# Teaching international students: the power of conversation

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I do want to go back to basics a little bit here. I’ve taught, up until now, in the Master of Teaching. And the Master Teaching is for people who have an undergraduate in some other area, who have decided they want to go into teaching. And one of the first things we need to do with that cohort of students is find out who they are. And we ask them the question: ‘What gives you the right to intervene in the lives of these children?’ And I usually put up a picture of my own children at that point. Because that’s what they’re going to be doing—going out into schools and teaching children. So they’re going to be taking the role that I’m taking when I standing in front of them.

So we do a lot of exploration around their teacher-learner identity. And in doing that, what that allows for me in terms of information, is that I start to understand 'What’s diversity amongst the cohort?' So I can tell you at a surface level we have—a course where I will teach a unit where I will have: early childhood, primary, secondary teachers all in one room. And international students and local students who are not fee-paying international students, but are still CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] students. So they’re struggling with the cultural shift of coming in to the education system in Australia. I can have people who have come from quite technical undergraduate degrees—so when you ask them to do critical reflection, they say 'But do I write ‘I’ in my essay?' I can have people who have come in from Arts degrees, where they really haven’t had to do much academic writing, and they really struggle around the workload around reading and writing academically.

Now, to create an inclusive curriculum that works for all those people, the only way you can do that is by having a conversation with each and every one of them at some point. So our team works really, really hard. We work really hard with Janet’s team[[1]](#footnote-1) and whatever support that we can get to have those kinds of conversations. I’ve included work that Ben[[2]](#footnote-2) has written for our students because he has a really unique perspective and an interesting insider perspective on diversity and what that means in the teaching situation. So there are layers and layers of conversations that are coming through reading and conversations face-to-face and in classrooms. I’d encourage you—and the technical stuff is amazing, and yes, you should be using it and thinking about it—but don’t under-estimate the power of the conversation or setting up situations where you can have student conferencing face-to-face with people, to really find out what their learning issues may be.

When we put up readings in our units, we ask them two questions: 'What difference will this make to your teaching?' and 'What difference will your knowledge of this reading make to the students that you could be teaching in the future?' And that’s the basis of the type of work that we do.

1. The ASK and SEE team was an academic skills support program—designed specifically for Faculty of Arts and Education students—that operated from 2010 to 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dr Ben Whitburn is a lecturer in the School of Education, whose insider research perspective focuses on disability, vision impairment (VI) and inclusive education. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)