



Engaging home and international students: A guide for new lecturers

Internationalisation
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Overview

This guide is for those new to teaching who work with diverse groups of students on mainstream undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses in UK higher education (HE). It will be useful to those who want to:

- learn about cultural diversity in approaches to learning;
- pick up techniques for engaging all students in a range of contexts;
- uncover their own assumptions and relate them to their teaching practices.

The approach this guide takes values the diversity that mixed groups of home and international students, and staff, bring to HE and seeks to promote teaching where all students can participate and learn effectively.

Students beginning their study will have mixed experiences and expectations. International students travelling to study in the UK have clearly demonstrated a respect for the UK HE system and recognise the value of a UK degree. On arrival, however, our students' previous experience may not necessarily have prepared them well, and their expectations may not match what they find. Bridging this gap to ensure that all students can perform to their potential does not have to mean changing what we ask of students, but it does mean recognising the scale of the transition with which some students are faced.

Professors from the highest level down, they all have the same mentality, they all are here to make sure we learn ... In my view that's how the UK has earned its status in education; it's a highly ranked educational system for good reasons ... It's very much a give and take learning process, not like a one way flow of information, that is not the case. (Student, University of Nottingham)

I hadn't realised how much work I had to do. I thought it was enough to read through my lecture notes before the exam and remember the main points but they wanted so much detail and I did quite badly. (Student, University of Nottingham)

For those new to teaching in higher education there are a host of challenges arising from limited experience and a lack of familiarity with tried-and-tested materials and techniques to draw on. Facing a large and diverse body of students can be daunting.

Issues raised by new lecturers at a recent workshop included:

- finding ways to involve non-native English speakers;
- getting students to interact with each other;
- making sure that assessment was assessing thinking and not language ability.

This guide does not attempt to offer ways to assimilate students into a UK HE way of thinking; that would reflect a deficit model, which unfairly places the student 'at fault' and fails to respect alternative perspectives. It does, however, address commonly experienced situations where cultural differences and expectations can give rise to misunderstandings. In a range of teaching contexts, there are usually small steps that can be taken to promote intercultural understanding and effective learning.

In the guide you will find:

- a consideration of the relationship between culture and learning;
- examples of strategies that lecturers have found successful in teaching a diverse range of students;
- suggestions for further reading.

The guide is adapted from a similar guide published by the Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre in 2010, which was written in conjunction with and with funding from the 'Teaching International Students' (TIS) project, a joint initiative of the Higher Education Academy and the United Kingdom Council

for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) with funding from the Prime Minister's Initiative 2 (PMI2). The project focuses on the ways that lecturers and other teaching staff can maintain and improve the quality of teaching and learning for international students.

The TIS website can be accessed at: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/teaching-international-students>

The website is for lecturers in higher education looking for ideas and resources for teaching international students. By 'lecturers' it is meant all those engaged in teaching (graduate teaching assistants, tutors etc.); by 'international students' it is meant students who have travelled to another country for tertiary study (now almost one in five of the UK university student population).

Contact the HEA Internationalisation team at: internationalisation@heacademy.ac.uk

I. Introduction

I.1. International students and difference

The term 'international students' is usually used to describe students who have travelled to another country for tertiary education – now almost one in five of the UK university student population.

By labelling a collection of students as one group, however, the term itself foregrounds the idea of difference and hides the level of diversity between students in the 'international' group. In the context of widening participation among UK students, it also encourages an inappropriate view that UK students are homogeneous, and different from 'international students'.

The reality is, of course, more complex. Within the increasing numbers of students on UK courses, we should expect and plan for an increase in the range of previous learning experiences, and diversity of approaches to, and understanding of, the discipline.

The students have the academic ability, but not necessarily the practical experience, the exposure to primary literature, or the habit of taking a critical approach to the subject [Bioscience]. (Aysha Divan, University of Leeds)

If we accept that there is diversity within student groups as well as between them, and that there are commonalities between all students, then the practical approaches here can be seen to be of benefit to all students and not just international students.

I.2. Diversity in approaching 'learning'

How students, both home and international, approach the task of learning will, in part, depend on what they perceive learning to mean.

Previous experience might lead to understanding learning as some or all of the following:

- the acquisition of facts;
- the application of procedures in a range of situations;
- a development of current understanding;
- grasping new concepts that describe the world;
- developing the skills of a professional practitioner;
- a change in outlook.

Similarly, students arrive at university for many reasons, including:

- to get a good degree that will help them choose from a range of occupations;
- to learn another language and culture;
- to study a discipline that they are interested in learning about;
- because their parents expect them to be university educated;
- as a part of growing up.

All new students have been successful in their education to date, and have met the entrance criteria for the course of study on which they are embarking. The transition into a UK HE context will, however, be challenging and a student's previous experience of learning and their motivation for studying will affect their expectations of a university education and the role of the student and the lecturer within it.

To be fair and honest to the British education system (practical included), it is like a vat which matures willing students into the finest spirit possible. The highest possible standards, state of the art infrastructure, supportive yet intellectually challenging and stimulating environment not only ensures that you complete your tasks for a degree, it also ensures that you develop your independent insight into things yet to come and courage to take the initiative. (Extract from student essay (Student 8))

Within any classroom cohort, the apparent impact of internationalisation will vary with the proportion of students arriving from overseas. Where a large class includes only a few international students, the most keenly felt challenge might be that of ensuring an inclusive learning environment. With a predominantly international cohort, as experienced with many Masters programmes, the issue of supporting an effective transition to UK HE expectations within a short time frame may be the main concern.

There's a tendency to play to the strengths of the group, whether that's mostly home or mostly international students. In either case, we try to treat each student as an individual, and this helps us to be inclusive of the minority. (Christine Wells, University of Leicester)

In all cases, the experiences and expectations of individuals within the cohort will vary. There will be variations, too, in the expectations of new lecturers. How those expectations might vary, and the implications for helping students learn is addressed in the rest of this guide.

1.3. Thinking about teaching: values, knowledge and experience, practice

Both lecturers and learners start in UK HE with preconceptions and expectations about successful education. In addressing the relationship between people's ideas about teaching and their teaching practice, Handal and Lauvas (1987) proposed that those who teach make use of a 'practical theory' to underpin their actions. This practical theory is informed by their knowledge of how learning happens and by their experience of their own and others' teaching. Importantly, it is also shaped by their ideology about UK HE and their expectations of their students. Any lecturer's actions are therefore affected by their values in relation to HE, and their knowledge and experience of teaching as illustrated in an adaptation of Handal and Lauvas' original figure.

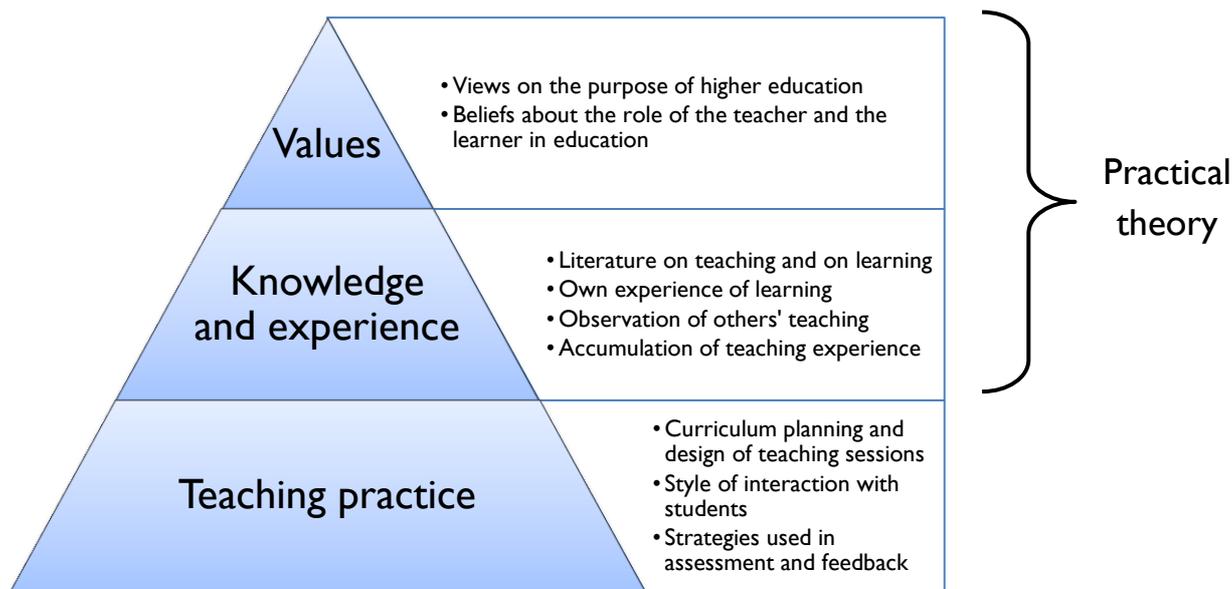


Figure 1: A 'practical theory of teaching'. Adapted from Handal and Lauvas (1987)

Although Handal and Lauvas were not writing about internationalisation, the idea of a practical theory is useful here as it provides a framework for considering how to engage all learners in HE. It locates decisions about teaching practice and learning activity in an individual's context. With the internationalisation of (or, indeed, widening participation in) HE the contexts for learning are not shared by all participants: their values, knowledge and experience will vary and hence their expectations of teaching and of learning will differ. This guide uses the idea of a 'practical theory' as a framework exploring the context for educating international students in UK HE, and the implications for making decisions about teaching strategies.

While there is a logic to following the order presented in the guide (values, knowledge and experience, practice), the reader may choose to focus on any of the three areas, and in any order, perhaps starting with practical strategies if time is short and returning to consider its basis in values having tried out some particular methods.

2. Values

Starting with the top level of Handal and Lauvas' model, an examination of values about education asks both the teacher and the learner to review their assumptions about learning, education and the role of the teacher and learner within it. This is not straightforward when those beliefs are culturally informed, often implicitly held, and may be rarely challenged.

In the context of internationalisation of HE, the bringing together of people from different cultures to study together, in the UK context, is the basis for considering what the impact of culture might be for all participants. This section outlines some ways in which cultures can be seen to vary, and suggests a relationship between culture and learning and teaching. While some of the studies explored here have been (rightly) questioned when characteristics are presented in relation to national traits, the ways in which people's beliefs and behaviours might vary can still be illuminating.

2.1. Culture and learning

Researchers in the social sciences have studied culture in attempts to understand human societies and behavioural norms. Current approaches view culture as flexible and dynamic rather than rigidly determining an individual's views or behaviour. Any one learner will be affected by culture from a range of contexts

including previous educational experience, age, gender, social status and nationality. Some descriptions of culture are highlighted here as a way of exploring how attitudes to knowledge and learning may vary.

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Intercultural_Competencies.

Collectivism and individualism

Groups have been described as collective when the primary concern is the benefit of an individual's actions to the whole group. The maintenance of social relationships and harmony within the group takes priority. The contrasting individualist end of the scale is concerned with autonomy, independence and individual achievement.

An understanding of the role of a learning group will affect a perception of appropriate behaviour within it. In education, the distinction between collaboration in learning (often encouraged in the UK) and collusion in assessment (usually punished in the UK) can be unclear, particularly when students work in groups towards producing an individually assessed report.

Critical thinking

A common view is that critical thinking is of central importance to western education whereas rote learning of core theories and dominant works takes a central place in Asian, particularly Chinese education systems. This is, however, increasingly questioned as a false characterisation. It is perhaps more useful to see critical thinking, with an outcome of a justified novel position, as a discipline-specific way of expressing ideas and communicating.

When it comes to assessment, all students are new to HE and to the idea of critical thinking, and all can demonstrate apparent plagiarism and/or inappropriate referencing in their work as part of learning the rules of academic communication and how to apply them.

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Academic_Writing.

Hierarchy and power

There is variation in the extent to which people within a group are unequal, and also whether the inequalities are seen as normal or appropriate. Inequalities might be based on length of membership of the group, skills, experience, social class, age, gender, or other criteria.

If the hierarchy and power relationships between lecturers and students are perceived differently by the student and the lecturer, it could cause awkwardness and discomfort in teaching situations, particularly in small group settings.

Some of my international students expect quite a formal relationship. I introduce myself with my title and full name and invite students to use my first name, if they are comfortable to do so. In emails, the forms of address range from 'Hey Rachel' to 'Dear Madam' and an interesting compromise of 'Dr Rachel'. (Rachel Scudamore, University of Nottingham)

Low- and high-context communication

Communication can be low-context or high-context in the extent to which we make use of implicit, or shared, understandings. In a low context culture, perhaps a more individualist culture, there is an emphasis on being explicit and giving great detail in messages. A high context culture, by comparison, places greater emphasis on the relationship between individuals and the non-verbal communication that accompanies that.

The result can be a misunderstanding about the purpose of communication, with a low-context culture focusing on information and accuracy, often providing great amounts of written material (e.g. in comprehensive handbooks), while a high-context culture focuses on maintaining group relationships (e.g. by being personally available).

This might result in a student agreeing to undertake a task, even though they are unable to, for whatever reason, because it is most important to not offend the member of staff by refusing.

For procedural matters, a student may prefer to receive, and may seek, personal assurance rather than rely on printed versions of official regulations.

Politeness and ‘face’

All cultures show respect for people’s concern that their public image is approved of, understood, and appreciated (their positive face) and for them to be free from imposition or inappropriate demands (their negative face). Politeness then consists of behaving in such a way to avoid ‘face’-threatening actions. What may differ between cultures is which aspect of ‘face’ is more emphasised and what face-saving strategies are used in communication.

In intercultural conversations, an unexpected emphasis on negative politeness strategies (being indirect, suggesting rather than telling, impersonalising a discussion) might seem overly vague, weak or deferential; an absence of such strategies where expected might seem aggressive, demanding and rude. Similarly, an unexpected emphasis on positive politeness strategies (showing attention, actively agreeing, promising action) might seem uncritical or even sycophantic; an absence of such strategies where expected might make someone seem uninterested and unenthusiastic. Being aware of such strategies may help in interpreting students’ behaviour and in choosing how to communicate effectively, particularly when discussing and giving feedback on a student’s work.

Students unwilling to cause a lecturer to lose face might readily agree that they understand, in order to avoid implying that the lecturer has not been successful in their teaching, or that the explanation is not clear. In this case, tasks that require students to demonstrate understanding are more likely to uncover gaps in learning.

The role of silence

The role of silence is culturally variable and while it is often interpreted in UK HE as a negative behaviour indicating lack of interest or knowledge, shyness, etc., it has been found to have a range of other possible interpretations:

- as a face-saving strategy, either to avoid causing loss of face to other students/the lecturer, or to avoid loss of face to themselves;
- as a means of actively demonstrating attention;
- as a sign of respect for others’ views and their own modesty;
- as a sign of disapproval of a low standard of group discussion (compared to lecturer input);
- as a preference for discussion based on considered reflection more than immediate response;
- as a result of lack of confidence in expressing ideas, particularly in a second language.

Alternatively, a silent student might simply be learning more effectively by listening and reflecting than by talking.

Risk-taking

The approach to taking risks, and the level of comfort with new and open-ended situations may be philosophically based in the idea of there being one Truth (with a capital ‘T’) as opposed to an outlook that encompasses a number of relative and potentially conflicting truths.

Students who are uncomfortable with risk-taking might express a preference for clear rules and instructions, and show a low tolerance for ambiguity or multiple options. They may seem sceptical of new ideas and expect detailed justification and evidence of likely value/success in order to reduce their uncertainty before acceptance. In the educational context, students might find it difficult to accept the equal validity of published papers that offer contradictory viewpoints. They may also be inexperienced and ill-equipped to manage the student-centred and project-based learning activities, with their attendant uncertain outcomes, that UK HE tends to value.

2.2. The impact of research into culture

Very little of the research into culture is based on studies of the educational experience, and recent work takes issue with direct application to understanding the international student in UK HE. Cultural influences are many and varied and arise from experience of a range of social settings including type of secondary schooling, social class, work experience and social groupings; all have associated cultural norms within which the individual has learned to operate successfully.

While it can be helpful to recognise some of the dimensions along which cultural values and norms vary, people cannot be categorised or their actions/reactions predicted according to broad generalisations – particularly assumptions made on the basis of nationality.

At the same time, recognising these sources of difference is an important first step in identifying one's own values and assumptions and their impact on practice.

There are, of course, commonalities across cultures as well as differences, and building on these can be important in creating a productive learning environment.

2.3. Culture and teaching

There's no simple definition of 'culture', but with Handal and Lauvas' (1987) model in mind, here are two ways of thinking about culture that can be illuminating when applied to teaching.

Culture as values

Firstly, we might think of culture as a set of values and beliefs that are often implicitly held. This suggests that no teaching is without a cultural basis, and that the values embedded may not always be explicitly articulated, examined, or shared with the students.

Strategies for improving communication around core course values:

- discuss the learning outcomes for course/module with your students – what you want them to learn and why you think it is important, how you teach and how you expect them to learn;
- actively involve students in assessing examples of work, including their own and each others', as part of teaching about marking criteria, degree classification and judgements about quality;
- draw your examples and activities from a range of contexts that will resonate with different students, or ask students to provide examples from their own background;
- acknowledge and debate perspectives on the topic from a range of sources.

Some of these strategies are explored further in the sections on specific teaching contexts.

In a session on international trade I was delighted with the work of a student from Santa Lucia who gave a presentation on how her country was affected by changes in the WTO banana regime. The session was highly rewarding for all concerned.(Simon Sweeney, University of York)

Culture as behaviour

Secondly, we might think about culture in a very practical sense as the knowledge that people use when deciding what is appropriate behaviour for a given situation.

This suggests a link between observing someone's behaviour and attributing intentions or motivations to that person as a result. If the 'knowledge' underpinning that behaviour is not shared, or if the behaviour is subject to different interpretations, then misunderstandings are going to result.

Strategies for reducing misunderstandings:

- discuss your students' previous learning experiences and their expectations, what you expect from your students and what you think it is reasonable for them to expect from you;
- negotiate 'ground rules' for group work where it's clear what the purpose of the exercise is, what the roles are, and where the responsibilities lie;
- give clear guidance on how you expect students to work together outside of contact time and discuss interpretations of collaboration and collusion;
- separate the observation of a behaviour from an immediate interpretation of that behaviour – ask yourself what might be happening.

Some of these strategies are explored further in the sections on specific teaching contexts.

You've got a layer that comes from educational experience to date. You've then got a layer that comes from the particular context – amount of time to make a difference, distance travelled and all the uncertainty that goes with that. And I think you have quite a complex set of drivers of behaviour: some is cultural, some is educational, some are situational. (Professor Christine Ennew, University of Nottingham)

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Intercultural_Competencies.

3. Knowledge and experience

The second level of Handal and Lauvas' (1987) model turns to the role of knowledge and personal experience in informing teaching practice. The current research into internationalisation that prioritises the experience of the student over a national characterisation is complemented by a recent emphasis on collating an evidence base for the effectiveness of teaching interventions across disciplines. When these inform a structured reflection on one's own teaching experience, a personal understanding of the student and of the learning environment emerges that will steer curriculum design and teaching developments.

The most urgent issue I have come across is the need for clarity. Every human activity is influenced by our expectations, and these are a result of our previous experiences. Unless your instructions address why a task is included (not just what the task involves) then some students will be genuinely confused about what is being asked for. (Dave Burnapp, University of Northampton)

3.1. Research into the international student experience

In response to the critique of studies of culture that focus on difference and characterisation (e.g. Hofstede, 1984), a more recent approach seeks to understand the nature of the international student experience.

A number of qualitative studies uncover the expectations, surprises and difficulties in the transition to living and studying in a foreign country (e.g. Merrick, 2004; and Jackson, 2008, cited in Montgomery, 2010). By examining the issues for students, and their impact on personal and educational development in UK HE, this work comes closer to identifying the educational processes and the support systems that have proved most

valuable to our students. This approach is accompanied by resources for international students that explain the norms and rules and suggest how to engage (e.g. Hyde, 2012).

Rather than attempting to understand different cultures, with the inevitable oversimplifications, current research identifies practical steps that can be taken to ensure that international students, indeed all students, are well supported in making the transition to the UK HE environment and its expectations. Hence the focus changes from what the student *is* to what the student *does*.

The Higher Education Academy has produced an 'International Student Lifecycle' resources bank, which is based on this philosophy. It includes resources for staff on engaging international students at all stages of their education, addressing learning issues and teaching methods in a practical and research-informed manner.

Further resources from the TIS project: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/international-student-lifecycle>.

3.2. Induction: from the beginning

While induction, as an organised university/departmental process, is likely to be beyond the normal responsibilities of a new lecturer, it is helpful to be aware of some of the issues faced by new students, and to consider how induction can be an ongoing process of acculturation that extends into taught sessions.

Culture shock

As well as the specific cultural differences addressed earlier, students who are new to living and studying in the UK may also experience 'culture shock' in making the transition to university. Indeed, most new students will be unfamiliar with living and learning independently, but the magnitude of the differences, and their effect, can be greater for those moving from their home country and working in a second language.

Several phases lasting over a period of months have been identified in the literature, some or all of which might be experienced by students:

- euphoria: everything is new and exciting;
- disorientation: anxiety, sense of loss (of friends, status, environment, etc.), confusion;
- rejection by and/or of the new culture: surprise, indignation, feelings of impotence;
- reintegration: adaptation to new norms, development of biculturality.

The timescales will vary with individuals, but stages two and three may occur after a few months. This could be at the end of the first term, when normal activities and contacts cease and there may be deadlines and possibly exams to contend with. Clearly there are implications for performance if students are not feeling secure and confident.

What you've learned is so different from what it is here – it does need some time to get adjusted to. It's not that your system is not right and this system is correct, but it's a different way of doing things.
(Student, University of N)

My first semester was a big shock ... you need more effort to ask questions of the lecturers otherwise they do not know you are lost in your studies. (Student, University of Nottingham)

Induction is an ideal route for addressing many of the barriers to successful integration and minimising the effects of culture shock. It also sets a foundation for getting students to work together throughout the course.

Induction can assist in:

- socialising students and encourage mixing;

- addressing expectations of the course – what will be taught, why, and how;
- showing how learning is assessed, how feedback happens, and distinctions between collaboration and collusion;
- breaking down barriers between staff and students;
- promoting language skills for non-native speakers of English.

3.3. A literature on learning and on teaching

Teaching practice in UK HE is strongly affected by the culture of the discipline. In some cases it is clear that the particular learning outcomes intended for the students demand a particular curriculum design and teaching approach (e.g. the heavily practice-based emphasis in many vocational degrees), but there is also a strong tradition that dominates staff and student expectations concerning appropriate teaching methods. These traditions are informed by a dominant discourse around teaching and learning based on shared values and common experiences as learners in the discipline.

Understanding learning

Research into higher education offers frameworks for considering the learning process and therefore what might constitute effective teaching.

Dominant ideas include approaches based on Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, which emphasised different, but complementary, stages in learning: active, practical, theoretical and reflective. Students are likely to have a greater affinity with some stages than others, with the implication that teaching should offer opportunities to engage in all stages through a variety of activities.

More recently, Biggs' (1999; Biggs and Tang, 2007) influential notion of constructivism proposed that students learn by adjusting current understanding in the light of the new experiences, ideas and information that they encounter. Teaching should therefore connect with students' existing knowledge and help them 'construct' new world views.

A third important contribution emphasises the role of others and of discussion in learning. Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on 'communities of practice' characterised learning as becoming well-versed in the norms of academic communication and behaviour in the discipline. Recent studies on student retention in HE (e.g. Thomas, 2012) reinforce the importance of social contact in engaging and motivating students when other factors might militate against continuing their studies.

Together, these approaches underpin the teaching strategies proposed in the Practice section of the guide:

- students should take control of their learning as active participants;
- using students' previous experiences and local knowledge helps engagement;
- social interaction helps learning.

Evidence-based teaching

In a reflection of the value placed on evidence in supporting practice decisions in medicine and the health professions, there have been recent attempts to promote the use of evidence in identifying the most effective teaching methods in education. Petty (2009) leads the field in interpreting research evidence and relating studies of student attainment to the promotion of practical teaching methods in secondary education.

Thousands of studies of the effectiveness of a range of educational interventions have been combined in meta-analyses to identify consistently effective teaching practices. Hattie's (2009) publication identifies the most influential factors on performance, not all of which are in the teacher's control. He reports the most influential teaching interventions to be:

1. Feedback: from staff, peers, or via self-assessment. An indication of how well the student has demonstrated understanding of the concept/attainment of the skill, where the weaknesses are and how to address them.
2. Interactive teaching: using methods that encourage students to be active and to work with each other in timetabled sessions. Quite structured on behalf of the lecturer, but open to student input and responsive to their understanding.
3. Teaching of study strategies: including discipline-based integration of reading, writing and argument skills with explicit recognition of their value to academic development.

Other valuable interventions include peer assessment, co-operative learning, reading, having challenging goals and being in a classroom with appropriate student behaviour.

Criticisms of the conclusions drawn from such meta-analyses highlight that most studies are carried out on children of school age, but Hattie argues that the effects are consistent across ages tested and there's no reason to expect a difference with older learners.

3.4. Personal experience

It's a common adage that 'there's no substitute for experience', but learning from experience can be improved by having a structure for interrogating the rationale, actions, reactions and outcomes of any teaching session. Schön's (1983) idea of the reflective practitioner in HE emerged from his book of the same title in which he discusses reflection as the means by which one can "surface and criticize the tacit understandings ... and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness" (Schön, 1991, p. 61). This approach underpins many universities' provision for new lecturers' education by incorporating activities that encourage reflection when evaluating one's own teaching.

Activities to assist reflection on practice might include:

- being explicit about the rationale behind the design of a teaching session;
- recording immediate thoughts after a teaching session, especially any surprises around student responses or behaviours;
- reading the literature on education in HE and/or in your discipline to position and challenge your views and understanding;
- being observed by a colleagues (with more/same experience and from the same/different discipline) to give alternative perspectives;
- talking to and observing others to see how their espoused values are reflected in their teaching practice;
- collecting feedback from your students on their experience of learning with you;
- reviewing student performance in sessions and in assessment tasks for evidence of understanding and common mistakes.

With experience, lecturers develop an ability to judge student learning during a teaching session and to draw on an increasing number of tools and techniques to adapt their methods and to be flexible within a planned session.

4. Practice

In Handal and Lauvas' (1987) model, all teaching practice is informed by a lecturer's 'practical theory'. The Values and Knowledge and experience sections addressed common elements of a practical theory, here we turn to the practice – techniques drawn from culturally aware values and a personal evidence base.

Common aims expressed by new lecturers include the integration of students from different backgrounds and engagement of all students with the topic – there is an interest in motivating and enthusing students.

I want to know more about engaging international students both in the UK and when teaching abroad on block programmes. (LC, a Midlands University)

The practical suggestions included in this section reflect values commonly espoused in UK HE: an intention to use teaching time to engage students with each other and the topic as part of developing their independence as well as their understanding. The suggestions also cohere with the literature on social constructivism and they are supported by colleagues' experiences in their own teaching. As such, there is a practical theory of teaching, as described by Handal and Lauvas (1987) that underpins this collection of techniques that you might wish to draw on with your own students.

4.1. Working in a second language

Language difficulties are probably the most commonly cited issues for new international students. There is a gap for students to cross between learning English as a foreign language in one's home country, and using the local, nuanced, informal version of English on arrival in the UK, and the discipline-specific terminology and academic language on their course. For example, terms such as 'significant results' have a very particular meaning in the sciences in addition to their normal English usage as addressed by a standard dictionary.

Although students arrive with a qualification in English, it's not the same as working in a second language on the course. (Christine Wells, University of Leicester)

Sometimes it is difficult for them to understand the accent (I have a Scottish accent) or colloquialisms. It is always a good idea to be wary of using too many analogies, and to speak slowly. (Anne Tierney, University of Glasgow)

A particular challenge lies in the subtleties embraced by academic writing, such as the use of the past tense in journal papers to discuss particular instances of a phenomenon, and the use of the present tense to describe more general statements about the current understanding of a field. The level of language competence to identify these differences and model one's own writing on them is quite demanding.

Our English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) will run bespoke sessions for us. So we can supply a research article and the ELTC staff will use it as an example when discussing scientific writing, styles, etc. This makes a good link to the subject under study and also into technical English. (Alistair Warren, University of Sheffield)

In relation to reviewing sources for reliability and validity, the language used and the context for that language are further cues that might be less accessible for those working in a second language. For example, sources using terms such as 'shocking discovery' or 'scientists prove' have a different agenda to those using terms such as 'new studies suggest', and this can be more obvious to a fluent English speaker. Similarly, the cultural context of a 'broadsheet' rather than a 'tabloid' newspaper provides much information about the likely quality of the content, before reading anything at all.

While students are developing their language skills, it's easily possible for small differences in expectations to be missed, when they are not clearly expressed or understood.

What might you do?

Strategies to help students understand specialist language on their course might include:

- providing a written glossary of new terms and referring to it in lectures;
- writing new terms, acronyms and abbreviations on the board/slides and pointing them out when you first use them;

- listening to yourself and explaining idiomatic language – terms such as ‘shelf life’ and ‘reading up’;
- planning sessions to allow time for reading new material before discussions;
- asking students to select articles from a range of sources and analysing them together in class.

Some of these measures are likely to be helpful to students who are dyslexic or hearing-impaired, as well as those for whom English is a second language.

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Language.

4.2. Engaging students in a range of teaching contexts

First sessions: cross-cultural activities

Bringing induction into the taught session is a powerful way to teach, rather than just tell, students about how UK higher education works and what is expected of them. This is helpful in settling all students into their course, since they are all new to the demands of a degree in the UK.

Inclusiveness fosters a good atmosphere. I tell a class of 15 there are 16 teachers and 16 learners in the room. The principle is important. (Simon Sweeney, University of York)

International students often report that an important reason in their decision to study abroad is a desire to learn about the host country and to meet people from other cultures. However, in practice we often see students self-sorting into groups made up of people of similar backgrounds to themselves. International students recognise this happening and sometimes express disappointment at the outcome. It is difficult, though, to mix when so much else is uncertain in a new environment and we perhaps shouldn't expect it to happen without some encouragement and assistance.

The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) suggests a number of practical exercises that can be used to facilitate and legitimise conversations with others in the group. Some of these make the difficulty of initial introductions an explicit part of the exercise. All aim to make it easier for students to talk about cultural differences, and similarities, from the beginning of the course. Most can be adapted to have a particular disciplinary focus. A selection is outlined here.

Discussing names

In small groups ask students to write down their names and discuss them – Who gave it to you? What does it mean? What do people call you? Is it a common name?

Line-ups

Ask students to form a line in order of distance from home, experience in the topic, English skills, views on a topic, etc. They will need to talk to each other to achieve this.

Being explicit about difference

Ask students to sit next to someone they think will be very different to them, and to talk about their differences and what they have in common. Use as a basis for discussing cognitive dissonance and the value of diversity in learning.

Questions in a bag

Ask students to answer an unseen question from a bag – topics might include previous educational experience, expectations, surprises so far, etc. This can work with students providing the questions too.

Learning about other cultures

Ask students to identify ways in which they could learn more about other cultures and ask them to commit to trying one or two.

The UKCISA (2009) guide, *Discussing difference, discovering similarities*, includes these exercises and more, each with a detailed briefing, suggested timings and likely topics that will arise in discussion.

Other successful strategies include involving students from previous years as facilitators in new activities and involving support staff in early sessions to develop familiarity with the people and support available. Activities carried out in groups, with clear briefings on the task and ground rules for working together, are a good route to encourage early interaction.

Rewarding a range of potentially conflicting contributions to group tasks (accuracy, expansiveness, efficiency, etc.) will demonstrate the range of qualities valued and the absence of a 'correct' answer to any task.

Debriefings following such activities are ideal opportunities to discuss the learning process, the roles of the students and the lecturers, and to explore students' previous experiences (at UK schools, professional training, or abroad) and their initial expectations of the UK model of education.

We take the view that orientation does not stop at the end of that week, it continues throughout their time here. Initiation and familiarisation is very gradual. (Southall et al., 2006)

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Induction.

Large groups

How large is a large group? Numbers enrolled on a module might be in the hundreds, but for our purposes a large group is any number beyond which it's not possible to have a whole group discussion.

Lectures

A traditional lecture might serve one or more of the following commonly identified functions:

- setting a framework for studying the topic: key arguments/questions/data;
- demonstrating how to structure an argument;
- motivating students to study a topic for themselves;
- challenging students preconceptions and assumptions;
- providing a whole-group learning experience;
- adding depth of interest and a human face to the arguments in the literature.

How you structure and deliver the lecture will depend on its purpose, but there are key qualities that are common to all successful lectures. Some of these are given below, with pointers on how to achieve them in practice.

<i>Explicitness</i>	List learning outcomes and keep referring to them.
<i>Structure</i>	Use signposts to show where you are in the overall structure, frame sections to clarify their start and finish, and highlight key points.
<i>Clarity</i>	Speak clearly, facing the front and provide (and refer to) a glossary of new terms.
<i>Variety</i>	Use a mix of audiovisual materials and presentation styles.

Challenging Ask questions and set tasks to keep students thinking.

Responsiveness Collect answers to tasks and adapt lecture content according to the understanding demonstrated.

Activities in large groups

Giving students a particular task to complete within the lecture is a good way to get them talking to each other and thinking about the topic. Decisions to make in designing an activity to use with a large group include:

- structure:
 - who should they be working with?
 - what size groups do you want?
- activity:
 - what do you want them to do?
 - how will you give instructions?
- feedback:
 - do you want feedback from them after the task?
 - how will you gain their attention at the end of the task?

Sample activities include:

Buzz groups Small group discussions, within a larger group, about a precise task or issue.	Silent reflection A set time to identify, alone, the key points/most surprising thing/question to ask, etc.	Three minutes each way Set time to take turns, in pairs, to explain key principles/analyse images/describe phenomena, etc.
Brainstorms Collection of ideas to the board with no immediate discussion on their validity.	Fishbowls Small number of students demonstrating a task/debate, etc. with all other students watching.	Rounds Each student/group in turn adds a new answer to a collection on the board.

(Adapted from Surgenor, 2010)

Tasks you might set include:

Identify main points Write a question Do a calculation Decide your opinion Match/group/rank	Analyse a situation Suggest reasons Plan your reading Fill in the graph Label the diagram	Find an example Propose your action Draw a concept map Compare/contrast Sequence/flow
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Asking questions and giving instructions

It's common to find advice suggesting that you ask questions in lectures. The fine detail of how you do this is important in making the difference between a question that elicits answers from students and a question that results in silence. It's important that your students feel able to answer without being wrong.

Try one of the following:

Question

'Has anybody heard of this author/disease/artwork? Wave if you have.'
(...follow with...)

Rationale/response

No right or wrong answer; no expectation that anyone will answer (not 'who has heard of...?'); very clear instruction on what to do if you have heard of it.

'Do you know anything about X?' (to an individual)

It's okay to know nothing and therefore to answer 'no', compared with being asked 'what do you know about...?' and having nothing to offer.

'Make a note of any examples you might be able to think of, then we'll share them.'
(...follow with...)

Doesn't assume that you can think of any. The act of writing them lets you see how many are participating. (...only if you've seen people writing...)

'Let's have a couple of examples then, who's first? Hands up please.'

More clear that you expect a response but not an extensive one, and again, the behaviour you expect is given as a polite request.

'In groups, it doesn't matter what size so long as you can hear each other, write me a list of X. I'll collect them up in four minutes.'

No need to over organise – allow students to find groupings that work. Your collecting means they have to do it! Allowing four minutes (not five) makes it clear that you really mean four minutes. Culturally, five minutes can be a variable length of time.

I will give my students more control and power by being clearer about the outcomes and giving them more freedom in deciding the approach taken to get there. (New lecturer, a London university)

Common issues in the lecture theatre

An observation: students don't ask questions

When given the opportunity to ask questions in the lecture, there is little response, but at the end there is a queue of students seeking clarification.

Why is this happening?

Reasons might include:

- an unwillingness to lose face on asking a 'stupid' question;
- a fear of causing the lecturer to lose face by implying the explanation has not been clear;
- a perception of hierarchy making it inappropriate to take issue with the lecturer's position;
- a motivation to do well that results in these students, and not others, staying on at the end.

What might you do?

Strategies to make it easier for students to follow the lecture include:

- reducing language-related misunderstandings by writing up new terms, abbreviations and acronyms for all to see, and avoiding or explaining colloquialisms;
- using a range of written and pictorial, audio and visual materials to help convey your message;
- referring often to the structure of the lecture and your place in it.

Strategies to encourage questions include:

- making time for students to come up with questions in groups of two or three before asking for contributions, maybe written on a slip of paper;

- using electronic voting systems to allow students to check their understanding anonymously;
- setting small tasks – filling in gaps in handouts, predicting the outcome, sketching the graph – and emphasise that it's an opportunity for them to check their understanding, not for you to test them.

Academics' experiences:

The clickers [an electronic voting system] were an effective pedagogical tool in our introductory biology course in several respects. First, the clicker system provided 'real-time feedback' to the students. This feedback allowed the instructor to establish clear expectations regarding the depth of student understanding required to answer quiz and exam questions correctly. Simultaneously, this information allowed students to gauge their understanding continually relative to those expectations (i.e. formative assessment). The clickers were also extremely helpful in identifying, and thus allowing us to rectify, by addressing in a more direct and thorough manner, student misconceptions. (Peter Armbruster, Georgetown University, in Armbruster et al. (2009))

From Day 1 if you establish that you are going to do 'question and answer' with them, then they will do it. Your average class, I would probably break it about 4 times with a straightforward question and it's quite usual that 3 or 4 hands go up in a class this size [150-160 1st years] and people will quite willingly offer comments. We just have an atmosphere where people will ask things. I have a 2 hour lecture so in the coffee break people come and ask me things and I will use them in the 2nd half. (Liz Sockett, University of Nottingham, in Sockett (2004))

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Lecturing;
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Language.

Small groups

This section might have been titled 'discussions' since the defining factor for a small group, in this case, is one in which all participants are able to see and hear each other, and therefore able to engage in a whole group discussion:

In seminars, ideally no student should have their back to any other student. Eye contact is important, so if the room layout isn't suitable, change it. (Simon Sweeney, University of York)

By engaging in small group discussion, students are practising their ability to:

- express their ideas clearly and succinctly;
- listen to others' contributions critically;
- build ideas into an argument;
- defend a position.

To develop these skills of argument it's important to practise analysis, questioning, evaluation, criticism and synthesis. To this end, the lecturer's role in the small group is primarily to generate, sustain and manage conversation around the topic to ensure that everyone feels able to contribute and that the group is steered, but not necessarily led, by the lecturer. However, some students can seem unwilling to engage with, and contribute to, discussions in small groups and/or seminars, with the result that home students and the lecturer do most of the talking. Reasons for this might include:

- a perception that speaking without being invited by the tutor would be inappropriate;
- an understanding of silence as a demonstration of interest and respect;
- reluctance to lose face by offering contributions that are less well-informed than those that the lecturer could offer;
- an expectation that the expert – the lecturer – should be talking, not the learner;
- lack of confidence in language skills.

Activities in small groups

To increase the level of participation some of the following structured tasks might be used:

Setting ground rules

Clarifying the role of the small group and discussing the expectations of all participants.

Building confidence

Using short activities in the early stages and allowing time for a sense of belonging to the group to develop to improve comfort levels before expecting whole group open discussion. Techniques such as brainstorming (collecting many ideas with no initial judgement on quality) and thanking students for their contribution help build an environment that feels safe.

Giving private time

Making space for limited pair work to allow students to 'try out' their contributions on a peer and to share ownership of subsequent responses. Pairs might prepare definitions, examples, challenges, or clarification questions for others to address.

Using written contributions

Collecting short written contributions from all before the session helps to gauge the level of understanding, provides material to compare and discuss and reduces dominance by a few confident speakers.

Questioning techniques

As with asking questions in the large group setting, the structure of your questioning will influence the responses from the student group. An awareness of the following question types and combinations should help with managing student contributions.

Closed questions

These usually elicit a short, right or wrong answer. Examples include: 'Have you read...?', 'What's the term for...?', 'What period did this take place in?'

Open questions

These have no 'correct' answer and encourage students to express their knowledge and opinions more freely. Examples might include: 'What do you think X is saying ...?', 'How might we estimate...?', 'What factors should we take into account when...?'

Probing questions

Used for following up earlier answers, these ask for clarification, extension or application. For example: 'How might that work?', 'Can you say more about...?', 'What if we changed...?'. These questions can be pitched to address different levels of learning, from straightforward knowledge ('Describe the process...') through analysis ('What's the evidence?'), to evaluation ('Can you justify that conclusion?').

Leading questions

For moving the conversation in a particular direction, or elicit an argument that you want to have discussed, a leading question should prompt a particular view. Examples might include: 'Is it true to say that...?', 'Surely we should conclude that...?', 'Is option 1 or option 2 preferable here?'

Academics' experiences:

Because they [truly 'timid' individuals] often lack self-confidence, they are usually extremely attentive, and will be able to take on summarisation tasks or provide reflections on process with great accuracy. Asking shy members to take on these roles at an early stage enables a gradual entry into the group activity. (Glyn Elwyn, University of Cardiff, in Elwyn et al. (2004))

I establish a rapport with the students by being very different from a formal teacher-student relationship – I engage students in group quizzes for small prizes to 'see where we are and what to concentrate on'. Sometimes this is easier with international students because they don't know what they should expect. (Peter Klappa, University of Kent)

Each group in the class has a private [online] forum where we expect students to post research and have discussions. This asynchronous approach gives international students a bit of 'breathing space' in which to compose their work, and post it to the group forum. So the use of technology offers equality for students. This also applies to home students who have home responsibilities or learning difficulties. (Anne Tierney, University of Glasgow)

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Seminars.

Common issues in small group teaching

An observation: students won't admit they don't understand

A lecturer might ask students if they understood the content of the relevant lecture and they say 'yes', but they can't apply the theory in practice and are not asking for help. This has implications for students making the transition to more student-led modes of learning.

Why is this happening?

Reasons might include:

- a need for the student to save face in not admitting their failure to understand;
- a need for the student to avoid loss of face by the lecturer by implying that the lecture was not understandable;
- a desire to maintain a positive relationship with the lecturer being more important than getting their help in the class situation.

What might you do?

Strategies include:

- indicating that you expect students not to understand yet – and that the session is to clarify areas they are not sure about;
- using open questions to work out what students do and don't understand;
- giving straightforward and assertive feedback where students are shown to lack understanding;
- assigning students to work in pairs or small groups on problems;
- collecting questions jotted down by each group at intervals, and addressing with the whole class;
- using time at the end of the class to encourage students to review their progress and to make links with lectures.

Academics' experiences:

We have a system of peer mentoring and tutoring so that students get both technical advice, and also help with approaches to learning from peers. Students find that it can be easier to discuss matters with someone from a common cultural background, and the subject can make more sense when discussed in relation to their previous educational experience. (Mike Thomlinson, Sheffield Hallam University)

I ask the students to prepare before the session, and then to compete in groups in a quiz that tests their understanding of the material. This uncovers areas they don't understand and I explicitly use this to inform how we use our time together. If combined with using an anonymous suggestions box for content and improvements it's possible to show students that you are interested in what they are having difficulty with.
(Peter Klappa, University of Kent)

Addressing contentious issues

An observation: students have very different world views that impact on studying some topics

Studying may raise a range of contentious issues in a diverse classroom. Topics addressing, for example, evolution, social policy, interpretation of history, religious practices, ethics, etc. will highlight a multitude of experiences, beliefs and personal convictions.

Why is this happening?

Reasons might include:

- personal experience may affect an attitude towards the worth of particular practices;
- religious beliefs may provide an uncritical basis for approaching topics;
- exposure to media stories or campaigns written with a bias may have shaped opinion;
- previous education will have taken place in a context with cultural norms regarding ethical issues.

What might you do?

Strategies include:

- providing opportunities for a range of views to be identified, without necessarily asking students to own or defend those views;
- offering frameworks and principles for positioning opinions on individual issues;
- setting each ethical issue in a wider conceptual approach to the topic.

Academics' experience:

The aim is to show them that they are intuitively making suggestions based either on founding principles or on expected consequences. I then use their answers as illustrations of wider ethical schools of thought. (Chris Willmott, University of Leicester, in Willmott et al. (2004))

The co-teaching of the seminar [on the use of human subjects in biomedical research] by a biological scientist and an ethicist enabled both the scientific and ethical issues surrounding the use of humans as subjects in research to be fully addressed. (David Lewis, University of Leeds, in Fry et al. (2009))

Acceptance of Darwinism can be very challenging for students who have a world view where it currently has no place. It's often down to individual maturity as to how much they feel able to discuss this. (Dave Skingsley, Staffordshire University)

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Critical_Thinking.

Group work

Group work is a common requirement of UK HE courses, often with the aim of developing students' ability to work with others and to manage themselves, their time and their peers as part of the learning process. However, it is difficult, and it is not always welcomed by students, particularly those who are keen to do well and who fear that their results may be negatively affected by others' behaviour.

Concerns can be limited by giving very clear briefings on the roles required in group work and the potential issues that can arise when working together, especially in cross-cultural teams.

A briefing for group work should be written as well as orally described and should include:

- a description of the task with expected milestones;
- examples of what a successful outcome might look like;
- the resources available to the group;
- a description of the roles that the group are expected to play, for example:
 - manager: oversees progress towards milestones and time management;
 - researchers: does background reading for each topic and summarising for the group;
 - task-specific roles: dependent on the discipline and the task for the group;
 - scribe: takes notes and action points from discussions;
 - presentation developer: compiles visual aids for any group presentation;
 - presenter: leads any group presentation;
 - checker: makes sure everyone is completing their tasks and performing their roles;
 - teamwork monitor: observes group behaviour and reports back to the group;
- a requirement to report on the process of working in a group as well as the requirement set out in the description of the task.

A discussion around the roles, and how you expect students to perform them, can take place before those roles are allocated. This allows students to clarify what the responsibilities are, and what behaviour is expected, without any possibility of suggesting concerns about which individuals are in those roles.

To prepare students to work together, and to assist them in managing their own groups, it is helpful to raise some common issues specifically. Asking students to identify and then suggest ways of addressing the potential challenges of group working, or to propose solutions to pre-prepared scenarios, allows them to raise concerns legitimately and to agree ground rules before starting work on the task. Potential scenarios might address:

- communication preferences;
- appropriate use of native language by some group members;
- approaches to time, working hours, planning and punctuality;
- status of group members and group contributions;
- assumptions of agreement/expression of disagreement;
- concepts of humour;
- vocal dominance;
- educational philosophies and expectations of learning together.

You can see a cultural difference in attitudes to studying with a tendency for UK students to play down the amount of work they are actually doing and international students taking the claims literally. It is important to advise students that they should do what is right for them and their studies. (Nadia Tuzi, University of Edinburgh)

Investigative practical group work enabled the development of communities of practice in which students constructed their own learning ... The complex feedback received by students within their community of practice contrasted with typical tutor feedback which is often focussed on specific attributes of individual written assignments. (Stephen Merry, Staffordshire University, in Merry et al. (2011))

Common issues in setting up groups

An observation: students don't mix in groups

International students often claim that being able to mix with other cultures was a key part of their decision to study abroad, and yet self-sorting groups of students are often seen to comprise co-nationals.

Why is this happening?

Reasons might include:

- a need to avoid causing loss of face to others when approaching home students, or a need to avoid loss of face if turned down by home students;
- home students' unwillingness to mix with other cultures;
- lack of confidence in language skills preventing making approaches to other students;
- cultural norms or religious observance making co-national groups easier to engage with.

What might you do?

Strategies include:

- saving group work until students are more confident with language and have had opportunities to mix in a more guided way during lectures and tutorials;
- assigning students to mixed groups, but with some homogeneity so that no individual feels isolated;
- giving instructions to students to self sort with clear parameters about group membership;
- assigning students to groups by project preference;
- mixing students for some tasks and allow self-sorting for others.

Academics' experiences:

The various project topics were written up around the room and students were asked to stand near a topic that interested them as a way of forming groups. A student on their own had to join another topic area and popular topics formed more than one group. Students were able to sort themselves by topic, but also see who they would end up working with. (Michael Davidson, University of Ulster)

Relating project work to issues that are relevant to international students' home countries offers better career development opportunities for them and for all students. It also helps to involve international students in mixed groups where they become a valuable resource in terms of having local knowledge and perhaps useful language skills. (Chris Branford-White, London Metropolitan University)

In practical classes we try to mix up students from different backgrounds when we teach in small groups (2-4). This helps team working, but also encourages cooperative use of English and we also see social links emerging between students from different backgrounds. (Alistair Warren, University of Sheffield)

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Group_Work.

Common issues in groups that aren't working

An observation: students aren't working effectively in their groups

Groups might experience a range of problems:

- UK students sometimes complain that international students are not contributing;
- international students sometimes complain that UK students are not putting in enough effort;
- students might interpret others' behaviour as offensive or inappropriate;
- a perception of uneven allocation of tasks can lead to resentment.

Why is this happening?

Reasons might include:

- different ideas about appropriate behaviour in group discussions can lead to unequal contributions and/or a lack of opportunity to be heard;

- different views on the importance of the group and the individual within it can lead to frustrations with contributions and shared products;
- lack of confidence in language skills might prevent full engagement;

What might you do?

Strategies to address the observations might include:

- providing ground rules for groups and how they should work (more detailed for first years);
- talking about the benefits of working with other cultures, while also raising the issue of cultural difference and potential misunderstandings with your students;
- assigning a leader to the group and giving them responsibility to get everyone involved;
- briefly joining groups and acting as a role model;
- assessing group-working skills an explicit part of the task through reflection and observation;
- focusing students' attention by assessing their contribution to the task, perhaps via personal statement;
- making the task compulsory to pass the module, but not counted towards the degree classification;
- being clear on the status of assessment of language skills in reports;
- asking yourself if working in groups really is important in this case.

Academics' experiences:

I allowed a self-sorting group of international students to work together, but they became isolated in the course and there was no-one from another culture to challenge their ways of working. They did not do as well as the mixed groups. (DW, University of Nottingham)

Instead of conventional assessments based on a written report alone, I embedded additional key skills as part of the assessment. These were monitored contemporaneously through regular meetings with the supervisor. This was done to enable students to recognise and develop key skills that are invaluable for their future. These skills are presumed but not always rewarded in conventional assessments for research projects. (Momna Hejmadi, University of Bath, in Luck (2008))

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Group_Work.

4.3. Assessment and feedback

The evidence-base for effective teaching (see Knowledge and experience section) suggests that feedback on performance is the most influential factor in successful learning. This does not have to be feedback from the lecturer, but might also include peer and self-feedback when students are well briefed in the process.

Key elements of useful feedback include:

- timeliness – prompt return and in readiness for the next relevant piece of work;
- specificity – comments relate to particular sentences/ideas/behaviours;
- constructiveness – explains how to do better, not just what is wrong;

In designing student activity over time, good practice to consider for incorporating feedback in learning might be:

- making the learning outcomes and your assessment criteria clear, and making the feedback relate directly to the criteria;
- using a range of sources for generating feedback;
- identifying what's done well, what to improve, and how to improve;
- setting formative tasks that build towards the summative task;
- setting new formative tasks based on improvements required from current performance;
- asking students to be explicit about how they've used their feedback as part of their improvement.

Students need to understand the grading system, the meaning of the grades, how their assignment has been marked, what they did well and what they did less well in, how they can improve next time, and who they can go to if they have a query. All this will pave the way for future assignments. (Fiona Gilbert, Oxford Brookes University, in Gilbert (2009))

Feedback needs to be straightforward with clear signposting of how they should go about improving their performance. (Dave Skingsley, Staffordshire University)

Common concerns about assessed work

An observation: students initially produce poor or plagiarised work

Early submissions are of a poor quality with little adherence to academic communication standards. Work may appear to be plagiarised and the standard of written English is low.

Why is this happening?

Reasons for poor writing might include:

- variation in previous education in writing, particularly critical reviews and experimental reporting;
- cultural norms around narratives and what counts as valid evidence leading to an emphasis in unexpected areas;
- some discomfort with taking an authoritative voice in work submitted for assessment by experts.

Common reasons for plagiarism include:

- pressure to perform well leading to over reliance on the proven quality of source material;
- poor writing skills and/or language ability leading to frustration with ability to demonstrate achievements.

Possible reasons for apparent plagiarism might include:

- a lack of understanding of the conventions for referencing others' work;
- a student still learning to write academically – 'plagiphrasing' is a recognised stage of learning to express another's ideas in your own words;
- poor language skills resulting in over reliance on words in the source material;
- pressure to perform well leading to an overeagerness to conform to academic norms;
- a level of discomfort in rewriting the ideas of an expert in any other words but the author's own;
- confusion between collaboration and collusion, particularly with conflicting expectations in group work process and assessment.

What might you do?

Strategies include:

- providing dedicated support sessions on information literacy and referencing skills;
- explaining the principles of academic integrity in the academic community and the value of referencing for showing the development of ideas in the field and the position of one's own contribution;
- setting small written tasks early and often and giving clear formative feedback;
- structuring later assessments to build on the feedback given in earlier tasks;
- using peer feedback on early work to develop an ability to reflect on progress in relation to assessment criteria.

Academics' experiences:

Individual assignments with each student investigating a different fungal gene certainly reduced the possibility of plagiarism between students ... [only] a small quantity of original writing in English was demanded and marks were awarded for analytical skills. (Paul Hooley, University of Wolverhampton, in Hooley et al. (2004))

For students to judge the quality of [their] work, they are provided with two sets of criteria. The first describes the honours degree classes and the second details the components which should normally be included ... The students use the criteria and hand them in attached to their record books ... The tutor now feels able to sample-assess, thus saving staff time ... The students ... have had the opportunity to develop their own skills of evaluation and judgement. (James Chubb, University of Liverpool, in Fry et al. (2009, p. 278))

It is important that there is a mix of assessment formats (MCQs, SAQs and essay type questions), such that you are assessing subject expertise and not the psychology of the learner (or language skills). (Nancy El-Faragy, University of Glasgow)

Some international students have been used to more frequent assignments with marks and feedback provided on a regular basis. I will point out other, less formal, ways that they are receiving feedback throughout the course. For example, in tutorials or laboratory practicals they address questions or work on problems and can talk these through with their peers and their tutor or demonstrator. This is a way in which they can evaluate their understanding and progress during the course. (Nadia Tuzi, University of Edinburgh)

Further resources from the TIS project:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Assessment_and_Feedback.

5. In conclusion

Developing intercultural competence and understanding in students is an aim that universities commonly express for their undergraduate programmes. This can be encouraged through intercultural dialogue and the attendant exposure to alternative perspectives. The inevitable misunderstandings, which demand patience and tolerance to overcome, form an essential part of the learning process for all involved.

It is really important to have an open mind and to know that mis-understanding happens, and that it is more likely to happen if one is ignorant or indifferent to the students' language difficulties, cultural or communication differences and previous teaching experiences. If in doubt one needs to ask and try to find what works best, but always assume it does not work and have contingencies in place. (Beatrix Fahnert, Cardiff University)

Adjustments made to help support students in achieving the intended learning outcomes may have something in common with those designed to address the particular requirements of students with disabilities. As such, inclusivity in relation to internationalisation does not necessarily require a whole new set of practices, merely an awareness of the impact of current practice and small changes in particularly sensitive areas. As with reasonable adjustments in anticipation of disabled students, the benefits are often felt by all students.

The aim of this guide has been to provide supporting information, prompts and suggestions to consider when teaching cohorts that include international students. We have concentrated on teaching activity – from learning environments, group working and assessment, to the encouragement of students' independent thinking and their engagement in the learning process.

It is, however, helpful to remember that the students' engagement goes beyond the classroom environment, to include the undergraduate or postgraduate office, the industrial or commercial placements office, student

support, housing and library/information services, all of which form a part of the HE culture in which they need to operate successfully if we are to provide the best possible learning experience.

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7. Further reading

- Biggs, J. and Tang, C. (2007) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 3rd ed. Buckingham: SRHE and OUP.
A very readable take on how students learn and the implications for teaching practice. The concept of constructive alignment (aligning learning outcomes, assessment and learning activities) originated in the first edition of this work.
- Brown, P. and Levinson, S. (1987) *Politeness: some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
A study of politeness and face across cultures, identifying commonalities in communication and implications for related fields of study.
- Carroll, J. and Appleton J. (2001) *Plagiarism: a good practice guide*. Bristol: JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee).
A comprehensive and practical guide to teaching strategies and administrative procedures that aim to prevent, identify and address plagiarism.
- Davies, C. (2008) *Learning and teaching in laboratories*. Loughborough: Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre.
A short guide that focuses on how students learn and practical approaches to supporting learning in the laboratory setting. Although generated from Engineering, many of the issues and approaches are relevant across disciplines.
- Dolan, M. and Macias, I. (2009) *Motivating international students: a practical guide to aspects of learning and teaching*. In: *The Handbook for Economics Lecturers*. Bristol: Higher Education Academy Economics Network.
Although presented as a handbook for lecturers in Economics, most of the issues raised and teaching contexts addressed are relevant across disciplines. The practical advice offered is based on the experience of the authors in their teaching at the University of Bath, as well as on relevant literature.
- DuPraw, M.E. and Axner, M. (1997) *Working on common cross-cultural communication challenges*. Available from: <http://www.pbs.org/ampu/crosscult.html> [12 August 2012].
One of many (American) websites giving advice on cross-cultural communication based in an identification of axes of difference between cultures and the misunderstandings that can arise as a consequence.
- Geert Hofstede. Available from: <http://www.geerthofstede.nl/> [12 August 2012].
Hofstede's website, which gives an introductory overview of his, now disputed, work on national cultural traits carried out in the international business community.
- Higher Education Academy, Teaching International Students project webpage. Available from: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/teaching-international-students> [12 August 2012]
An ongoing project that includes a resource bank of very practical advice on teaching international students collected from across the sector.
- Luck, M. (2008) *Student research projects: guidance on practice in the biosciences*. Leeds: Higher Education Academy UK Centre for Bioscience.
A thorough exploration of the value of research projects for students, and staff, in bioscience, accompanied by detailed practical guidance on implementation and assessment of outcomes. A range of case studies show how others have put the ideas into practice.
- Leeds Metropolitan University, Themed resource bank for internationalisation of HE. Available from: http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/world-widehorizons/index_resource_bank.htm [12 August 2012].

This resource bank includes Viv Caruana's literature review, originally commissioned by the Higher Education Academy in 2007, and more recent work from Caruana and Lefever. Coverage includes the curriculum, e-learning and ideas of 'graduateness'.

Montgomery, C. (2010) *Understanding the international student experience*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
A reorientation to study internationalisation from the student perspective. This review contextualises the research in the current HE context, presents the student experience of transition to UK culture, and draws conclusions that place an emphasis on intercultural competence rather than assimilation.

Ryan, J. (2000) *A guide to teaching international students*. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development.
Although it's now 12 years old, this readable guide offers relevant strategies to include international students in a range of teaching contexts, with insights into the nature of cultural difference and the student experience of learning and prompts for reflection on practice.

Ryan, J. (ed.) (2012) *Cross cultural teaching and learning for home and international students. Internationalisation of pedagogy and curriculum in higher education*. Abingdon: Routledge
A recently published collection, stimulated by an HEA conference on internationalisation, with contributors working in a range of institutional roles in internationally active universities.

Ryan, J. and Louie, K. (2007) False dichotomy? 'Western' and 'Confucian' concepts of scholarship and learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 39 (4), 404-417.
An argument against a stereotyping of the west as the home of critical thinking and the east as the home of rote learning. This paper reconsiders the complexities of culture and the dangers of using simplistic notions to inform teaching practice.

Signorini, P. Wiesemes, R. and Murphy, R. (2009) Developing alternative frameworks for exploring intercultural learning: a critique of Hofstede's cultural difference model. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 14 (3), 253-264.
The authors re-examine Hofstede's much-used dimensions of culture and find they have limited value in informing practice in higher education due to oversimplification of cultural differences and a lack of data from relevant contexts.

Trahar, S. (2007) *The International Higher Education Landscape – some theories and working practices*. Bristol: ESCALATE Education Subject Centre. Available from: <http://escalate.ac.uk/3559> [12 August 2012].
Sheila Trahar explores the culturally embedded nature of teaching and the discomfort that reflecting on practice can cause. She also presents case studies of the complexity of cross-cultural interactions in teaching from a student and lecturer perspectives.

UK Centre for Bioscience, Short Guide series. Available from:
<http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/shortguides.aspx> [12 August 2012].
These short introductions address a range of teaching issues in the Biosciences with pithy summaries of core issues and practical tips supported by further reading and resources.

Walker, J. (1998) Student plagiarism in universities: What are we doing about it? *Higher Education Research and Development*. 17 (1), 89-106.
Although published more than 14 years ago, and showing its age in some places, this article is still useful for examining the broader concept of academic integrity and proposing a Plagiarism Continuum in an attempt to identify different types of plagiarism and assign a level of gravity to each.

Wheeler, G. (2009) Plagiarism in the Japanese universities: Truly a cultural matter? *Journal of Second Language Writing*. 18 (1), 17-29.

An interesting study that tackles the problematic characterisation of national behaviours by examining the attitudes of Japanese students to plagiarism. The findings suggest that stereotypical assumptions that these students would find plagiarism to be culturally acceptable are faulty and that lack of knowledge of HE is a more likely explanation for inappropriate behaviour.

8. Author biography

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Rachel is an educational developer, with a background in the biological sciences. As Course Director for the University of Nottingham's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education for new staff, she led the adaptation of the PGCHE for the University's campus in Malaysia, and has taught international academic staff both on the Malaysia campus and via videoconferencing from England. Her recent online publication, *Learning from Internationalisation*, explores the professional development of staff at the University in relation to the internationalisation of higher education. Rachel currently holds the post of Head of Teaching Enhancement Information at Nottingham where she also teaches Animal Behaviour on the Foundation Science course. She is also a freelance educational consultant.

9. Acknowledgements

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