divergences and multiplicities of practical and cultural skills as resources that position international and domestic students and teachers differently in the classrooms. It also highlights how these differences may be mediated by all to achieve equality and connection with each other.

Functional goal of vocational and cultural skills development

The teacher participants in this research have two broadly functional goals: first, to develop students' vocational skills development for the industry, for example bakery, hairdressing or carpentry. Second, they need to foster an environment for cultural awareness to take place, and particularly develop the students' cultural skills set to enable international students to adapt to Australian culture. The first goal is primary because they see their identities as the teacher/trainer of mastery of skills for vocational functions. The second goal of cultural skills development and support is secondary to and, in some cases, support vocational skills mastery. This section discusses the vocational skills and the next section discusses cultural skills.

Functional goals of vocational skills mastery
Vocational skills mastery is an important goal for these teachers in their relations with students because they see these practical functions as relevant to life experiences. This might

be because VET programs prioritise hands-on experiences in a real-world environment. As the following teacher suggests about the practical approach to everyday life experiences;

> What they're learning is relative to what they want to do. They're not learning something about mechanics but they're working in a cabinet maker shop. Everything we teach is relative to what we do. (Carpentry, QLD)

In this comment, the teacher refers to students' learning being shaped by what they want to do in life. This is consistent with Hall's (1990) idea about a person's social practices in shaping person's social identity. This teacher also sees everyday experiences as a connecting point between his teaching and students' interest in learning which is related to their future occupation. In a way, he sees students' identities as social identities where they are members of a social group, in this case a cabinet maker shop, rather than drawing on some individual characteristics. The kind of teaching practices he then employs are based on competencies that need to be developed in order to enhance students' readiness for the workplace. He is developing a common point with his students through the social place of cabinet making and the functional goal of developing students' skills set to be a cabinet maker.

This teacher also extends his idea of connectedness through participation in society by suggesting a link between belonging and labour participation as a citizen's rights;

> I've done it so, yeah look if people think that they can have a better future or better life or they can change the circumstance by coming to another country, whether it be Australia or any other country, I'm all for that. We're all citizens of the world. I always say that. (Carpentry, QLD)

His viewpoint about citizenship beyond the nationalist idea of legal status of citizenship justifies studying abroad to acquire better economic opportunities for oneself. While his view may stem from his own past experiences, it is insightful in the broader context of international education where there is a stereotype of international students whose motivation for studying in Australia is to acquire residency only.

Functional goal of cultural skills development in class and out of class
The teacher participants seem to view cultural understanding as skills sets that can be used to support vocational and practical skills development. Therefore, they see the relationships between domestic and international students as of potential mutual benefit, where domestic students can teach international students practical skills, and learn about different cultures from international students. Moreover, they seem to view culture as embedded in people's skills sets which influence how they might use these skills as resources in their everyday situations. As these teachers comment:

> It's good for the local students to understand that this is not just an industry that is concentrated here in Australia. It has unlimited cultural boundaries. All cultures have some aspects of screen,

> screen industry, screen cultures, independent screen cultures. These things are important to understand. (Film and media, NSW)

> Tourism and hospitality, and to a large extent cookery, aim at skilling people to serve tourists, travellers, visitors, and of course, many of whom are international. There is a lot of cultural awareness built into the training packages as part of teaching: teaching people to work with different people, to work with different cultures and backgrounds, to understand that culture is not just a country or a nationality. (Hospitality Management, VIC)

The above comments suggest a direct linkage between culture and vocational jobs, which provides the logic for these teachers to incorporate differences in culture to develop students' understanding of the industries' practices. These comments also suggest teachers' recognition of multiplicity of identities that come from different places, and that culture is not bound by nations or race. This is encapsulated in the idea of transnationalism (Vertovec 1999, Gargano 2009).

In addition, teachers view the relationships between domestic and international students as building social networks that extend beyond the borders of Australia. They see the need for domestic students to develop a cultural awareness that Australians generally lack. Thus international students can contribute positively to local students' cultural learning, and in so doing become their transnational connections. As the following teacher says:

> They [international students] contribute by talking about their own experiences, who they are, and where they come from. In the second semester we started talking about working with people from different cultures and we asked the internationals in particular: "You've come here to Australia, now tell us something that you really found so strange, where you thought, "Oh, look at that! Fancy that!" And they'll talk about something and then the local students have said, really? Did you find that strange? And the local students will learn from the international students. But also the international students learn also about the variety and learn to be more accepting of different ways of doing things on both sides. (Hospitality Management, VIC)

The comment above suggests again that connectedness through understanding cultural differences or similarities also take place in the context of everyday life practical experiences. This is similar to Harris's (2009) claim that an approach of everyday encounters of culture is appropriate because it focuses on "the local, the domestic and the ordinary neighbourhood spaces, or micro-geographies of people's day-to-day lives" (Harris 2009, pg. 192). Deirdre's focus on everyday practices in the classroom also highlights the difficulties that these students might encounter in trying to understand different cultures. The absence of reciprocity by local students that are often found in literature is their fear of displaying their

lack of cultural awareness (Tran & Pham, 2015; Pham & Tran, 2015). While these behaviours may be perceived as lack of empathy, they arise from fear of displaying their cultural unresponsiveness because they assume that these international students have cultural skills. As another teacher comments:

> I think we are frightened of them because they just seem different and we don't really understand how to communicate with them. I've had (local) students say to me that they feel they are inadequately equipped to interact with international students. Australian students worry that they will look stupid themselves because they won't understand. My experience with Australian students is that they're very ignorant in general of other countries and other cultures. So they're frightened to get to know someone from another culture reasonably well because they will show their own ignorance. They are actually ashamed of their own inability or their own ignorance. When I talk to them that's what they really say to me. They're just frightened that their inadequacies will be exposed. (Executive Officer, VIC)

This comment reveals a dimension that is not often brought to light in literature, which largely focuses on domestic students' negative attitudes and a lack of cultural sensitivity towards international students, or international students' unfamiliarity with communication norms and English language proficiency as the most significant barriers for effective intercultural interaction between domestic and international students (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002; Wakimoto, 2007). The teacher's comment suggests that domestic students' fear of having to construct, maintain and negotiate differences and new schemas of understanding of differences is just as prominent as it is for international students. As Mead (1910) argued, the presentations of others' attitudes and our own are reflective of the consciousness of the world that is bound up in our own self-consciousness about our place. It is always difficult to bring up that self-consciousness to display to others our attitudes and movements (Mead 1910). Yet such self-consciousness can be the beginning of social interactions which can lead to what Hall (1990) refers to as understanding the self through recognition of differences.

Similarly, another teacher in the comment below, perceives that international students can acquire cultural skills when they socialise with local students outside the classroom, for example by attending local football game or go to Australian friends' BBQ. He sees himself as occupying that role of developing international students' cultural learning in order to make them feel like they belong to the Australian community;

> Once they [international students] are here and they get frightened or whatever it may be, they then lose their self-esteem, which in turn, demotivate them to take chances or do things. Even the simple things of going out and experience new things, going out to a local nightclub or the pictures, meet people, you know. One of the

things I say to them is go and see an Australian Rules football game. Experience it, be amongst other Australian people. I've taken a group of students with me to the football and once they've been there they go wow! I've taken students out to my business or to other restaurants and we talk about designing menus to meet market needs or design or developing a coffee shop. We walk around the city. I take them to different coffee shops and show them how they're set up, how they create their own niche and things like that. Part of education must be about teaching them cultural thin gs, allowing them to experience the city or the country, to make them be part of it. I keep on saying here that we really need to do more to get students out and see Melbourne and Victoria. (Cookery, VIC)

The above comment suggests that there is much anxiety and feeling of low confidence with international students. Richard perceives that his role of a teacher and of education broadly, is to help these students to overcome their anxieties or low self-esteems by giving them opportunities to experience Australian culture. It also highlights the connection that he makes between building cultural awareness with work practices for example designing menus or coffee shops. Again there is a focus on connecting work-related skills through everyday life experiences and sense of belonging to a wider Australian community.

On the other hand cultural differences can lead to racism when there is no acceptance of differences, or no way for people to tolerate different cultural behaviours. Thus, even though the majority of teacher participants seem to recognise the importance of cultural understanding and social participation, the relations between them and international students are reflective of their own dispositions to take on different cultures. For those who were diasporas or migrants in Australia, or have had overseas experiences, they seem to relate to international students more because they have the cultural skills to do so. These teachers see themselves as cultural beings, not someone who tries to enforce multiculturalism on others. They see their functional goals of cultural development as embedded within the relationships with international students they work with. As with vocational and practical skills, there seems to be a direct association between cultural skills and social practices. As the teachers reveal in the excerpts below:

As a teacher, you also need to be able to understand the cultural differences, particularly with things like special dietary needs. If you approach teaching with a closed mind and narrow thoughts of "I'm going to treat them all the same", I don't think you'd be able to teach. I think students [international] have to be able to understand their learning process too. Because you learn things that are particular to the ways that Australians learn things in Australia. So I need for them to be part of the Australian learning processes. I need them to be part of what's happening in the class room because

> to be able to communicate, they need to have a part in the communication process. (Bakery, VIC)

> I enjoy the process of learning and I enjoy adapting myself to a person's circumstances. I enjoy learning about the person and where they've come from and their cultures. I've learnt so much since I started here and started teaching international students. I've learnt so much about the world around me. Learning about cultures is as important to me as myself teaching students. (Cookery, VIC)

Alongside with seeing his role in fostering cultural skills which necessitates having the right attitude and skills, the teacher in the first excerpt emphasises on the cultural skills embedded in the communication process which is essential for effective learning. He suggests that international students could engage in reciprocal actions of communicating with his and other students, which would allow them to recognise different ways of learning between Australia and their own cultures. From that, international students can take part in their own learning. Even though these two comments emphasise the importance of cultural learning for both teachers and international students, they differ in terms of teachers' experiences and expectations of international students. However, they both agree on cultural skills as enablers of agentic practices and that both teachers and students have to develop and practise. They also highlight that without these cultural skills sets, teachers may have a mono-cultural view which may lead to expectation that the onus is on international students to learn about Australian culture which is linked to an assimilation approach.

Similarly, another teacher recognises differences in attitudes between local and international students towards him as teacher. As he says, it is positive for his own identity and sense of being a teacher;

> It's not only good for local students; it's good for the teachers because you have this other attitude towards teachers and teaching that you don't find in the local population. The local population tend to despise teachers, whereas a lot of international students actually have respect for teachers which is very refreshing. (Film and media, NSW)

These reflections by teachers on their interactions with international students are consistent with Mead's (1910) argument that during the whole process of interactions with others, we are analysing their oncoming acts by our instinctive responses to their changes of inclinations and other indications of intentions. These teachers' social conducts seem to be responses to their perception of their roles and relationships with international students. They consciously develop their attitudes as they interpret others' behaviours, which in turn shape their attitudes and further actions. Their cultural understandings are based on their interpretation of international students' cultures. They see cultural skills to come about when they recognise their involvement in practical situations; they then see cultural skills as part of developing practical skills to take on vocational jobs. As Vertovec (1999) says, the heightening of

cultural awareness is parallel with new kinds of self-awareness. Rather than thinking about culture as a fixed state of being and differences as different states of being, cultural skills are viewed as skills that can be developed, as long as social actors within relationships are willing to think relationally in terms of their own positions and dispositions to certain attitudes and behaviours of others. These teachers seem to promote an instrumental approach to culture, to rationalise cultural skills and support the development of vocational skills in the situational contexts of classroom and workplace. This in turn serves as commonality that can connect international students with local people.

Functional practices: pedagogy and support

The teacher participants seem to make choices to achieve functional goals of vocational and cultural skills through specific teaching methods and providing support to international students. It is within these functional relations that these teachers recognise differences between international and domestic students, in terms of practical skills, language capacity, attitudes and learning styles. They attribute differences in attitudes and learning styles to cultural differences and thus view supporting students to develop cultural skills as ways to develop their practical and language skills. Therefore, it seems that teachers link skills development to teacher-support activities. The latter also address other learning and social needs, particularly in cultural understanding which they see as leading to improved skills development. For some teachers, particularly those who are migrants themselves or used to working with different cultures abroad, their functional practices seem to be embedded in humanity relations that are deeper than developing skills.

Teaching practices
Teachers' functional goals also influence their teaching methods and style and preference for classroom structure. For example, some comment upon Asian international students' rote learning style, or less English skills, which are different from local students; therefore they prefer segregated classes between international and domestic students to enable them to implement teaching strategies that accommodate international students' learning;

> There are strategies that we use to teach international students. We give them extra exercises. We slow down. If we teach too fast the students will say, you're talking too fast for me. You've got to slow down. You have all these teaching strategies. Often you'll repeat key words. (Finance, VIC)

This comment suggests a link between functional goals and teaching practices which are shaped by their recognition of different skills level between international students and local students. The teacher's preference for segregation seems to relate to his desire to support international students, rather than a form of discrimination. However, it is also worth noting that effective approaches to teaching international students also stand to benefit all students (Leask, 2008; Ryan & Viete, 2009).

Other teachers prefer integrating international with domestic students in classroom activities as ways to develop their adaptation skills and intercultural capability. They make a direct connection between cultural awareness and adaptation skills for work. Again this suggests a connection between work and social identities within the mindsets of these teachers;

> I like to put them out of their comfort zone by putting them with students with different nationalities so they are forced to engage. This is helpful for a job in hairdressing, because you might have a client that you don't like and you don't want to cut his hair. But you don't have a choice. If the boss says you have to cut, you have to cut. So in hairdressing you are constantly put in a situation that you might not like it but you must deliver your services. In the classroom environment, it's where students begin to learn to adapt because this is where they have to adapt, and later on in their life or at work. So it's a good test or a good playground for them to sort of learn and adapt to situations. (Hairdressing, VIC)

It seems that the vocational aspects of these VET courses foster teachers' practical viewpoints about identity and participation in society and professional networks, which not only orient towards skills development but also agentic practices. This is different from a higher education environment when there is more focus on abstract learning which demands a higher level of language proficiency, and less application of learning to life practical experiences. This is illustrated in the below comment;

> From the learning aspect, I prefer to teach a mixed class because I think the level of exposure is better for international students if they get some pick up from the local students, particularly in subjects like law and work place analysis. It's very, very difficult to teach the work placement just to internationals because it's coming from an unexplored area in their learning so you've got to start at the bottom and build. But if they're in a class with locals, we can capitalise exponentially on the learning in both the locals with the internationals and both gain, in my experience. Also I'm very keen that people work together, that the internationals don't sit in one place and the locals sit in the other. We share, we learn, we work together. (Hospitality Management, NSW)

> For supervision I think it would be better mixed because domestic students could also help them [international students] in the class room. But when it comes to the practical demonstration and skills it doesn't matter. Because I find international students to be more structured, visual learners and that way you can demonstrate and they can pick up the skills quite quickly. You know, make a coffee maker, cocktails, things like that to serve customers. But supervision where it's very theory orientated then they need a lot of

assistance with the language difficulties that they have here. (Hospitality Management, Queensland)

These comments suggest that teachers engage in deliberate strategies of putting students together, through their recognition of learning differences between students. Teachers have a direct involvement with their students through their teaching methods, because they can see skills and knowledge gap and they seek to fill those gaps by using student interactions.The participant's comment below extends this idea, highlighting that by unpacking the skills differences between students, she is able to use these differences to converge their differences towards a common functional goal, and through that, students can create transnational networks.

> We also encourage the difference, within international cohorts because international students aren't just from one country either. So it's good to get the international students talking to each other. So maybe like the Swedish students talking to the Sri Lankan students and the Canadian students talking to the Chinese students. (Hospitality Management, VIC)

These teachers see themselves as skills trainers, which are embedded in their practical, cultural and teaching skills. Relationships between international and domestic students involve exchanges marked by recognition of differences and resulting interactions on an instrumental basis of achieving their functional goals of developing vocational skills. The practicalities of daily life seem to be a salient perspective of their social interactions with these students and construction of both their and their students' social identities. As Hall (1996) explains, identities are about questions of using resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming, rather than being: not who we are, but who we might become, and how we might represent ourselves. For these teachers, it is not so much the history, but the present practicalities and future participation of students in their work, that invoke them to connect with each other.

Providing support (in class and out of class)

Many teachers believe it is their role to support international students, and that they are the first port of call for students who may need support. Some see a mixed class environment as places where interactions between local and international students may be useful to support international students. For these teachers, they view the relationships between domestic and international students as a platform for providing student support As the teachers below suggest, reciprocity between students can be a mechanism for student support because international students can reciprocate by teaching domestic students about their culture and adaptation skills:

> The local students learn from the internationals and they also learn tolerance and inclusiveness. The international students learn a lot more English and a lot about the Australian way of doing things.

International students frequently find that the locals will be a mentor for them. (Cookery, VIC

Because those international students have left all that's comfortable, they've left their family, their friends and all the things that they know and they've travelled thousands of miles. It's a really brave thing to do. So I think that our international students could teach our local students into action. (Hospitality Management, VIC)

The second comment implies a sense of responsibility upon local students to support international students given their lack of family and friends in a foreign country. While these benefits can come from mixed class environment, it is largely dependent on the course and the teaching style. In the below comments, these teachers connect the functional goal to learning practices and classroom structure.

The idea of providing support for student well-being outside the classroom also involves improving functional outcomes of students. Most of the teachers feel that there is much support provided by TAFE (Technical and Further Education – public VET) institutes such as counselling, which is also different from higher education where the former seems to gear more towards providing well-being support for students. This is evident in some teacher participants who see a close association between functional goals and support for students' work placement. For example, the teacher from the except below views helping students to obtain an apprenticeship as his responsibility;

I take responsibility for finding work place for them. I go with them. I go and knock on the doors before them and when they go, I go with them, introduce them. (Carpentry, QLD)

It must be noted that such a desire to provide work placement support seem to rely on deeper relationships between teachers and students where they see their relations as encompassing trust, care, and feeling of equality. For this teacher, the relationships with his students are more than simply providing support for a particular goal. He seems to see himself as their fellow human being, not just their teacher. In the comment below, the teacher uses the term "Ubuntu" which means humanness to describe the relationship between one another as just human being;

They just come into this class and they are like friends, like a bond. 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. I really enjoy having the boys and I have formed friendships with them that will probably stay with me, and they'll

stay mates with me because I am teaching the same fields that they're going to be working in. (Carpentry, QLD)

In summary, the teachers in this study engage in practices that are shaped within the functional relations with students generally and international students specifically. They have clear functional goals toward developing students' vocational skills and thus they engage in functional practices to achieve these goals. Such practices include specific teaching strategies and providing support to students to improve their vocational skills and cultural skills. These teachers perceive a link between the teaching and learning practices within the classroom and students' life experiences, which can be co-constructed through supportive relationships. These are seen as being core to culturally responsive pedagogies (Ryan & Viete, 2009; Tran, 2013; 2013a). Teachers also perceive the importance of self-awareness that can be learnt by all through exposure to and recognition of differences in each other's culture and skills. Through recognition of these differences to achieve vocational skills that they can apply in the broader community, international students may feel connected to their place, work, community, college, friends and teachers. Awareness of differences is an essential step towards ensuring culturally inclusive teaching and learning (Hellsten, 2008; Tran, 2009).

Conclusions

The findings discussed in this chapter suggest that the teacher participants view their relationships with students and between students through a functional lens. This is largely driven by their perceived understandings of their work as VET teachers, which in turn influence their teaching and support practices. With functional goals of developing students' vocational and cultural skills, these teachers engage in practices inside and outside classrooms to connect with international students, and foster the connection between international and domestic students. These findings seem different from teachers' practices in higher education, where it is more difficult to find a common point between students and teachers, and between students due to the more abstract nature of knowledge that is being presented in contrast with the practical skills and knowledge that define the VET sector.

The research also indicates that the ways teachers see international students' identities and international students' connectedness with domestic peers, their college, workplace and broader community depend on the functional roles associated with the courses that they teach. Their constructs of identities are shaped by the specific contexts of the vocation, the classroom environment and how well equipped the teachers and students are to achieve their functional goals. This means that both teachers and students can be participants in the intercultural interactions and in constructing connectedness.

It must also be noted that the teacher participants in this study view functional roles of teaching and learning from their own perspectives, rather than from international students' perspectives. The risk is that teachers might engage in practices that are ethnocentric and over time may create hegemonic practices that they may not intend. These risks are not evident in these teacher participants because the nature of learning activities is practice-based (functional) which tend to be similar across cultures.

This chapter extends on Vertovec (2001) to theorise a typology of transnationalism and the conditions that affect teachers and students' participation in intercultural interactions. Theories about transnationalism tend to fragment between transnationalism as transnational networks of exchange and participation grounded upon some perceptions of common identity (Vertovec, 2001). Yet, theories of identities that position diasporas and international students in the third space and space of hybridity (Mead 1910, Hall 1996, Gu & Schweisfurth 2010) claim that identities are constructed, and negotiated within the social worlds that span more than one place. The analysis in this chapter deconstructs this juxtaposition, to understand how identities are shaped through functional roles of VET teachers which allow a common point of identity to be shaped. It offers ways that differences may be identified, constructed, and then bridged through recognising and validating the potential and resources that teachers, international students and domestic students may employ in transnational intercultural contexts.

References

AEI (2015). Monthly Summary of International Student Enrolment Data – September 2015.https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/Monthly%20summaries%20of%20international%20student%20enrolment%20data%202015/09_September_2015_MonthlySummary.pdf

Bennett, R. J., Volet, S. E., & Fozdar, F. E. (2013). "I'd Say it's Kind of Unique in a Way" The Development of an Intercultural Student Relationship. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 17*(5), 533-553.

Cheung, C. K., & Yue, X. D. (2013). Sustaining resilience through local connectedness among sojourn students. *Social indicators research*, *111*(3), 785-800.

Collett, D. (2007). Coming together: Power, rank and intercultural interaction. Developing inclusive approaches in higher education. *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities & Nations, 7*(5), 17-25.

Crose, B. (2011). Internationalization of the Higher Education Classroom: Strategies to Facilitate Intercultural Learning and Academic Success. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 23*(3), 388-395.

Dalglish, C. L. (2006). The international classroom, challenges and strategies in a large business faculty. *International Journal of Learning, 12*(6), 85-94.

Dippold, D. (2013). Interaction for learning in the Anglophone university classroom: Mastering interactional challenges through reflective practice. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 7*(1), A14-A25.

Gargano, T. (2009) (Re)conceptualizing International Student Mobility. The Potential of Transnational Social Fields. *Journal of Studies in International Education,* 13(3), 331-346.

Glass, C. R., & Westmont, C. M. (2014). Comparative effects of belongingness on the academic success and cross-cultural interactions of domestic and international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 38*, 106-119.

Gu, Q.Schweisfurth & Day, C (2010). Learning and grwoing in a 'foreign' context: intercultural expereicnes of intrnational studbets. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education,* 40(1), 7-23.

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identitty and disporas. In Rutherford J (Ed), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 222-237). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Hall, S. (1996) Introduction: Who Needs Identity? In S Hall and P Du Gay (Eds). *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 1-17). London: Sage.

Harris, A. (2009). Shifting the boundaries of cultural spaces: young people and everyday multiculturalism. *Social Identities,* 15(2), 187-205.

Kingston, E., & Forland, H. (2008). Bridging the gap in expectations between international students and academic staff. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 12*(2), 204-221.

Jon, J.-E. (2013). Realizing internationalisation at home in Korean higher education: Promoting domestic students' interaction with international students and intercultural competence. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 17*(4), 455-470.

Leask, B. (2009). Using Formal and Informal Curricula to Improve Interactions Between Home and International Students. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 13*(2), 205-221.

Mead G. (1910). Social Consciousness and the Consciousness of Meaning *Psychological Bulletin* 7: 397-405.

Mead G. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Montgomery, C., & McDowell, L. (2009). Social Networks and the International Student Experience: An International Community of Practice? *Journal of Studies in International Education, 13*(4), 455-466.

Nakar, S. (2013). Understanding VET teachers' challenges in providing quality education to international students. *International Journal of Training Research*, *11*(1), 79-88.

Owens, A. (2008). Fitting in" in a" stand out" culture: an examination of the interplay of collectivist and individual cultural frameworks in the Australian university classroom.

Pasura, R. (2015). International students in the private VET sector in Melbourne, Australia: rethinking their characteristics and aspirations outside the deficit model. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, *67*(2), 203-218.

Peelo, M., & Luxon, T. (2007). Designing embedded courses to support international students' cultural and academic adjustment in the UK. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 31*(1), 65-76.

Pham, L & Tran, L. (2015). Understanding the symbolic capital of intercultural interactions: A case study of international students in Australia. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 25*(3), 204-224.

Pyne, C. (2015). Education exports worth $18.1 billion. Media release. https://www.pyneonline.com.au/media-centre/media-releases/education-exports-worth-181-billion

Rienties, B., Héliot, Y., & Jindal-Snape, D. (2013). Understanding social learning relations of international students in a large classroom using social network analysis. *Higher Education, 66*(4), 489-504.

Rienties, B., Nanclares, N. H., Jindal-Snape, D., & Alcott, P. (2012). The role of cultural background and team divisions in developing social learning relations in the classroom. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 1028315312463826.

Ryan, J., & Viete, R. (2009). Respectful interactions: Learning with international students in the English-speaking academy. *Teaching in Higher Education, 14*(3), 303-314.

Rosenthal, D. A., Russell, J., & Thomson, G. (2007). Social connectedness among international students at an Australian university. *Social Indicators Research*, *84*(1), 71-82.

Sawir, E. (2011). Academic staff response to international students and internationalising the curriculum: the impact of disciplinary differences. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *16*(1), 45-57.

Tran, L. T. & Pham, L (2015). International students in transnational mobility: Intercultural Connectedness with domestic and international peers, institutions and the wider community. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education.* DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2015.1057479

Tran, L. T (2015). Mobility as 'becoming': A Bourdieuian analysis of the factors shaping international student mobility. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* Publish on line before print:
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2015.1044070

Tran, L. T. (2013). *Teaching international students in vocational education and training: New pedagogical approaches.* Camberwell: Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) Press.

Tran, L. T. (2013a). Internationalisation of Vocational Education and Training: A Learning Curve for Teachers and Learners. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 17*(4), 492-507.

Tran, L. T. & Nyland, C. (2011). International vocational education and training - The migration and learning mix. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*. *51* (1), 8-31.

Tran, L. T. (2011). Committed, Face-value, Hybrid or Mutual Adaptation? The experiences of International Students in Higher Education. *Educational Review, 63*(1)*, 79-94.*

Tran, L. T. (2010). Embracing prior professional experience in academic writing: Views from international students and academics. *Educational Review, 62*(2), 157-173. Vertovec, S. (1999). Three meanings of 'diaspora', exemplified among South Asian religions. *Diasporas,* 7(2), 1-37.

Vertovec, S. (2010). Transnationalism and identity. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 27(4), 573-582.

Wiers-Jenssen, J. (2003). Norwegian Students Abroad: experiences of students from a linguistically and geographically peripheral European country. *Studies in Higher Education*, *28*(4), 391-411.

Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, *16*(1), 15-28.