

“It should be the same!?!” – An Unexpected Disparity in Teaching between Post-Colonial British and UK Educational Systems (0176)

Anesa Hosein

University of Surrey, UK

## **Introduction**

This paper looks at the pedagogic dissonance/consonance that may arise through the teaching transitions and adaptations of international academics in different countries' Higher Education (HE) systems by using myself as an autoethnographic case study. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) define autoethnography as:

“an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)”

I chose this approach to explore my personal teaching dissonances/consonances in different countries connected to the cultural context of the HE systems. There are three country contexts that I would like to draw upon. These were, however, at different stages of my teaching career and hence my experience may impact on how my teaching was affected in these cultural contexts (Prosser, Ramsden, Trigwell, & Martin, 2003; Stes, Gijbels, & Van Petegem, 2007). Although I have taught in a range of subjects, I will contextualise my research experience to the teaching of mathematics-related subjects as disciplines can sometimes have an impact on teaching approaches (Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell, Nevgi, & Ashwin, 2006; Stes et al., 2007; Stes & Van Petegem, 2014).

## **Teaching Context**

I taught mathematics to engineering and science students at the University of Guyana (UG) for 2 years full-time and at the University of West Indies (UWI, Trinidad and Tobago) for 3 years part-time. In the UK, I taught mathematics to Education Studies students at Liverpool Hope University for over 2 years.

## **Analysis**

Although there is a range of contexts I can on how the HE culture in these three countries impacted on my teaching such as HE structure, technology, stress levels and teaching resources, for this paper, I will concentrate on one area: schooling system and type of students.

## **Schooling System and Type of Students**

As both Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana were British colonies, they had a similar schooling pattern to that of the UK that is, having a mathematics examination certificate of secondary education (CSE) at 16 years and the advanced certificate of secondary education (ACSE) at 18 years. Therefore, students' mathematics level and knowledge prior to university could be judged fairly similarly based on these examinations. However, unlike at UG and UWI, where all (regardless of subject area) students are required to attain a mathematics pass at the CSE

levels, students at LHU were not. At LHU students' CSE mathematics passes were more variable due to a large percentage of widening participation (WP) students unlike at UG and UWI which had students predominantly with good passes (A and B grade) at both CSE and/or ACSE in mathematics. These classrooms, therefore, in terms of students' background knowledge and life experience were homogenous. The LHU classroom was a teaching challenge as I was accustomed to teaching to the "mathematical majority", that is, where most students' understood most basic mathematical concepts however at LHU I had to teach to the "mathematical minority". This created a tension within me, that is, a pedagogical dissonance with my teaching belief and my expected practice. Vu and Doyle (2014) noted a similar dissonance with what her international students expected from teachers. I was discontented to teach the basic concepts of mathematics as I felt it impacted on the depth and extent of the mathematics topics I needed to cover. My belief stemmed from my conceptualisation of teaching that was formed in Guyana and Trinidad, that was different from LHU, that is, firstly, teacher-focused rather than student-centred (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001) and syllabus-based rather than learning outcomes based (Biggs & Tang, 2007). This dissonance started to fade as I became socialised into the teaching culture of LHU through teaching mentors and learning and teaching training. This suggests that teaching approaches are not fixed but are fluid and given the appropriate support (or pressure) someone can adapt and change to the prevailing institutional teaching approach.

## Conclusion

Working currently as an academic developer, I am aware of my migrant colleague voicing similar a similar pedagogical dissonance I raised with respect to the expectations of the homogeneity of knowledge and background of their students. It is, therefore, incumbent on academic developers, like myself, to aid migrant colleagues in understanding the differences in student cohorts even though they may first appear similar to what they are accustomed to. Further, as there is an increased pressure to have WP students, training migrant academics to teach heterogeneous cohort can help ensure that no student is disenfranchised in their learning experience.

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