

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Reconciling international and academic identity: creating a space for storytelling for non-British lecturers

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**Research Domain:** International Perspectives and context (IPC)

**Abstract:** The recent rise of neoconservative, single-issue social conservatism has led to an anti-immigration, authoritarian agenda dividing not only nations, but interconnected nation states. This paper considers how three non-British academics position themselves in relation to their job as a lecturer and a colleague as the climate and opinions of immigration continue to be a key political battle both in the UK and further afield. Since a lecturer is a forward-facing position, one must be conscious of the language, tempo, accent spoken, and the mannerisms used. One also must be aware that all of these examples are outward expressions of heritage and with that comes expectations, (mis)conceptions, and the weight of larger national definitions of the in/out discourse – all of which have serious political consequences (Pehrson & Green, 2010). The objective of the research was to open up the discussion of inclusion to incorporate academics because, if universities want to be truly inclusive, they must think about who is leading and shaping the classroom.

Pehrson, S. & Green, E. (2010) Who We Are and Who Can Join Us: National Identity Content and Entry Criteria for New Immigrants: *Journal of Social Issues*, 66:4, 695-716

**Paper: Reconciling international and academic identity: *creating a space for storytelling for non-British lecturers***

Universities continue to strive for increasingly higher levels of excellence, status, and funding to raise and maintain their global positions as rankings continue to affect student choice and perception of value. Thus, the neoliberal agendas of marketisation and choice has led to universities competing, 'in the global market of higher education for "world class" students, staff and resources' (Burke, 2013, p.

110). Yet, the world has recently seen the rise of neoconservative, single-minded social conservatism leading to an anti-immigration, authoritarian agenda dividing not only nations, but interconnected nation states. Ideas of national populism are reflected in the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the Brexit Referendum in 2016. This urge to turn inward upset long celebrated ideas of the global world such as the free movement of people, while also disrupting individual identities and the sense of belonging. Much of the rhetoric behind immigration often hinges on the phenomenon of unintentional othering. According to McCrone & Bechhofer (2015) one does not fully appreciate their national identity until they are away from home. Thus, marketisation and globalisation of higher education (HE) has led to an inherent conflict: universities recruiting foreign staff into a political climate that has the potential to be indifferent or hostile.

This paper features the results of a small-scale, narrative research project which examined whether a non-British lecturer's national identity affected their teaching, their relationship to students, or to their university. The study aimed to capture what it is like to live and work in a country that is arguably struggling with its own identity and stance on immigration. As academics need to travel further to find employment, and universities continue to push the global agenda and recruit international academics, practical aspects of 'foreignness' like visas and navigating one's new country are up to the foreign academic. As a result of today's wider political climate, questions such as *who is an 'acceptable' immigrant* add to the pressure of navigating academic life. The objective of the research was to open up the discussion of inclusion to incorporate academics because, if universities want to be truly inclusive, they must think about who is leading and shaping the classroom.

The interviews were analysed and co-constructed using an ethnographic approach by the researcher—considering cultural and social aspects as to how they experience the world and the socio-historical factors shaping the story. By co-constructing the interviews, the hope was to disrupt the current conceptualisations of 'inclusion' in higher education to stretch to include the experience of non-British academics. Preliminary findings indicate that due to the rise in nationalistic language, a small minority of students feel emboldened to use Brexit and nationalistic language as a means to voice their displeasure in class: *I cannot wait until Brexit and you are gone* (Academic 1). Second, the academics featured in this study were hyper-aware of the cultural differences between themselves, their colleagues, and the students. Efforts were taken by the academics to ensure their cultural differences were mitigated in some cases in an effort to ensure student comfort.

In order to humanize the experience of academics, a narrative storytelling method was adopted. Storytelling allows participants 'to reflect and archive ... complex notions of who they are in the world' (Alrutz, 2013, p.48). One key aspect of this research was to explore what Griffin (2003) refers to as a *critical incident* from the stories told by participants. The critical incident is more than a mere chronicle of an event, after all, it is the emotional aspect of a story that connects readers with a text. It can be argued that stories are only ever written in the mind of the reader but there has to be something there we recognise which makes us want to connect with author's words. By using critical incident, it was hoped that other 'outsiders' may hear experiences which resonate, experiences which engender a sense of inclusion from exclusion. Thus, creating a larger dialogue about university inclusion and the experiences of non-British academic staff.

The approach for this study was to begin the exploration of common themes from the experiences of non-British academic staff to gain a better understanding of how their own national identity was

formed, was it (re)formed by becoming an academic and how the culture of the university was experienced through the foreign lens. If universities are to increase their global positioning, understanding the experiences of international staff could have positive outcomes for creating an inclusion university environment for all. Understanding how non-British academics position themselves in relation to their job as a lecturer and a colleague is crucial as the climate and opinions of immigration continue to be a key political battle both in the UK and further afield. Since a lecturer is a forward-facing position, one must be conscious of the language, tempo, accent with which they speak, and the mannerisms used. One also must be aware that all of these examples are outward expressions of heritage and with that comes expectations, (mis)conceptions, and the weight of larger national definitions of the in/out discourse – all of which have serious political consequences (Pehrson & Green, 2010). Much of the discussions around university inclusion and creating an inclusive campus environment rightly centre around university students, particularly those who are underrepresented. Yet, by exploring not only the students, but also the staff who instruct them, ideas of inclusion can expand.

#### References:

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