Teaching International Students

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Session themes

• Considering some common experiences and challenges for *all* HE students

• Focussing, in particular, on teaching students who are non-native speakers

• Contextualising students’ prior experiences and qualifications

• Reflecting on the role of assessment and feedback in supporting students’ academic development

• Considering practical strategies for engaging international students in a variety of settings
Considering some common challenges and experiences for all HE students

‘Learning in higher education involves adapting to new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge. Academic literacy practices - reading and writing within disciplines - constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study.’

(Lea and Street, 1998)

‘...it is important to view such confusion not as an individual student phenomenon but as indicative of a dominant practice in HE, which I am calling here the ‘institutional practices of mystery.’”

Lillis (2001)
What kinds of knowledge are being communicated in an assessed piece of work, for example? (apologies if you’ve seen this before!)

1) Substantive relevant content-based knowledge (have they ‘got’ the topic, theme, idea, concept etc.)

2) Knowledge about the nature of knowledge, including how it’s produced and contested, in particular discipline domains (epistemological values)

3) Practical knowledge of various conventions of academic discourse and how to work within these (do they sound like a Biologist, Historian, Chemist, Sociologist etc.?)

4) Practical knowledge of various study practices (can they manage tasks effectively?)
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. (p7)
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. (p7)
References

