

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Cash Cows or Pedagogic Partners? Mapping Pedagogic Practices for and with International Students

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Research Domain: Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

Abstract: International students' presence in the UK has increased dramatically in 20 years. For many academic staff, this characterises their teaching experiences and, for an increasing proportion, their entire professional career. Our SRHE-funded project interviewed 45 UK teaching staff across disciplines, nations and institutions, exploring representations of international students and how their presence shapes teaching practices. We found that, while most were broadly positive about the educational merit of international cohorts, many staff reverted to using stereotypes and language of deficit. Most staff had a clear - and surprisingly consistent - vision of what teaching international students inclusively meant. However, we argue that the promise of internationalisation as a critical radical educational opportunity is rarely fully articulated, partially due to the structural barriers that constrain them. Some also remain hampered by latent racist stereotypes of international students, perpetuated by 'politically correct' deficit narratives that link certain cultures to particular academic deficiencies.

Paper: Introduction

In the context of rapidly expanding international student recruitment and attention on internationalisation of the curriculum, the question of how we teach international students has become a matter of both ethics and survival. Our SRHE-funded project explored what the literature and academic staff say about how we teach and represent international students in UK higher education (HE) through a systematic literature review (see Lomer and Mittelmeier, 2021), and subsequent empirical interview study. This paper discusses the latter findings.

Methodology

We conducted 45 semi-structured online interviews with academic staff who teach international students with current teaching roles at a range of UK institutions, including universities from across sector groups and country, targeting a varied profile of staff across disciplines. We sought to understand how international students were defined and conceptualised by teaching staff, and how lecturers have transformed their pedagogies with international students in mind. Full methodological details are available in [Lomer, et al. \(2021\)](#).

Findings

Qualitative template analysis (Brooks et al 2015) indicated that participants were broadly positive and enthusiastic about teaching international students and appreciated the complexity of individual

experiences.

Conclusions from interviews identified substantial commonalities to teaching practices across the sector, in contrast to our expectations of situated, context-based approaches. Regardless of discipline, most participants described broadly social, interactive, 'student-centred' teaching practices that structure learning from diversity, based on a 'safe space' in the classroom and deriving from empathy and compassion for challenges, and an overarching commitment to inclusive education. Few emphasised lecturing as a key part of their practice, though observations might conclude differently. Participants believed themselves to be implementing universally applicable good general pedagogic practices focused on engaging students. They used technology, alternative assessments and scaffolding academic skills. Participants also reflected on the lessons learned from adaptations to emergency remote learning during COVID-19 national lockdowns.

But on the whole, participants did not frame their practices with international students as distinctive. Indeed many pushed back against the notion, re-framing this as teaching 'differently to different groups'. A few participants highlighted how international students' presence highlights norms and assumptions about teaching and learning, particularly those that remain Western-centred, neo-imperialist, and xenophobic or racist. For example, assumed norms around vocalised discussion, implicit cultural rules about group work, critical thinking and 'Socratic dialogue' particularly raised these concerns. However, few participants clearly articulated pedagogic practices as systematically or rigorously informed by teaching with international students. Glimpses of such insight appeared in isolated examples, favourite activities, and specific practices, but the dominant narrative was one of 'thin' inclusion (Stein, 2017).

Some participants, however, replicated existing cultural and national stereotypes in relation to international students, implying that latent racist tropes remain prevalent in the sector. These are particularly apparent in the recurrent use of deficit narratives about international students' skills, knowledge, and dispositions. Yet, many participants (sometimes the same) reported resisting this narrative, 'speaking up' for international students. We suggest these dominant discourses structure narratives about international students, making it hard for even critical individuals to fully extricate themselves.

Challenges inhibiting more reflexive, transformative pedagogic work exist at sector and institutional levels, including: limited incentives to focus on teaching with research prioritised; increasing student numbers; limited resources; workload; time; lack of support; and training

Conclusions

Despite the acknowledged limitations, we drew a picture of attitudes and practices of the sector. This study relates these practices specifically to internationalisation, to understand how teachers at the chalkface create daily opportunities for the promises of internationalisation to be realised for and with students. While teaching practices broadly reflect widely-held notions of 'good teaching' and superficially positive attitudes to international students, they do not always engage critically with the epistemic challenges of internationalisation and decolonisation.

For teaching to be fully inclusive in UK HE, we argue it must also be internationalised - not only in content (curriculum), but also in practice (pedagogy). This entails a minimum level of intercultural (or

transcultural) awareness through teaching practices that value without essentialising difference, positions culture as both large (e.g. national) and small (e.g. classroom), examines intersectionality and individuality, and values non-Western knowledges equally - in a word, that it be decolonial. Internationalised pedagogy must be transformative rather than assimilative (Clifford & Montgomery, 2015), and rich (albeit limited) examples or glimpses appeared in many interviews.

For this promising area of research to become established, different ways of conducting research, publishing pedagogic literature, and teaching creatively, collaboratively and reflexively are needed. Our open-access [resources](#) from this project aim to consolidate some of this emerging work to support and share developments.

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