

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Success through Diversity

Dr Nida Denson from the Centre for Educational Research is exploring the benefits of interactions between students of different cultural backgrounds to seed success in tertiary education. This research has been funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery program.

'Cultural diversity in education is a topic of critical importance both nationally and internationally' says Dr Denson. 'In the higher education sector there is a focus on preparing students to function effectively in increasingly diverse cultural and social settings. Prior research has investigated the effect of cultural diversity and cross-cultural interaction on students' social and intellectual development, but little research has examined why diversity is beneficial and what factors can maximise these benefits. This project will study the cognitive processes through which the benefits of diversity occur and the individual and situational influences that strengthen the relationship between cultural diversity and social and intellectual success.'

Using a combination of surveys, field experiments, and meta-analyses, Dr Denson will explore the cognitive processes that underlie the effects of cross-cultural interactions on critical thinking and the ability to positively interact with others (known as intercultural competence). The research will also test which factors can be manipulated in culturally diverse interactions to improve or adversely affect the students' intercultural competence and critical thinking. The research participants will be university students such as those who are doing business courses in highly culturally diverse environments and in schools of psychology where critical thinking is particularly valued.



Australian higher education is unique in the Western world because of its proximity to Asia and its ability to attract large numbers of international students to its universities. This project will improve the capacity of Australian universities to take advantage of their unique position in encouraging interaction among the next generation of citizens and leaders by cultivating intercultural skills in their graduates. This will contribute to helping Australia to be economically and socially competitive in an increasingly global society.

Project Title: Maximising the benefits of diversity in university through cross-cultural interaction
Funding has been set at: \$328,000 over four years

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