

The time for “recognising” intercultural learning has come

Victoria Perselli & Diana Moehrke

**Kingston
University**
London

Purpose

- To present the **interim findings** from a **literature review of different approaches to internationalisation** at tertiary level

Background

- Based on a **research project** into the **lived experiences of intercultural learning** among international students and staff in the UK
- **How** does **pedagogical thinking shape** current **internationalisation practice** at tertiary level?

Aims

- a) To raise awareness of the lack of pedagogical underpinnings in the discussion on internationalisation
- b) To encourage the development of resourceful pedagogical approaches to intercultural learning in practice

Contextualisation

- International students have often been perceived as a **homogenous group**, needy of the knowledge and skills to be academically successful in the “Western” world (Ryan, 2005; Kreber, 2009; Louie, 2005; Turner, 2009; Caruana and Spurling, 2007).
- Moreover, international students have been **valued for their financial contributions** by education providers and governments alike (Kreber, 2009; Ryan, 2011).

Shift in perception

- More recently, a **positive shift in perception** of international students has occurred
- **Moving towards...** education as a reflexive process that acknowledges, in a critical manner, **the cultural dimensions of learning** (Jin and Cortazzi, 2013b; Welikala, 2013; Trahar and Hyland, 2011; Ryan, 2011).
- **Going away from...** the provision of education as a means of adaptation to existing academic standards and profit generation

BUT: This shift in perception is complex...

...as the following quote by a UK university teacher illustrates (Welikala 2013, p. 49):

‘When international students come here, **we have to** show that they are **important** and that their experience counts and so on. We have to treat them as **customers** and ... they bring **revenue** and if we are going to be the second highest **market** for international students, we have to **provide more and better learning experience.**

International students

- For the purpose of this presentation we will use the term in its broadest sense to refer to...

students ‘who have chosen to travel to another country for tertiary study’

(Ryan and Carroll 2005, p. 3)

Our review focuses on two points:

1. The gradual **move from deficit and assimilatory thinking** to a ‘pedagogy of recognition’ (Caruana and Spurling 2007, p. 67)
2. The literature that pursues **approaches of recognition** and its function towards positively repositioning students and their learning in diverse contexts

Positionality

- This presentation is **situated** within approaches to internationalisation that **recognise the cultural dimensions of teaching and learning**
- **Learning ‘from international students** who have been successful learners in their own educational contexts’ is ‘[a]rguably the next crucial step in internationalization’ (Jin and Cortazzi 2013a)

Applying a critical pedagogical lens

- To **unveil potentially hegemonic forces** in the internationalisation of tertiary education
- To become more **alert to social inequalities and injustices** in diverse study contexts (Giroux, 2010; Kincheloe, 2005)
- **Hegemony** – Power that is ‘exercised throughout society by the dominant group’ (Gramsci 1930-1932, p. 200)

What is critical pedagogy like?

- Encompasses scholars who draw on shared principles to inform their practice
- ‘social and educational **vision of justice and equality**’ (Kincheloe 2008, p. 6)
- Concepts of **critique**, e.g. ‘conscientization’ (Freire 1970)
- Concepts of **change**, e.g. a vision of what could be, empowerment and agency

Approaches to internationalisation & the hegemonic thinking behind these

- Correcting deficiencies
- Assimilatory practice
- Pursuing resourceful intercultural learning

Approaches to internationalisation & the hegemonic thinking behind these

- **Intercultural learning is not a popular term** in the literature on international students
- The term **internationalisation clearly predominates** in current discourse
- Yet, understandings of internationalisation often vary and are **value-laden** (political, economic, socio-cultural and educational meanings (Knight, 1999; De Wit, 2002))
- The value-laden understandings are reflected in the various approaches to internationalisation

Correcting deficiencies

- International students as a **homogenous group**, needy of acquiring existing academic knowledge and skills (mainly prior to the late 1990s)
- Learning **‘to master the rules of the game’** (Welikala 2013, p. 40)
- International students as **passive and linguistically incapable class fellows, rote learners, plagiarisers, uncritical thinkers** (Leask and Carroll, 2011; Ryan and Carroll, 2005)

Correcting deficiencies leads to...

- **One-sided process of adaptation** (Welikala, 2013)
- Internationalisation as the **oppressor** / international students as the **oppressed** (Freire, 1970)
- **Feelings of powerlessness and inequality**, e.g. 'I'm the guest and the guest is always less powerful' (Gu, Schweisfurth and Day 2010, p. 17)

Assimilatory practice

- Emerged as a critique of the deficit approach
- International students' **diverse cultural origins began to be acknowledged**
- educators and students encouraged **to develop a meta-cultural sensitivity** (i.e. to reflect on their own culture and other cultures (Louie, 2005; Ryan and Carroll, 2005))

Shortcomings of assimilatory practice

- Mainly researches and discusses the **dilemmas and challenges** that are experienced with international students being on campus
- **Ignores the contributions** that international students can make to the learning environment
- **Fails to take into account the construction of socially just learning environments and educational theory**

These shortcomings mean that...

- International students are **still required to adapt** to existing academic standards (Montgomery, 2009) and social expectations
- This is **reminiscent of the deficit approach**

Assimilatory Approach: Research themes and findings

- **Wealth of literature** – reports mainly on **student interaction and multicultural group work** (classroom based)
- **Major finding: Students do not interact spontaneously** with other students who have a different culture, ethnicity, religion or speak a different language (Volet and Ang, 2012; Peacock and Harrison, 2009; Hyland, Trahar, Anderson and Dickens, 2008; Turner, 2009; Volet and Ang, 1998)
- **Consequently, it is argued:** Meaningful cultural interaction does not simply occur, but must be encouraged, e.g. by “forcing” students to work together (Rienties et al. 2012)

Pursuing resourceful intercultural learning

- International students are appreciated as **resourceful peers** (Jin and Cortazzi, 2013b; Welikala, 2013)
- **Economic rationales** for the provision of intercultural education **seem to recede**
- **Discussions on pedagogies** that seek to empower students to become active agents of their own learning **are emerging** (Jin and Cortazzi, 2013b; Welikala, 2013; Caruana and Spurling, 2007)

For example: 'cultures of learning'

(Jin and Cortazzi 2013b, p. 5)

- To signal '**how learning has cultural dimensions, how it is a culturally pluralistic process, and that participants in international and multicultural contexts may well bring quite different social practices and cultural expectations with them**'

Emerging themes

- The most recent trend in the internationalisation literature is **to re-think existing approaches and to add a stronger pedagogical dimension**
- However, there is very little literature that examines **how this new, resourceful approach is being realised in practice – *what we refer to as intercultural learning***

Emerging key questions

- In what ways can **students be empowered to act as active agents** of their own learning in diverse contexts?
- How can educators ensure that they **foster socially just learning environments through their teaching**, especially when the provision of education is firmly rooted in capitalist settings?
- How can **formal and informal curricula** be intertwined to foster inclusive learning within and beyond the classroom, **without “forcing” students to interact?**

We therefore argue that...

- that the time for “recognising” intercultural learning has come
- ...and seek to encourage for this approach to be developed further at practice level and beyond

THANK YOU!



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