Internationalisation and the Student Experience
Edited by Wendy Miller

PedRIO paper 5

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Introduction

In December 2013 PedRIO, in collaboration with Plymouth University’s Faculty of Business and English Language Centre, held a one-day conference on Internationalisation and the Student Experience. The conference attracted 140 participants from across the UK and Europe, including leading academics, practitioners and students, providing a forum for intensive discussion on this highly topical issue for higher education. For the full list of conference paper and workshop presentations see page 34.

This PedRIO Occasional Paper presents eight extended paper summaries with their key findings. These reflect the breadth of the internationalisation agenda, and provide an example of the range and high quality of contributions. The conference was framed around five themes:

- The student experience of internationalization
- Creating an international curriculum
- Transnational education
- English language teaching and support
- The business of internationalisation: recruitment, admissions, strategies and partnerships.

Particular highlights included Dr Sheila Trahar’s keynote on internationalisation strategy, Kevin van Cauter’s insights into the role of the British Council, and Professor Troy Heffernan’s inaugural lecture on Transnational Education, “Navigating a Complex Future”.

One particularly noteworthy feature of the conference was the contributions from delegates who co-presented with their students, and the presentation from a group of medical students who had researched the induction experience of the first year through analysis of student diaries, which challenged the assumptions made by academic staff about the experience of their students in the first few weeks. This growth in the presentation of student experience research where students are partners and co-producers of the research is very welcome. Student delegates were active participants in the discussions following each presentation.

Feedback from delegates and presenters reflected the current topicality and importance of the internationalisation agenda across the 20 universities and colleges represented at the conference. All participants are warmly thanked for their contributions to every aspect of the day.

Professor Pauline Kneale,
Director of PedRIO
Pro-Vice Chancellor Teaching and Learning
Supporting Asian Postgraduate students: An exploratory study to understand the key factors influencing Asian students’ learning styles and inhibiting their performance.

Christine Comrie, Faculty of Business and Law, University of the West of England (UWE)

The growth in international students studying in the UK has been substantial and the British Council estimates this growth will continue to be dominated by ‘Asian’ students (Li et al., 2009). Joy and Kolb (2009) suggest cultural differences lead to diverse learning approaches which may impact performance in a different academic context. Furthermore, ‘Asian’ students are seen as a “problem” by some staff (Kelly and Moogan 2012). Ryan and Louie (2007) purport many lecturers are unsure of how to meet these students’ needs. Universities are tasked with ensuring international students are not disadvantaged whilst maintaining the academic rigour that attracts people to Higher Education in the UK. Therefore it is important that we recognise any barriers faced by international learners which may negatively impact on their performance and ability to reach their potential. As potential future advocates, it is essential to support and nurture international students and to satisfy their specific needs.

An exploratory study was carried out to investigate these issues at UWE, with the context of the research based on the different learning approaches reported for Western and Eastern learners. These were, as summarised by Confucius, “I transmit but do not create. I place my trust in the teachings of antiquity.” (Ratcliffe 2012: 7), and by Socrates, as the representative of the Western learning style, “I shall not teach him, only ask him and he shall share the enquiry with me” (Trahar 2011: 31). The concept of deep versus surface learning was also considered as summed up by Ezra Pound: “Real education must ultimately be limited to men who insist on knowing. The rest is mere sheep herding.” (Ratcliffe 2012: 114).

With growing numbers of students studying at the University of the West of England, and with internationalisation as a key part of the university strategy, the research was designed to consider how to provide timely and appropriate support for direct entry international students who are likely to be UWE’s future advocates. This research was interpretivist and involved semi-structured interviews focusing on postgraduate ‘Asian’ students studying marketing at UWE. The aim was to understand barriers to learning and to identify areas where students could be better supported in a more targeted fashion. The impact of learning approaches, culture and other factors such as language and staff attitudes is explored in qualitative semi-structured interviews to deepen the understanding of these barriers. The output of this understanding is to recommend a better approach to meeting these needs during the three stages of their educational journey: pre-arrival; induction and on-going.

The findings in the main concur with previous research in this area but suggest that embedded home academic culture has the greatest impact on potential performance. This is slowly changing with this generation of students differing from their parents in terms of formative academic experience. Categorising students as ‘Asian’ following the British
Council classifications is too broad to enable specific understanding of the unique learning approaches and barriers faced by different cultural groups.

Specific findings of this research included that the main motivation for study in the UK was that, in order to get a good job in their home market, they needed a Master’s degree; one from the UK would give them competitive advantage over their peers. With the exception of the Chinese students, Confucius was felt to be relatively unimportant although ‘face’ (dignity/honour) was an issue that all recognised and this became more prominent when they were out of their comfort zone in the UK.

As noted above, academic culture has a strong impact on students and there is perceived to be one main academic culture and teaching style within Asian higher education. The majority of those questioned stated that teachers just follow the text book and many did not have any business experience. Students are generally reluctant to ask questions because of the worry about losing ‘face’ and also because it is not the norm. Although many lecturers are becoming more willing for debate and questioning in seminars/lectures, this is not the case in schools which leads to students who are conditioned to be quiet, passive receivers of information.

Apart from those studying at international universities, the prevalent teaching method was lectures. Teachers write answers on the blackboard and students are supposed to copy and learn them, and the classes are often very big. As a result of expectations and the teaching style, students become passive learners stating that there is so much information to be conveyed that there is no time to question it. Furthermore, the desire to pass exams means that surface learning techniques are used as the key motivation is to get the certification in order to get a good job: “Learn by heart ... that is how you can pass exam because we need certification only." (Comrie 2013: 19).

Furthermore, the teachers’ expectation is that the students copy theory exactly and do not have their own opinions which fits with the Confucian model stated above. “They do not want your opinion in the paper ... Don’t have an opinion, just copy it to get a good mark.” (Comrie 2013: 19). As such it would be difficult for students to analyse as is expected in the UK. The difference was expressed clearly by one respondent: “The teachers in Vietnam provide you with the information and the English teachers show you the way to get the answer.” (Comrie 2013: 16)

This difference in approach, and the silence that many UK lecturers complain of, was felt by the student to be a result of indoctrination. Furthermore, language, particularly academic discourse, added to the challenges that direct entrant international students faced. Subject-specific terminology and the difference between formal and colloquial English caused problems, as did the issue of ‘face’ which prevented students from speaking up in class for fear of their English being ridiculed. Often, even when they knew the answers, they could not find the correct words quickly enough to contribute earlier than a home student.

In conclusion, the findings concur with most literature in this area and the researcher further found that home-country academic culture had the greatest impact on students’ learning approaches. Added to this, the primary motivation of obtaining the certification tends to lead to a more passive and rote learning approach. It will be important to coach students in analytical analysis to ensure that they are able to perform well in the UK.
Other key inhibitors to learning are illustrated in Figure 1 below:

![Figure 1. Key inhibitors to direct entrant international student learning (Comrie 2013: 22)](image)

**Recommendations**

The findings provide a focus for future larger scale research projects. They also provide guidance for actions to enhance the international student experience at UWE. The central recommendation is to develop an holistic and coordinated approach to the students’ journey through the university from the first moment of contact to when they become alumni. An embedded support package rather than a bolt-on approach is recommended. The research therefore recommends that inhibitors can be addressed pre arrival, at induction and ongoing, suggesting that at each stage relevant support measures can be put in place.

Pre-arrival students were unclear as to what they would be studying and on how to prepare before arrival. This represents an opportunity to set expectations by giving students a clear view about managing the different teaching approaches.

At induction, students focus on immediate issues such as timetables and as such cannot process the academic information, thus possibly missing key information. Academic personal tutors can help, as can scaffolded learning using online study techniques.

On an ongoing basis, timetabling sessions couched in terms suggesting that attendance will lead to success may eliminate gaps in knowledge/skills. Furthermore, module leaders need to set clear expectations, give essential versus recommended reading, clearly state the key points from each lecture and endeavour to integrate home and international students. This
integration can be achieved by academics recognizing the value of having different ways of thinking in a group, and by them stressing this value to the home students.

Importantly the research illustrates that internationalization is not just about international students adapting but rather a two way process involving both international and home students/staff, a fact that needs to be emphasized from the top down in order to encourage this view.

References


International study visits and the promotion of intercultural capabilities

Valerie Huggins, Institute of Education, Plymouth University

Having been on several international study visits to The Gambia, the potential became clear of these visits to widen student teachers’ learning about cultural diversity, and so preparing them to work in the increasingly diverse world of the 21st century (Buczynski et al. 2010). It is essential that student teachers are prepared to respond positively and sympathetically to children and families whose way of life, beliefs and attitudes may differ significantly from their own (Carter Dillon and Huggins 2010). But it is now recognised that the ‘multicultural’ approach, celebrating and valuing the differences between cultures on the basis of learning facts about them, is inadequate. Walters et al. (2009) argue that what is needed is the development of intercultural capabilities such as sensitivity to cultural differences, a questioning of one’s own beliefs and values about cultures and a recognition that one’s own world-views are not universally held. In turn, teachers themselves need to be able to promote such capabilities within the children they teach in a deliberate and focused way (Huggins 2013). All this involves a shift away from a ‘soft’ global citizenship approach to a ‘hard’ critical literacy which Vanessa Andreotti promotes in her work (Andreotti 2006; Andreotti 2011; de Souza and Andreotti 2007).

I had anticipated that the visits to The Gambia would be hugely beneficial in developing students’ intercultural capabilities and yet I was left disappointed and puzzled as to why this was not necessarily happening. So in my doctoral research I set out to investigate to what extent intercultural capabilities were being promoted within the international study visits that are available to the students. Perry and Southwell (2011) provide a very useful review of the literature on intercultural capabilities. They suggest that most authors agree that these capabilities comprise a set of cognitive, behavioural and affective skills and characteristics that will support sensitive, effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts. An interculturally-capable person:

- Adapts quickly to new cultural circumstances
- Has a positive attitude and curiosity about other cultures
- Is willing to see someone else’s point of view
- Can understand perspectives of people from another culture
- Is knowledgeable about aspects of different cultures

Many writers in this area, for example Bennett (2009) and Deardorff (2006), see the development of such intercultural capabilities as a process, and suggest that we move through various stages from ethnocentrism to ethno-relativity as we respond to different intercultural situations. However, the findings of my study indicate that this is unlikely to happen through simple exposure to cultural difference; other factors are important.
The first is that there has to be a willingness and a desire to achieve such intercultural competence on the part of the participants. My research with the students suggests that their major motivation to go on an international study visit or placement is what one could term ‘selfish’ ambition. Under pressure to improve their academic credentials through extracurricular activities (Buczynski et al. 2010), they see an international experience as an opportunity to enhance their CV and demonstrate to future employers that they are willing to take on a challenge, especially if they are planning on working abroad when they qualify. They also see it as a way of adding to their professional skills as teachers by learning about new cultures and ways of life. They are therefore little prepared for the ‘unlearning’ (Andreotti 2011) and the potential changing of deeply-held attitudes and beliefs that is a part of achieving intercultural capabilities. Without this, there is a danger that the visit becomes a form of ‘development tourism’, underpinned by a neo-colonialist paradigm, in which information and experiences are collected with little respect for the host culture.

A second factor is that the underpinning approach to international study visits, and so their pedagogy, is often experiential, and the literature (e.g. Phillion and Malewski 2011) strongly suggests that experience alone is not enough to develop intercultural capabilities. For example, there were frequent examples of students having painful or disturbing experiences while in The Gambia but these were not used as a basis for reflection to help them make meaningful sense of the cultural encounter and its relationship with teaching. The students’ interpretation of experiences was highly individual and any confirmation of stereotypes and prejudices about African poverty or even inferiority were often left unchallenged. Martin et al.’s (2011) Global Sites for Mutual Learning ESRC project, argues that the experiential model is problematic. Instead of extending and enhancing learning, trips organised on this basis may well be confirmative of existing attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices unless work is done beforehand to deconstruct the students’ current worldviews. This process also involves making connections with the socio-historical processes that have shaped our contexts and cultures and the constructions of our knowledge and identities.

This study has therefore led me to make several recommendations about the pattern and practice of international study visits if they are to contribute to the effective promotion of intercultural capabilities. It is vital to decide upon the purpose of such visits. Are they simply ‘enrichment’ activities for those who are able and willing to go? If so, then what we currently do is providing just that. If, however, they are seen as part of the planned programme of teaching and learning, then there needs to be some shifts in our practice. For example, the reflective process can be specifically targeted using critical incidents as a starting point, as advocated by Bruster and Peterson (2012).

As tutors we ourselves need to develop our understanding and expertise in promoting intercultural capabilities which at present is not given the necessary prominence when planning and leading international study visits. Part of this is learning to provide experiences which challenge and shake up existing ideas, preconceptions and beliefs (Brock and Wallace 2006). In their significant contribution to this field, Andreotti and de Souza (2008) see this as an essential element in the first stage of developing intercultural capabilities - learning to unlearn. The consequent disequilibrium is often disturbing and discomforting but if it is not to result in rejection of new ideas, or even the reinforcement of existing stereotypes, then this disequilibrium needs to be contained and supported, then resolved through discussion and reflection.
Thus careful pre-trip, in-trip and post-trip planning is essential with agreed learning goals and with tutors who are prepared to challenge students’ perceptions and to promote an ethical engagement with the ‘other’. The development of intercultural capabilities needs to be made explicit to the students, with clear links made to their future professional practice in teaching in diverse classrooms and to helping them to promote in turn the intercultural capabilities of the children.

References


Language skills and employability: future directions
Matt Lawrence, INTO, University of Exeter

Introduction
Growing interest in employability among international students has recently led to considerable expansion of this area for The Insessional Programme at The University of Exeter. Careers advisers’ practice at Exeter and higher education literature (see Pegg et al., 2012) have been highly influential in the creation of a recent series of ‘language for employability’ workshops. Nevertheless, how English language practitioners can also share their perspectives on practice seems worthy of further exploration. This paper therefore considers a recent professional development workshop aimed at careers advisers to look at employability from a language perspective.

Methodology
After carrying out an informal needs analysis at a previous meeting, I invited a group of six careers advisers at the University of Exeter to a one-hour workshop regarding written language issues. The session incorporated theoretical insights from English language teaching and employability. I also introduced examples of both CVs and covering letters from published materials and students at Exeter. I sought permission from the students prior to sharing these documents and, in return, offered a summary of feedback given by the careers advisers.

The content of the workshop
In order to address the careers advisers’ concerns, the workshop began by eliciting the main language issues faced when dealing with international students and relating this to perceptions of language. A significant concern related to students’ expectations that careers advisers would proofread their application and the struggle of careers advisers to make sense of their writing within the short time available to them in their meetings. A narrow view of language may argue that a remedial language clinic, dictionaries or a spellchecker can solve these problems and ‘tidy up’ errors. However, as Turner (2004, 2011) emphasises, such conceptions of language at universities may trivialise the constitutive role that language plays in its contribution to content knowledge. Applying this to the present context, I also argue that linguistic, cognitive and socio-cultural learning opportunities are embedded in the language of employability.

Opportunities to develop linguistic and socio-cultural learning were considered through the examination of a student’s CV. Engaging the careers advisers with language correction incorporating metalanguage such as collocation, dependent preposition or relative pronoun foregrounded discussion on the potential applications to their practice including: raising students’ awareness on linguistic features; noticing useful language; as well as recognising and classifying their common errors. The cultural appropriacy of personal anecdotes on CVs was also questioned, which seemed more indicative of challenges in understanding a

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1 Insessional at Exeter provides English language and academic literacy support. This is available to all international students studying at the University.
different communication style than an issue of language proficiency (Marra 2013). In the sample CV, the student illustrates her teaching experience and gives pupils crying for her at the airport as evidence of being an influential teacher. This led to a discussion on how best to advise students on both providing a more relevant example as well as the appropriate use of language to illustrate this.

In terms of cognitive learning, the careers advisers participated in a task to critique a sample covering letter (originally aimed at students). Seven key attributes for graduates from higher education (Kneale 2009) were considered, including: critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, decision-making, personal effectiveness and commercial awareness. I emphasised that if the meaning of these words is constituted through language and experience, specific language development opportunities with authentic language of employability may well be required, particularly for international students. After the careers advisers identified the target ideas in the covering letter, I introduced the terms noticing, relevance, sufficiency and organisation of ideas. However, the most salient theme in the particular example I used was an apology for being a non-native speaker with temporary resident status. The letter subjugates and ‘others’ (Pennycook 2001) its author. In discussing how to deal with this, we agreed that encouraging students to think critically and creatively author a positive yet honest letter was essential. I suggested that empirical studies which confirm the positive perceptions of international experience for graduate employability (e.g. Crossman and Clarke 2010) can also inspire students on this task, countering negativity. My aim was thus to draw attention to the numerous cognitive learning elements which intersect with language work.

The workshop also looked at explicit support with planning such as mind-mapping and strategies for interpreting job descriptions or candidate criteria, which both English language teachers and careers advisers stated they were actively involved in. It was also agreed that although style guides, lists of expressions, action verbs or positive adjectives are helpful to share with students, guidance on how to make use of such resources is fundamental. As Marra (2013:180) summarises: “there are increasing calls to encourage learners to develop analytic skills rather than teaching particular formulae or strategies.”

Feedback on the workshop from careers advisers

Qualitative anonymised feedback was given by four of the participants, three of whom mentioned that looking at analysis of errors in the session was most useful. Participant 1 highlighted the focus on meta-language as most relevant. Participant 2 valued looking at “the difference between correcting and showing students how to understand”. Similarly, Participant 3 stated that “how best to help students, not just correct” and an awareness of common errors were of most benefit. Participant 4 responded that it was useful to “look at the theory behind practical advice” and consider their practice “from a slightly different perspective”. Participant 2 suggested that one hour was insufficient to fully cover these issues. These comments are certainly encouraging in terms of future potential for collaboration.

Future discussions

In a future workshop with careers advisers, I intend to consider how best to exploit frameworks such as VIPER - Values, Intelligence, Performance, Engagement and Reflection.
(Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011). VIPER has proven to be a helpful mnemonic, enabling students to better articulate their emerging professional identities. Research by Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011: 571) examining employers’ perceptions can be illuminative in terms of the implications for language choices and examples provided by students in their applications. Noticing that 98.1% of employers in a given sample expect to see evidence of honesty and integrity on a first encounter prompted considerable reflection by students on how to demonstrate such values through their future applications.

**Conclusion**

Given the importance of employability to students and the increasing internationalisation of universities, collaboration between careers professionals and English language practitioners can significantly enrich practice. I believe that helping (especially international) students to notice, plan, analyse and critique language can enhance employability with cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural learning benefits. Both careers professionals and English language practitioners can bring complementary perspectives helping students as they articulate, envision and navigate their transition from education to employment.

**Bibliography**


An exploration of perceptions of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies on intercultural group interactions and how they impact on learning and teaching in higher education

Anne Lawrie, School of Education, University of Stirling

Exploring the perceptions and use of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies in intercultural group interactions is the focus of this paper. The data presented are limited to transcriptions of semi-structured interviews from Home, European and Chinese students which were collected at the beginning and end of their first ten-week semester of study. The participants in this small-scale study were full-time postgraduate students.

The interview questions concentrated on exploring the students’ perceptions in four main areas as they experienced working in multicultural groups for the first time. The data reflect responses from the participants after four and ten weeks of study. Their initial four weeks of study involved working in groups which comprised mainly Chinese students whereas after ten weeks of study they experienced working in multicultural groups which were not dominated by Chinese students.

**Verbal and Non-verbal Communication**

Initially, all the participants were aware of their use or lack of use of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies. The most common comment from the Home and European participants about the Chinese students was “a lack of facial expression” (S9) and “a lack of body language” (S7) The Chinese students were aware that when they spoke Mandarin it was not common to use verbal or body strategies so noticed that the Home and European students “tend to use body language. Their face have much expression, they smile” (S6) and that they “laughed out loud and used their hands and face when they were speaking” (S2, S4). The Home and European students were aware of doing this and explained that they did it to try and get a reaction from the Chinese members of their group.

After 10 weeks of study, verbal and non-verbal behaviour changed during group work. The Home and European students were more conscious of “nodding more” (S3, S7, S8, S9) and “showing I’m interested more” (S3) and they were aware that “they [Chinese students] are laughing more” (S7, S9). The Chinese students were aware of “using more eye contact when speaking English” (S2, S6) and “smiling more” (S4, S5, S6).

**Feelings**

Initially, the lack of reaction from the Chinese students caused the Home and European participants to feel angry and frustrated, particularly as they had tasks to complete as part of their group assessment:

“I never felt more angry in my life, you know, we got given this big sheet of paper and this A4 bit of paper with instructions, and I read it all to them and there was just silence, and I, and I, I was so ‘Ohhh, I’m going to explode!’” (S9).
The Chinese students tended to be “comfortable” (S4) and happy because they were working with native speakers or students whose English they perceived as being better than their own. Politeness was considered the reason why there was a lack of communication from the Home and European students: “Sometime they are too polite. Yeh, I think it’s a good thing but sometimes they are too polite to communicate with me.” (S4).

At the end of the first semester, the increase in the amount of interaction among the participants as they worked in groups not dominated by Chinese students tended to result in more positive comments, particularly from the Home and European participants: “communication was so much easier and so much better”; “it was good” (S3, S9) and from the Chinese students: “good … locals encouraged you” but also “others didn’t want to work with you” (S4).

**Roles within the multi-cultural groups**

Initially, the Home and European participants realised they were being viewed as the leader or the expert in their group simply because of their perceived fluency in English. Being used to mono-cultural group work, they assumed each person would choose a task and complete it. Requests, for example, “would you like to …” and “what about if you did this …” (S3, S7) did not appear to get any response:

“… I don’t know if it was … probably was it a mixture of kind of tone of voice and hand gestures, em, so I just had to be like ‘Right, so I’m going to give you this, and you’ve got 5 minutes to do it, and then come back to me’, but they responded better to that than me being a bit more … so I think maybe a mixtures of cultures, and they saw me as this leader figure, that they were waiting for a, for somebody to tell them what to do, then they were responsive, whereas if you tried to be ‘Oh we’re all …’, you know, ‘we’re all equal here’, they didn’t really respond to that, I think they preferred to have a dominant figure, and they didn’t want to do anything until I’d specifically said ‘Do this.’” (S9).

The Chinese participants appeared to have been unaware of this: “we are all the same and we discuss, maybe one organise the meeting” (S5). However, when asked who the leader of the group was, the response was “a native speaker” (S5).

After ten weeks of study, the participants had experience of working in groups both dominated and not dominated by Chinese students. This appeared to impact more on the Home and European participants who found it hard not to be looked upon as the group leader. It was “difficult … I went from being a leader to we didn't have a leader” (S9). As the participants were being assessed as a group, the shared group responsibility meant they felt they had less control over the output and that caused them concern.

**Nationalities they would choose to work with**

As none of the participants had experience of working or studying with other nationalities, the initial four weeks of working in multi-cultural groups presented mainly negative comments. Initially, the Home and European participants “definitely wouldn't choose an Asian group” (S3); “would choose anybody but the Chinese students” (S8); and would prefer to work with “two friends from Stirling” (S9). The Chinese participants, on the other hand, tended to be more positive and “would like to sit with native speakers” (S6, S5); “[students]
who work hard" (S4) and “Canadian … Scottish … and if there is a Chinese who can accompany me that's better” (S2).

By the end of their first semester, the participants had experienced working in groups both dominated and not dominated by Chinese students. Their responses were quite different from their initial ones, in that the Home and European participants would like to work in groups that were "mixed but with at least one other home student" (S9, S7), with only one participant remaining adamant that “I would choose anybody but the Chinese students” (S8). The Chinese responses were similar to those of the Home and European participants but included “… only those that work hard” (S4).

What changed over the 10 week period?

Encouragingly, the Home and European participants felt they “learned how to adapt when working with International students” (S9) and that by underlining “verbal with non-verbal when interacting with other nationalities” better feedback is produced (S3). The Chinese participants appeared to adopt more verbal and non-verbal communication strategies and as a result felt they were included more in group work: “if they [non-Chinese] see in my face that I don't understand, they will use their gestures and some easy words to make me understand” (S2, S4).

Implications so far …

This research has several key implications for developing internationalisation in UK higher education. Notably:

- An awareness of verbal and non-verbal behaviour appears to improve interactions within multi-cultural groups
- Students appear to prefer to work in mixed nationality groups, as long as one other member is of their nationality
- In mixed-nationality groups where the predominant nationality is Chinese, Home and European students should adopt the role of group leader or expert.

Conclusion

The preliminary findings suggest that an awareness of verbal and non-verbal behaviour and a consideration of the mix of nationalities within multi-cultural group work increases interaction. This would appear to contribute to some of the goals of Internationalisation in higher education being met, for example, maximising and enhancing the learning experience of all students during their studies (British Council, 2010:1).

Bibliography


A 'Roller Coaster' experience? An exploration of postgraduate international students' perceptions of teaching, learning and assessment, integration with home students and building a campus community.

Tomasz John, University of the Creative Arts

**Background**

The internationalisation of higher education tends to be theorised in the literature at the organisational, strategic level or to focus on the growing numbers of 'international students'; there are very few comprehensive investigations of the interactions between international students and academics (Brunner, 2006). Much of research carried out in this area examines the experiences of students from one particular location (usually China); compares the experiences of students from particular culture with those of another, or offers an assessment of internationalisation strategies developed by institutions. There are, however, more and more in-depth studies, which make use of stories from the field and accounts of the experience of both students and practitioners dealing with internationalisation (Sawir 2013; Trahar and Hyland 2011; Trahar 2011, 2010, 2007; Montgomery 2009). Such research attempts to explore the complexities of interactions between international students and home students, and international students and academics, in the constantly changing intercultural higher education landscape. It also highlights a strong need for cultural sensitivity in pedagogical approaches. Lecturers and students often assume that intercultural learning happens automatically, without effort on the part of learners and teachers. The experiences of international students or home students studying with international learners and lecturers teaching international students are, therefore, receiving growing attention.

This paper is derived from my doctoral research, which aims to contribute to an understanding of the international student experience from the perspectives of teaching, learning and assessment as well as social participation. It presents an analysis of focus groups with postgraduate international students as a part of a wider case study carried out at an English university, which draws on the views of international students, home students and staff. Emerging themes from the focus groups were mapped onto the research questions in order to elicit students' views on: teaching, learning and assessment; their experiences with student support services and integration with home students; and the building of a campus community.

**Teaching, learning and overall experience**

Students discussed both positive experiences and areas where there was room for development within the themes of teaching, learning and assessment. Some reported that they had chosen to study at a UK university in order to broaden their horizons. They genuinely embraced the huge gap between different education systems and found the new challenge exciting and enjoyable. In addition, some students commented on how much they enjoy feedback given in tutorials, something that the majority of them had not been familiar with prior to starting their educational adventure in the UK. Several also shared that they loved being treated as individuals as opposed one of many like in their previous educational settings. Furthermore, when asked about the content of the curriculum, most students admitted it was already international in nature and that they appreciated how tutors tailored
the programmes to different students’ needs. Some recognised the value of being exposed to international staff and professionals from various industries too:

“Even though our main tutor is British, he will always show examples from different countries, because I have classmates from Colombia, China, India and America. So, I think it is a good thing for us, because I believe that I learn a lot, each time we talk, and it is a new experience for me. I can get inspiration from the different examples from around the world” (Jim).

What needs to be mentioned is the fact that some of the students had attended a pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course prior to embarking on their main course of study and then used the in-sessional EAP support offered via student services. Most of them agreed that if they had not attended these courses that the start of their MA would have been more challenging. Nonetheless, several students reported difficulties with understanding tutors, especially at the beginning of the course.

Above all, the majority of students felt the assessment was fair, as many assignments, presentations, critiques, ‘pitches’, and assessment in general, were evaluated by more than one tutor; as a result they felt confident that this process was fair and reliable.

Nevertheless, overall feedback from students could be placed on a continuum: at one end, students deemed their experience ‘excellent’; at the other end they criticized some aspects of the courses. Some students thought that the learning support the university provided for students was insufficient; they felt uncomfortable asking for help as they felt, or even were told, that the support was limited and relied heavily on part time or sessional lecturers. Further, during the period of data collection, student services and the library were undergoing a restructure, giving rise to some concern among international students that they would not be able to access appropriate levels of support during the summer while finishing their dissertation.

Another major area of disagreement concerned the final MA show in which students presented their dissertation projects in an exhibition. Some students complained about the time of year, choice of venue and lack of close friends and family who would visit the final show, as well as the lack of any professional advertising campaign to attract visitors:

“Not many people come to our shows, mainly students' family and friends. I really think we need more opportunities to advertise the event so that people can visit it. When I was a student in Japan, when I graduated, I had three shows, one was on the campus, and one was in a national museum, one in another modern gallery that was really nice. When I displayed my work in external venues, some people noticed me; it's easier for making connections, networking." (Lena).

Moreover, there was a certain level of dissatisfaction with the organisation of the courses involving: late inductions into certain technical areas of the university; lack of a friendly learning environment due to sharing space with students from other courses; limited technician support in specialist areas (workshops) during summer holiday; and long handbooks with difficult language and an inability to find or understand information in them. Students were mostly annoyed by the visa restrictions and the fact they were not able to graduate alongside some of their peers, as to be able to do that, they would need to go back home, re-apply for a visa and then come back for the graduation ceremony, which was problematic and prohibitively expensive for most of the students.
Integration with home students and building campus community

Some students reported that they belong to virtual communities on Facebook or twitter, for example, Taiwanese, Thai societies or campus-specific Facebook groups on which they share ideas, experiences and provide support to smaller national or campus communities and can use their mother tongue when they feel homesick. Students use this platform as a way of disseminating, for example, what is happening in the area or interesting events at the university. However, some of these groups do not have administrators so the information might be inconsistent, and some students suggested that the Student Union or other university service could run these groups. They thought it would be better to belong to a group with both international and home students, which would enable at least virtual communication. In terms of integration, the majority of international students have bonded very well in their own international groups as they meet regularly, travel together; their favourite activity is cooking and trying different international cuisines.

The major challenge identified by the majority of students in all four focus groups was in regards to communication with home students. Students thought that the dynamics between different groups caused some issues in the area of collaboration, both in the classroom and outside. International students acknowledged that sometimes they think that home students are fed up with working with international students, as it requires more effort to understand them. They commented that home students are not equipped with the strategies necessary to collaborate with students using English as a language of wider communication. All students agreed that this interaction should be somehow facilitated by the University through integration activities at the beginning of the course.

Because of the fact that the majority of students on postgraduate courses are international, some students expressed concern about the lack of opportunities to practise English, especially since some courses tend to attract students sharing the same language. They all agreed that collaboration with other MA or even BA students or any home students, facilitated by the tutors would expand international postgraduate students’ circles of friends and improve their opportunities for learning.

In addition, some students said they felt isolated from the main campus building as their course was based in a separate building 15 minutes’ walk away from the main campus. However, in this particular instance, the course leaders were considering a change of location and moving the course to a different campus.

Regardless of the fact that the Student Union organised a number of events and parties for all students, some students felt that these were mainly targeted at undergraduate or home students on the grounds that these events usually included loud music and alcohol. Students added that tutors did not disseminate information about events, nor was the information too visible on the campus. Regardless of a number of SU societies and clubs on different campuses, the students claimed they would rather go to a subject specialist club where they could discuss programme-related topics. A number of students reported they attend a Christian Club, as its members are very understanding; they appreciate the fact that international students are listened to and respected, and the opportunities offered for improving their English in reading and interpreting a simplified international version of the Bible.
And finally, even though students expressed a desire for greater integration with BA students, some complained about the ‘busy’ lifestyles of foundation and undergraduate students living in the same halls, highlighting a potential mismatch of expectations between the two different cohorts of students.

“I feel that my English is not improving a lot, sorry! It doesn’t matter if we are Asian or international, but it’s like that, really. And the other thing is that UK postgraduate home students are nice and polite but we don’t meet quite often as they have their personal lives, they commute to work, they have no time for socialising. In our accommodation there are mostly international students” (Marina).

What’s next and conclusion

These findings have formed the basis for discussion for the next stage of the research, i.e. focus groups with SU, home students and academics as a means of finding ways in which improvements might be achieved at the target university and more widely.

Responding to diverse students' needs around internationalisation has become a significant issue for university professionals working both directly and indirectly with students. Therefore, this study aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the impact of developments on both students and staff as a tool to maximise, and benefit from, the opportunities for intercultural learning. By exploring the students' varied needs and the relation between academic success and social participation, this research will hopefully have implications for the effectiveness of teaching and learning, as well as for curricular and extra-curricular activities and finally, for the integration of international and home students inside and beyond the lecture room.

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Integrative internationalisation: discipline and interaction in articulation

Rupert Waldron, University of the Arts, London

Most commonly within the literature (e.g. Crowther et al. 2000, Leask 2005), curriculum internationalisation aims at an equitable study environment for all students and preparation for global citizenship. I would suggest that integrating these aims with an emphasis on epistemological rigour can help interaction research through identification of patterns amongst students, and persuade staff and students of its relevance as a learning outcome. I support this with data from fashion media.

There is a body of theory in moving towards disciplinary internationalisation, with, for instance, sustained critical analysis of the extent to which many conceptions of ‘fashion’ itself encode exclusions of groups constructed as non-Western (Niessen et al. 2003), or how media culture itself embodies and reproduces representational biases (Dowling and Husband 2005).

The data (from audio-visual recording) are from a group of female students collaborating on a story for a magazine of their choice (set and taught independently of the researcher). There are two white British, a Hong Kong Chinese, a Taiwanese, an Egyptian, an Indian and a Tibetan national. I mention ethnicity not as a priori relevant, but because it becomes so.

They are strange data on the one hand, a crazy fantasy, but as Bird (2003) suggests, creative interpretations form useful audience response data, both to access concealed discourses, and also to consider reception as action. Pedagogically, it also allows investigation of students’ active-productive-reception of curricula entering into their joint constructions of identity and difference, and thus suggesting interventions.

The students chose adaptation as the theme. A ‘tribal’ woman leaves the jungle for the city, learning to adapt her clothing and bodily habitus, leaving an aggressive or a shy comportment for a measured, feminine, ‘fashion’, educated one in an adaptation likened to that of various animals.

The sources of the idea are manifold, from the internet to the Tibetan stylist’s pattern choices. Indeed, a home student mistakenly represents these as Tibetan in origin, imagining the concept to emerge from the pre-London dress past of a group member. One source is the magazine’s editorial (Golsorkhi 2013), the theme of which suggests, simplistically, that the fashion consumption of Chinese and Russian consumers post-Communism (and, in illustration, Muslims) proves the capitalist model of Western Europe to be a universal human destiny.

This sets the tone for a magazine with the mainstream Western fashion’s problem with black and ethnic minorities. There are few black models, almost only in a story where they figure as ethnic representatives: a European brand educating Africans within Africa in fashion business models, on the one hand, and on the other, within Europe, realising a classic narrative of a rural refugee model discovery by the urban West. The story bills itself as an empowering alternative to the stereotypical media representations, but frames Africans only within European normativity. That it is stereotypical, and internationally so, is attested to by
Li’s (1998) discussion of an exactly equivalent narrative of fashion model discovery as the entry into urban modernity in a Chinese soap, constructing, like the magazine, fashion, post-Mao, as Westernisation and universal hegemonic destiny/aspiration.

In the play of experimentation, the story becomes at times extremely problematic, with students laughing together at Zulu dancers, for instance, with ridiculous stylised voodoo and American Indian sounds, self-constituting as group over against the Other, mediated through the project and the reactionary politics of the magazine. Further, this spreads to any visible African heritage, even Beyoncé’s, whose dance moves also become a source, with Zulu and Beyoncé dance moves merging in ways essentialising her heritage and inscribing her into that same pre-fasion, pre-education, jungle, animal wildness. And the group is differentially situated relative to its Other, with the tribal sometimes a generalised foreigner, and the international students’ transition identified with hers, like their tribal, learning before successful integration not to be shy.

And yet, on the other hand, there is experimentation, negotiation and exploration beyond this: some deliberate, some perhaps accidental. For instance, as well as mockery of Others, and the attempt to draw boundaries, there is admiration, and adoption of their bodily movements and style. The white British editor, who expresses disgust at white women with dreadlocks – at blurring racial distinctions – enjoys having worn her hair in an afro for a test shoot, sings and dances along with Beyoncé, performs the Zulu gestures researched, and declares ‘Sometimes I wish I was black’.

And the group do manage to blur the distinctions that they discursively construct – the shy students get their ideas on the floor with patterns that show an agency undermining the group’s own picture, and the home students also adapt, learning to elicit and attend to the purportedly shy members’ opinions. The final outcome, all agree in interview, is untraceable to a particular agency: all have contributed ideas to the degree that, unlike their story, it has no identifiable origin, and has a heritage not only as mixed as Beyoncé’s – or anyone’s –, but beyond traceability to singular identities.

Thus, enacting their reading of a specific magazine and wider discourses, the students work within a framework placing Western knowledge and style at the aspirational centre, and others hierarchically beneath it, and yet at the same time their creativity, responding to exploratory potentials as much inherent to fashion and media as their potentials for essentialising and boundary-drawing, also challenge this hierarchy.

And this shows in summary both the responsibilities of teaching and learning the subject, but also opportunities to explore. Collaboration techniques, considering that perceived British English patterns are not normative; media culture and representations; the place of fashion in identity constructions; the global processes differentially universalising and localising; and the place of inclusive epistemologies, for instance, can all be explored in ways that encourage self-reflection about the individuals concerned and their groups, and the learning environment as a source of possibilities but also responsibilities in relation to life beyond, right up to macro structure at the global level. The data are contextually specific, but not untypical (Waldron 2013), and the model I hope is suggestive beyond fashion, everywhere problematic reterritorialising tendencies, differentially distributing control, compete alongside deterritorialising forces of exploration.
**Bibliography**


Self-concept in L2 reading in an academic context

Carolyn Walker, INTO, University of Exeter

Background

In the higher education context, reading is a key method of acquiring knowledge and developing cognitive skills. But the consequences of academic reading, i.e. learning, are associated with assessment, whose results affect students’ self-views, especially their perceptions of competence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Furthermore, as Mann (2000: 315) points out, in this context students are not in an “asocial, timeless state when they engage in reading. They are social beings with a biography and aspirations that contextualise” their reading experiences.

On pathway courses where students study through another language, reading is extra-complex since students need to both learn to read and read to learn. However, social psychological aspects of L2 reading, such as the role of the self-concept, have not been much explored up to now, despite the fact that in the educational context self-concept is associated with achievement and mediates motivation.

The self-concept is concerned with people’s self-perceptions. Traditionally, studies of academic self-concept have focused on perceptions of competence and difficulty, affect (liking, enjoying the activity), and the importance of the activity. Much self-concept research has used cross-sectional survey instruments, but questionnaires overlook contextual influences and personal histories, and mask individual variation. However, a different perspective is taken by Harré (1998), who sees the Self as a discourse category in which the self-concept is all of a person’s self-knowledge and beliefs, generated in the course of interaction. This standpoint enables a wide view of what is relevant for the L2 reading self-concept. Furthermore, self-questionnaires and interviews can be seen as different genres of self-discourse, so that, in a mixed methods approach, themes from each data source can complement each other, providing a fuller picture.

Research questions in the study reported here were: what did students’ self-concepts as L2 readers of English consist of? How did their L2 reading self-concepts change over whole course and how did they vary? The participants were 104 international students on a nine-month Graduate Diploma course in Management and Finance. A longitudinal, mixed methods approach to enquiry was used, as follows:

- a questionnaire about self-concepts of reading and learning was administered at the beginning and end of the course;

- three semi-structured interviews were carried out with nine students (three high English level and six low level).

Results and discussion

First, in the questionnaires, L2 reading was strongly associated with learning in this context. It was also clear that as the course progressed, assessment results impacted on students’
views of themselves as learners and readers. Furthermore, reading was seen as very important, though its importance declined. Perceptions of competence, difficulty and affect emerged as major themes, all showing mean increases over the period. However, only the change in competence perceptions was statistically significant. Consequently, interviewees’ responses were grouped according to their competence perceptions at the start and end of the course (low-low, high-high, low-high).

Themes from the questionnaire and interviews were mapped onto a framework, based on Pollard and Filer (1996), which captured the interaction of students’ sense of self-identity with the sociocultural and educational context, illuminating how students experienced L2 reading as well as the scope of their L2 reading self-views. This framework gives an approximation of a cycle of development of the reading self-concept.

First, the students arrived in the classroom with views of themselves in a general sense. They had life plans, intellectual and linguistic abilities, material, cultural, intellectual, and physical resources, as well as family and others who formed part of their network of significance. They identified reading challenges (difficulty of the material, reading process, language, study reading). Their responses to these challenges were informed by their internal learning stance, deriving from aspects of their self-identity and an umbrella term for motivation (value and affect towards reading), strategies, persistence, and sense of reading competence. The new cultural setting and the support systems (teachers, peers and family) were also significant. Finally, the outcomes of learning (i.e improved academic reading) were assessed formally, which impacted on self-views. The improved L2 reading competence was also described in detail by the interviewees.

To illustrate some aspects of the model above, two low-level English interviewees with differing perceptions of their reading competence are discussed.

Emily (low-high perception of competence) was a Vietnamese female student, aged 25. Her parents were illiterate but valued education highly and worked hard to ensure their children received university educations. Emily was extremely proud of her parents’ achievements. With her family’s social achievements as a role model and her future career in finance and business mapped out, she was highly driven.

Emily’s learning stance showed she was strongly motivated. She was keen to acquire knowledge, and derived pleasure from this: she read to learn, also enjoying learning new words. Her strategy was to work slowly step by step. Dogged determination and the belief that reading was her strongest skill kept her going. She persisted in the face of difficulty, and achieved her goal to progress to masters.

Zac (low-low perception of competence) was a 24 year-old Chinese student. An only child, he came from a high-achieving family, with a rather overbearing father. Zac had the lowest competence ratings of the whole group, and pessimistic attitudes from the start. In terms of reading challenge, he focussed on vocabulary as the source of his problems. He did not grasp the nature of study reading. He did not derive pleasure from his study material, and in the face of difficulty did not have the capacity to persist: he had good intentions but poor self-discipline. Finally, his poor exam results, resulting in failure to progress, impacted badly on his whole sense of self.
Implications

First, language and cognitive ability are not the only reasons for success or failure: students' social identity and self-concept impact on their learning experiences in a L2 context. Secondly, this study identified ways in which low and high self-concepts of reading are manifested and change. If negative self-views can be spotted early on, teachers may be better able to support students.

References


Ethnicity and equality in higher education: the postgraduate teaching experience

Jennie Winter, Rebecca Turner, Sharon Gedye, Patricia Nash, Vivien Grant, PedRIO, Plymouth University

Introduction

Several changes in the higher education sector are impacting on the postgraduate teaching experience. These include: the professionalization of university teaching; the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (which identifies teaching as an integral part of the doctoral research experience); and the steady internationalisation of the postgraduate community (57% of the UK fulltime postgraduate population are non-UK domiciled (HESA 2011-12). This raises questions about the provision of teacher training and ongoing academic development of this student cohort. With these issues in mind the research that informs this paper considered the following:

- Motivations of doctoral students to undertake teacher training
- Satisfaction with teacher training
- The impacts that nationality has for on-going academic development

The research project took place at a UK, post-1992 University. An online questionnaire was undertaken (n=171/626, 27%), the results of which informed semi-structured interviews (n=10).

Motivations for undertaking the GTA

International students were significantly more likely (p<0.01) to want Continuing Professional Development (CPD) certification. This supports previous work which identified that international students are strongly motivated to undertake Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) programmes due to a perceived prestige in returning home with a UK teaching qualification (Lee et al. 2010).

Satisfaction with the course

International students undertaking teacher training reported higher levels of satisfaction with the course content, delivery (p<0.01) and the relevance of the assignment (p<0.05) than home students. Although there was no clear reason for this identifiable in the data, it is possible that the learning experience was more meaningful due to the subject matter being culturally distinct to that which they had encountered previously. Alternatively it may be evidence of culturally determined social desirability bias (Bernadi 2006).

Many international students reported challenges e.g. a lack of background knowledge, critical thinking, communicating in a second academic discipline and understanding course expectations (Borg et al. 2009; Chadha et al. 2009). Those completing the assignment reported longer timescales to undertake this work (100% of home students took less than one month to complete the assignment compared to 73% of international students) and attributed writing in a second language and unfamiliar discipline as a possible causes.
However, in contrast, international students also reported that being a student of education enhanced their understanding of the expectations upon them in their wider student role (PhD), in particular around feedback, collaboration and self-evaluation; something not reported by home students. This is an interesting point as there is a burgeoning literature on the academic challenges associated with the internationalisation of higher education (e.g. Jindal-Snape and Ingram 2013) yet little has been directly written about the potential of academic development to influence this through GTA provision.

**On-going academic development**

Key to on-going academic development was the opportunity to teach during and beyond the GTA. Interviewees suggested that this limited the potential benefits of the course, particularly in term of implementing and reflecting upon their new knowledge of teaching and learning. International students reported significantly fewer teaching opportunities post GTA (p<0.01). This was supported by interview data where international students described struggling to obtain teaching. There was evidence that certain individual and departmental practices limited teaching opportunities. In particular we found that:

1. Supervisors acted as gatekeepers of teaching opportunities and were not always supportive of their students spending time teaching at what they perceived to be the expense of research;
2. Some schools or departments had policies in place that prevented PhD students teaching in the writing up stage;
3. Fewer participants are being offered teaching and more are having to actively seek teaching out. The number of students reporting no teaching experiences is also rising. This is perhaps a consequence of growing numbers of postgraduates (HEPI 2010), combined with tightening teaching budgets;
4. A lack of standardised processes with which to secure teaching opportunities.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The results suggest that international doctoral students are going to continue to want to undertake teacher training due to perceived benefits for their CPD. This has implications for how teacher training is delivered, for example, course materials and pedagogy should promote inclusivity and equality and be considerate of students whose second language is English, particularly around assessment.

In considering the management of teaching opportunities, more can be done to encourage transparency and equality. Our data clearly show there is no one way to access teaching. This echoes recent work which has explored the experience of postgraduates who teach, revealing disparity in employment conditions across the sector (HEA 2011; Hodson and Buckley 2011). Indeed, the recent NUS (2013) report *Postgraduates who Teach* stated that 25% of respondents believed the allocation of teaching to be ‘unfair’ or ‘very unfair’ and identified bias, nepotism and corruption as causes for this.

The proposition that there are social-cultural barriers to allocating classes to international students suggests tensions between their holistic development and demands for quality assurance. However, universities are tasked with postgraduate development and the
cultivation of future academics which should be inclusive. We suggest centralised guidelines on the equitable provision of teaching opportunities for GTAs may mitigate inequality and help to embed teaching as a normative requirement within a PhD.

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Conference Papers

(Abstracts available at:
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