Teaching international students:
Strategies for enhancing students’ learning

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The case against the term ‘international student’

Does it mean anything?

Is it useful?

Should it shape what you think about your role as teacher?
‘International students’: who are they?

Foreign…. overseas …. offshore ….

'The students who don’t pay home fees' 'The students who are not from [here]' Students who speak a language other than [national language] at home

Students who travelled by a plane to study' Anyone who calls themselves ‘international’ ‘We are all international’

There’s no such thing: students are students.

‘International students’: who are they?

Feasibility

ability with English

fees and money

‘cultural’
distance travelled

capability with English

far from support

far from family

far from help

unfamiliar with ‘how it works here’

‘strange’ expectations

inappropriate skills
‘Diverse students’: many factors you might include

... here, I suggest a focus on

Educational mobility
   Students moving across [national] boundaries
   Programmes moving to students (Transnational Education)
   Students returning ‘back home’

Pedagogic variation [academic cultural differences]
   ‘Same words, different meaning’

Learning and teaching in English
   **Students:** variable levels of competence and confidence
   [Teachers, too]
   Not the same as ‘learning English’
These factors inter-relate

- Educational mobility
- Pedagogic variation
- Learning in English
The case for teacher adjustment and accommodation

Denial  ‘I teach. It’s up to them to learn.’
‘I teach Chemistry. Oxygen is the same everywhere’
‘I didn’t admit this student who can’t speak English’

‘Repair’  ‘These students can’t.....They don’t ..... They aren’t motivated..’ [‘You fix them and then I’ll teach them’]

The students must adapt  ‘They want an education .... so, they should  be ready for our kind of education.’

Teachers accommodate and adjust their practice:
These are my students: what do they bring?  What do they need from me in order to succeed? What can I do to help them succeed?
Students’ key learning issues:

- **Language** [studying in English]

- **Academic transition**: new practices assumptions and expectations; new standards
- Having appropriate **skills**

- Engagement and **participation**
- **Collaboration, mixing.** Having their knowledge and experience valued

- **Useful awards**: knowledge and skills can be applied ‘back home’
Focus on classroom interaction

- **Lecturing** to diverse students

- **Seminars** with diverse students

- **1 to 1 supervision** of diverse students

- **Language issues**: developing students’ capability, enhancing understanding

- **Transition** to new learning context: seeing the purpose(s), having necessary skills,

- **Learning through participation**: ‘Getting the most from ......’

- **Inclusion**: Using students’ ‘cultural capital’
Questions and reflections on....

**Task:** 3 activities [Lecturing Seminars One2One meetings & tutorials]
4 areas for attention [language, transition, participation, including students’ knowledge]

Create useful, typical questions and concerns. Write them down.

On lecturing & language issues (teachers’ and students’)
- lecturing and students’ making a transition to Coventry ways of teaching
- lecturing and encouraging participation
- lecturing and using/hooking into students’ prior knowledge and experiences etc...
Where did these issues come from?

What is.....
the case for teacher adjustment and accommodation?

What are ....
the learning issues for ‘international students’?

What roles might teachers play in interactive teaching with diverse students?

How could I, as a teacher, take on these roles and responsibilities -
what might I do to make students’ more effective learners?
integrated responses

Appropriate admission criteria

Graduate outcomes for internationalisation

Good induction
Skills progression

Support and guidance: diagnosis, triage, integrated into programmes, on-demand

and more
adjustment and accommodation?

- to students’ **language** capability, to your own use of English. Better support for students learning in English.

- to students’ **transition** to a new way of learning [and to new forms and functions of assessment].

- to ensuring students have necessary **skills for success**.

- to encouraging **participation** in teaching and learning methods

  ‘*Students getting the most from ......*’

- to student-student **collaboration** [ vs. ‘ghettos’ and ‘silos’ and avoidance].
Issues needing accommodation

- students’ language capability
- New academic culture
- building necessary skills.
- participation ['Getting the most from ......']
- collaboration & inclusion

Your role? Curriculum issues ....

- auditor (where are they so far?); enhancing students’ language learning
- Mediating between pedagogic cultures
- Coaching, providing practice, giving feedback
- Choreographing, shaping, valuing. Inviting in...
- Designing it, supporting it, valuing it
Resources for finding answers

Students
Colleagues
Books

Teaching ‘international Students project
Higher Education Academy ‘Lifecycle’
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/internationalisation/studentlifecycle

Two reactions: “Oh good!” ..... “Yes, but....”
Teachers as language enhancers

- Developing your own language self-awareness
- Ensuring students have a true sense of their language needs and strengths
- Building students’ own language awareness
- Building students’ vocabulary
- Providing useful feedback about errors and necessary language improvements
- Creating opportunities for language practice [oral, written, receptive]
- Helping local students improve their skills as communicators with those for whom English is a developing skill

- HOW?
- Where?
- When?
Language issues in lectures

• For teachers

  Lowering the students’ cognitive ‘load’ [less focus on language, more space for thinking]
  Helping students work in translation
  Checking students’ understanding
  Self-monitoring, self-awareness

• For students

  You list them.....
Tips for inclusive language use in lectures (especially at first)

- Pace
- Obvious, stated structure
- Pauses for thinking
- Pauses for note making.
- Glossary, pre-reading, running glossary
- Recording
- Breaks from
# students’ participation in lectures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What students do</th>
<th>Teacher support?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make notes/ create a record</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand &amp; think</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Make links to assessment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask and answer questions</td>
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<td>Do brief activities</td>
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</table>
Language enhancement in seminars

- [leave until we look at participation issues......]
Do’s and don’ts for language issues in other teaching methods

- Reading

- Writing

- [in general]
Is English capability / learning in English the key issue?

Yes, because ......

No, students say .....

What one change to your own use of English might make a real difference for students’ success and ease in learning?
Issues needing accommodation

- students’ language capability
- New academic culture
- building necessary skills.
- participation [‘Getting the most from ……’]
- collaboration & inclusion

Teachers’ role .... Curriculum issues ....

- auditor; enhancing students’ language learning
- Mediating between pedagogic cultures
- Coaching, providing practice, feedback
- Choreographing, shaping, valuing. Inviting in...
- Designing it, supporting it, valuing it
Questions and reflections on ....

Task: 3 activities [Lecturing Seminars One2one meetings & tutorials]
4 areas for attention [language, transition, participation, including students’ knowledge]

Create useful, typical questions. Reflections of teachers’ concerns. Write them down.

EXAMPLE:
On lecturing & language issues (teachers’ and students’)
- lecturing and students’ making a transition to Coventry ways of teaching
- lecturing and encouraging participation
- lecturing and using/hooking into students’ prior knowledge and experiences etc...
Focus on students’ transition to [this place] ways, [this place] assumptions, [this place] expectations

From what to what?

Where are the predictable ‘sites of conflict’?
   What are the ‘trip wires for trouble’?

How can teachers help students recognise ‘new game, new rules’ .... then ensure they have the skills to play that new game?
An encounter on a flight from the Middle East (August, 2010) to London

Mohammed turned 18 years old two days before. Of Indian (Muslim) heritage but all his schooling was in an Arabic-speaking country. Speaks no Arabic. Oldest of 6 children. ‘My mother is crying since Monday’.

Starting an undergraduate course (3 years). Big plans ‘I will get an MBA in the US then a top job’

All assessments so far by year-end exams. No coursework. Has written up to 50 words in exams. No writing in any other language.

Never read a book in English except school text books

Shows me his IELTS: 5.5. Very strong on listening and speaking. Was taught in English by Indian-origin teachers

He knows nothing about UK Higher Education
Just 18, all schooling in an Arabic-speaking country where he is an outsider.

Starting a BA in xxx

All assessments by year-end exams.
No coursework.

Has only written 50 word answers in exams

Never read a book in English except text books
IELTS 5.5 but very strong oral (listening and speaking).

Taught in English by Indian-origin teachers

What issues can you foresee for Mohammed in lectures?

in seminars?

in 1:1 tutorial discussions with a teacher?

in assessment?
Transition: from what to what?

An aside about previous academic experiences

'Students expected a different culture .... they didn’t expect a different culture of teaching and learning. They didn’t expect a different meaning for the word ‘examination’. ‘

Poulton, 2009

They continue to not expect these differences ...... until they encounter them.
Teachers as academic cultural mediators: same words, different meanings

Teacher
Student
Read
Write
Examination
Dissertation
Supervisor

Help
Good work
9:00 AM
‘my own work’
‘logical case’
• A good teacher notices I need help and offers it.

• A good teacher tells me good answers to good questions.

• To learn, I must listen to the teacher. Really listen.

• I read the textbook many many many times. Exam questions and answers are from the textbook.

• When students ask, I help with study-based issues.

• I select the issues but the students must find their own answers.

• I want students to discuss, argue, solve problems. What’s their conclusion?

• I want students to read around, to choose good bits ....and to weave them together to make an answer. I want their answer .... not the answer
‘previous educational experiences’

1. Teaching methods
2. Relationships between teachers & students
3. Assessment
4. Writing
5. Reading

Under each heading, what would someone see/notice here?

What would a student from other kinds of experiences find surprising ‘here’?
No: describe / name the artifact
Yes: explain the rationale

the artifact the rationale

First names for teachers

Reading list

Word limit on essays

Office hours

group work

72% as top mark
Issues for teachers [continued]

• Students’ language capability, using English. Learning in English.

• Students’ transition to new learning [and new examination] context. Ensuring students have necessary skills.

• Students’ participation in teaching and learning methods ‘Getting the most from ......’

• Integration and collaboration [vs. ‘ghettos’ and ‘silos’ and avoidance]. Using students’ ‘cultural capital’
Task:

Address the transition questions and issues in lectures

in seminars

in 1:1 tutorials

What could you do to find out what they are?
How could you ensure STUDENTS are aware of them?
How could you help students negotiate between different assumptions and beliefs?
Not just YOU

Graduate outcomes
Beliefs and values for internationalisation

Epistemology [knowledge-making]

Good induction & skills progression
Appropriate admission criteria

Support and guidance

"An international university"

Programme

Course

Teacher practice, classroom practice

Knowing students' past experiences ...
and more
Focus on classroom interaction

- **Lecturing** to diverse students
- **Seminars** with diverse students
- **Assessment** of diverse students
- **1 to 1 supervision** of diverse students
- **Language issues**: developing students’ capability, enhancing understanding
- **Transition** to new learning context: seeing the purpose(s), having necessary skills,
- **Participation**: ‘Getting the most from ......’
- **Integration and collaboration**: Using students’ ‘cultural capital’
information
examples
tools and equipment
motivating reasons
Practice of the ‘sub-skills’
feedback
Putting sub-skills together. Practice
time
working with an expert to aim high
practice
Teacher-supported skill development

Programme-level planning and delivery

Early **diagnostics**

Design in **practice** and feedback

Practice, practice, practice ..... over time

Skills learned as an integral part of content learning
Teacher adjustment and accommodation [continued]

1. Language capability, using English. Learning in English.

2. Students’ transition to [new] learning, new examinations, new context. Ensuring necessary skills.

3. Support for students’ participation in teaching and learning methods

4. Integration and collaboration
Participation: the primacy of exploratory talk?

‘Learning is not a spectator sport’

Learning always takes engagement, personal involvement, .... but does that mean talking?

Some teaching methods are especially reliant on interaction and involvement – what is the learning rationale?

If you want students to talk,
  prepare students for it
  plan it; organise it
  process it – ensure students make sense of it
## students’ participation in seminars

### What students do

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question &amp; discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply, analyse, evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolve a personal stance</td>
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</table>

### Teachers’ support strategies

- for language
- for thinking & learning
- for interaction?

### What to say?

- What did she mean when she said that?
- What’s the point?
- How can I join in?

- Will it ever be MY turn?
Thinking in seminars

What students do
State information
Ask questions
Answer questions
Challenge each others’ views
Collect ideas and organise them
Solve problems
etc.....

What teachers can do to create the thinking space
Collaboration and interaction: student-student

‘An international university’

Programme

course

Teacher practice, classroom practice

‘Whole university’ issue

Requires deliberate action

Not easy!
Early support for social inclusion

Organised ‘getting to know’ chances

In-class discussion: purpose explained and participation supported

Fewer, longer, safer group tasks

Group tasks which bring students together’

Teach Cross-cultural skills

Programme-level value for inclusion
Programme-level assessment
Making groupwork work
**Last words**

Most students succeed

Most students are proud

'It was the hardest thing I ever did'

Most teachers cope

Many teachers enjoy it

A few will never change

Many practical changes do help

There is support and guidance for teachers