

From international students' perceptions to focused teaching, learning and reflection: An exploration and evaluation of the QUEST Project

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Many researchers, including those linked to major Research Centres (Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2004), Faculties (Doherty & Singh, 2005; Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999), and university-based Teaching and Learning or Academic Skills Units (Hawthorne, Minas, & Singh, 2004; Reidy, 2004) have explored the challenges faced by international students undertaking courses in Australian universities. In order to build on these understandings, the Quality University Enhancement for Students in Transition (QUEST) Project was set up in 2004 by a Nursing lecturer, an Academic Skills Adviser and an Information Literacy specialist as a two stage-project, the first stage being oriented towards research, the second towards learning and teaching. The first phase, completed in Semester 2, 2004, investigated students' perceptions of their studies in the first year of Nursing, using focus groups to do so. In 2005, an ACU Teaching Development Grant enabled the researchers to develop and implement teaching strategies designed to focus on the academic concerns the Nursing students had highlighted, special attention being given to assessment issues. This paper offers both a summary and an evaluation of the Project. It is argued that the teaching of international students in Australian universities requires an understanding of the students' expectations, their previous learning experiences and present difficulties, and that close collaboration between lecturing staff and specialist support services can enhance the experience for students and staff. The place of discipline-based academic support will be examined as specific teaching strategies are discussed.