

## **Developing Inclusive Approaches to Intercultural Dialogue**

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Getting local students to interact with international students at University is tricky. In recent research at UniSA I asked students who had observed the dynamics between these two groups to explain their impressions. Their comments have provided some valuable insights into how the cultural divide is perpetuated along with a range of successful strategies for creating intercultural connections that they had developed.

Throughout the sector little attention has been paid to incorporating the experiences and strategies that local students utilise in their interactions with people from differing cultures. This paper shares some of the experiences as explained by these students and how these have been employed in the classroom to encourage others to develop their interactive capacity with culturally diverse peers.

As part of a Mentor Training Program in February 2010 we trained 70 volunteer mentors in intercultural communication skills to assist them in supporting the commencing students during their first year experience at UniSA. Our aim was to raise awareness of cultural difference and its specific impact on intercultural dialogue on campus in one hour.

We chose to stimulate their interest by making the global cultural context personal and helping students gain greater insight into their position in the cultural composition of Australian society relative to the indigenous Australian experience. From here we explored strategies for connecting interculturality that emerged from within the group itself. The use of these peer experiences turned the normally taboo topic of intercultural dialogue into a safe environment for rich discussion in which the students explored their assumptions and understandings about others.

Feedback from these workshops has highlighted this means of engagement as particularly effective for encouraging personal reflection and future intercultural connections between students.

### **Biography**

Diana Collett is a counsellor at UniSA who is currently undertaking a Professional Doctorate at the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney on the topic of power rank and intercultural interaction. She has a keen interest in developing and disseminating practical approaches that increase awareness in this area.