

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

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Ethically engaging international students: student generated material in an active blended learning model

Sylvie Lomer<sup>1</sup>, Loretta Anthony-Okeke<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom*

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

**Abstract:** In the context of increasing international mobility in higher education, educators experience multiple challenges in the classroom. In the UK, policy discourses often frame international students as desirable resources. However, international students are frequently problematized as in academic deficit. Cultural reasons are posited for different patterns of participation in seminar discussions and critical engagement. This deficit narrative is neo-imperialist. A critical and ethical pedagogy should position international students as equals and as co-contributors. This article suggests that by changing pedagogical structures of traditional higher education classroom in the UK, subverting norms for epistemological interactions, international students can be empowered to engage actively and critically. This approach draws on the principles of Active Blended Learning to develop an ethical pedagogy, with equitable epistemic access for internationally mobile students. This paper explores how a module designed in keeping with ethical pedagogy (Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo, 2009) succeeded in critically engaging students.

**Paper:** Nearly 4 million higher education students travelled abroad in 2015 (UNESCO 2017). The pedagogic literature focuses on challenges raised by international students' presence in UK classrooms. International students are often described as lacking the language and academic skills to participate effectively in British academic life, where silence is often misunderstood as failing to think and participate (Marlina 2009). Chinese students especially are frequently described as passive, uncritical, and reliant on memorisation (Clark and Gieve 2006). Much of the pedagogic literature addresses these challenges without engaging with Madge et al.'s call to "challeng(e) normalising conceptions that present the internationalisation of HE in ways that objectify and homogenise students" (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015, 688).

The consumer model of international HE implies that international students should pay for the

privilege of 'high quality' 'Western' education. International students are valued for their economic contributions to host economies, supporting the UK by £25.8 billion (Universities UK International 2018). But positioning international students as economic and educational resources, who simultaneously enhance and undermine the quality of education for home students, constitutes an ethical dilemma for contemporary HE. Where HE pedagogy fails to address or challenge this dilemma by altering structures of learning and teaching, we risk unconsciously exploiting international students in the classroom, capitalising on their economic and cross-cultural contributions without genuine epistemic inclusion.

This paper outlines a pedagogic approach that seeks to partially resolve this dilemma, by developing principles and practices to restructure the classroom and curricula, positioning international students as co-creators of knowledge and content, rather than resources. The key principles for an ethical pedagogy for internationalisation proposed are:

- Adopt an epistemic stance which emphasises uncertainty and complexity
- Make macro (national) and micro (classroom, institution) cultural understandings in teaching practices transparent
- Treat students as equals and individual agents and persons
- Work towards decolonising content, teaching methods and learning design

*Higher Education in International Contexts* was developed as an option on three MA programmes, with cohorts of predominantly international students. It used student generated content exclusively in seminars, drawing on the principles of active and blended learning. After lectures, students wrote a blog post based on a researched case study. Seminar discussions were based entirely on sharing and comparison of this student generated material. Afterwards, students wrote blogs which compared case studies and related them to the lecture theme. This moves students away from the transmission model of learning, towards an uncertain, multivalent epistemology.

I conducted an insider action research project (Embury 2017), using a survey and analysis of blog posts and comments over two years of delivery, generating mixed methods data to explore how international students engaged in the module.

Students typically wrote between 6 and 7 blog entries (see Figure 1), more than required for assessment. Survey participants all reported that their learning and writing skills were enhanced through this approach. The quality of blogs generally, corroborates this perception showing clear evidence of learning from the lectures and seminars. I used comments on blogs to highlight links and explicitly incorporated students' research into my summaries in seminars and as examples in lectures, which legitimated their contributions as valued knowledge. This acknowledges students as complex knowledge agents

Autonomy was a key principle in the learning design, so students were free to select case studies and topics, conduct their own research and select a focus in the final assignment. This freedom meant that a range of countries were included in case studies, contributing to a less Western-centric learning experience. Students reported that they learned more because of this autonomy (100% in 2016-17; 96.4% in 2017-18). Rather than constructing a 'moral discourse' around an idealised fully independent student, an ethical pedagogy should recognise "the inherent interdependence of learning as a social practice" and support students towards a positive sense of autonomy (Goode 2007).

Blog topics reflected engagement in decolonial thinking, as many of the students wrote on topics like linguistic imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Seminar discussions were generally lively based on my observations while teaching, with the majority of student contributing at least in their small group discussions, and a smaller proportion in the plenary as well. Most students claimed on the Google survey that they made contributions either every week or 'most weeks' to seminar discussions and lectures, with a notable improvement in 2017-18 in the numbers of students who participated every week. This shows how course design can influence student behaviour, creating the opportunity for Chinese international students to be highly active and engaged, in contrast to the usual stereotype of the 'shy' or 'reserved' East Asian student (Zhou et al., 2005). On the survey, 100% stated that they agreed or strongly agreed in 2016-17 (92.9% in 2018-19) that writing the blog posts made the seminar discussions more focused, and they enjoyed the seminar discussions more because of the blog posts (85.2% agreed or strongly agreed in 2016-17; 92.9% in 2018-19).

These results suggest that the module demonstrates the effectiveness of the critically engaged and ethical pedagogy for internationalisation in enhancing student engagement. High rates of engagement with writing and blogs and commenting indicate that students were active in the process of determining, creating and evaluating course content. Adopting this approach of using blogs to embed student-generated content in the module enabled students to be highly engaged because students' active intellectual engagement can be acknowledged in multiple modes of participation (direct verbal, textual, and indirect), even if they remain 'silent'. This contributes to undermining the stereotype of the 'quiet' and therefore disengaged international student (Turner 2009), a critical step to establishing an ethically international pedagogy.

This pedagogic approach encompasses a set of principles and practices that seek to restructure the classroom and curricula to position international students as co-creators of knowledge and content. This encourages students to learn actively, engage in multiple modes, is consistent with epistemic change and flux in a globalised context, and is realistically achievable in terms of staffing and resourcing.

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