

Small world, big lessons

In today's global marketplace, infusing tertiary education with an international perspective can boost business, create leaders and may well help prevent war.

AS A law student at Bond University, Tina Hunter – now a senior teaching fellow in the Faculty of Law – took part in an exchange to the University of Bergen, Norway. The experience, she says, “radically changed my life.”

Hunter believes international experience is crucial for students to gain personal and professional maturity.

“Since Australia has no common borders and is a huge island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, we have no real international interaction,” she says. “By travelling overseas for study, students get a sense not only of how big the world is, but also of how interconnected it is.”

Today's world order is undergoing a paradigm shift from once-separate and autonomous communities to what we now experience as truly interconnected economies, cultures, nations and individuals. What does this mean for the way we relate to one another, study, do business and resolve conflict?

Hunter's colleague and Bond University's Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, Professor Raoul Mortley, believes that understanding global connections and “moving away from the narrow confines of the nation state” are important elements of contemporary education.

“Global education is about interconnectedness,” he says. “In a previous generation it was more about imposing perspectives and approaches. Now, it is about receiving messages and looking for difference where there is apparent similarity.”

The bell tolls for thee

‘Interconnectedness’ is a word the world's education thought-leaders enjoy using today. Doctor Merry Merryfield, for example, Professor of Social Studies and Global Education at Ohio State University's School of Teaching and Learning, equates an understanding of our interconnectedness with the concept of global education.

In a recent interview with online education resource ‘Outreach World’, Merryfield differentiated between ‘international studies’, which she described as including “the study of countries and world regions, languages, international relations, international exchanges and study abroad,” and ‘global education’, which

“teaches students to see the world through multiple perspectives of diverse people and purposefully addresses stereotypes of The Other.”

But business leader and Bond alumnus David Millhouse finds such distinctions irrelevant to business practice.

“This is jargon,” he insists. “Whether it's ‘global education’ or ‘international studies’, that's just academic.”

However, on the importance of getting a global education – regardless of the language used to define it – both academics and entrepreneurs agree: it is crucial.

“In practical terms,” says Millhouse, “which you have to be when you are CEO, interconnectivity or networking or however you choose to define it comes out of an understanding of differences, a respect for them, and a thirst for knowledge that comes out of that.”

Millhouse says this ‘thirst for knowledge’ is critical to building international connections, adding, “international networking is a derivative of an underlying intellectual desire.”

And according to Mortley, a thirst for knowledge is alive and well among Bond's student body. “We find that students actually know the importance of a global education and seek out disciplines such as international relations or international marketing, which give them a worldwide perspective,” he says.

Human beings have long understood that their ‘interconnectedness’ stretches well beyond their personally experienced community. When Renaissance poet and theologian John Donne penned the words ‘No man is an island’ in his ‘Meditation XVII’, his wonderful expression of global connectivity inspired generations of poets from Ernest Hemmingway to Simon & Garfunkel.

‘All mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated...’ Donne insisted, more than 500 years ago. Therefore, ‘Ask not for whom the bell tolls,’ he challenged the world, ‘it tolls for thee’.

Few today would disagree with this sentiment; in fact, it is truer now than at any time in history. The advents of air travel, the World Wide Web and global broadcast capabilities have brought human beings closer together than we have ever been.