

Coming together

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Power, rank and intercultural interaction: developing inclusive approaches in higher education

Increasing global migration and interconnectedness presents us with the challenge of finding ways to incorporate diversity and its inherent potential for change. The higher education field exemplifies these global trends as international students from a variety of cultural backgrounds choose to study overseas. One of their important motives in doing so is the opportunity to gain intercultural experiences. Yet consistently they report dissatisfaction with the nature and frequency of their interactions with and among members of the host culture. Educational institutions face losing a lucrative market if they do not pick up the opportunity to engage differently with this diversity. The challenge is to facilitate interactional experiences that will improve working relationships and provide potential for ongoing collaboration between all students and between students and staff of all backgrounds. University of South Australia recognises the potential of inclusivity in developing qualities of global citizenship among all students and is researching critical elements that make a difference. This paper explores alternative interactive strategies being developed at UniSA that explore the effect of differing worldviews on interaction among international and local students and staff. This inclusive model is based on Process Oriented Psychology which emphasises change through increasing awareness among participants. It discusses the critical role of intercultural interaction in developing awareness about cultural assumptions and expectations of themselves and others, and how these shape ongoing and future interactions. Central aspects that have previously received little attention are the role and impact of rank in determining a dominant communication style and how each person's culturally defined understanding of power and rank impact their ability and choices to contribute in any given context.