

Teaching International & NESB Students

UTDC Guidelines



Improving Teaching and Learning

Teaching International & NESB Students

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Victoria University of Wellington

Foreword

The authors wish to make clear that this booklet was designed and written to reflect the following approach to the issue of International and NESB students:

- (a) We believe that internationalisation of education is a positive development that enriches the teaching and learning process and opens up new opportunities for research. It benefits all students by widening their educational and cultural horizons, increasing their awareness of their own cultural identity and of what it means to be a citizen of the global village.
- (b) We believe that many of the problems associated with international students are in fact common to other groups of students and can be addressed by modelling good learning strategies and techniques and effective teaching that encourages deep learning.

At the end of the booklet you will find a section entitled 'Teaching and Learning Strategies to Help IS and NESB Students', which outlines common problems as identified by lecturers teaching IS and NESB students, and suggests possible reasons and solutions for these problems. You can use this section as a **quick reference guide**, however, we believe that reading the first part of the booklet will help you gain a better understanding of the so-called 'issue of IS and NESB' students overall, and put the suggestions offered at the end of the booklet into context.

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Introduction

The issue of international students is becoming more and more pertinent both in New Zealand, in general, and for Victoria University, in particular. According to the Ministry of Education figures of 2002, there were 52,700 foreign fee paying (FFP) students in New Zealand in 2001. This represents a 36% increase over 2000, and an 86% increase over 1999 numbers. In the public tertiary sector, there were over twelve and a half thousand FFP students in 2001. This number represents 5.4% of the total tertiary roll in 2001. The Ministry of Education forecast is for this rising trend to continue in the near future.

Victoria University has recently introduced an internationalisation article into its strategic plan. The University Internationalisation Plan sets the target for total numbers for international student participation at 16 percent by 2010. The plan highlights the importance of providing “a high quality (learning and life) experience for all international students”. This objective calls for a better awareness on the part of VUW staff of issues involved in being an international student in New Zealand, including cognitive, linguistic and cultural challenges, and understanding of the reasons for mismatches between teachers’ and students’ beliefs and expectations in relation to education in general, and tertiary study in particular.

1. Identifying challenges and questioning beliefs

It is important to acknowledge that both IS (international students) and local teachers approach the teaching and learning process with a set of preconceived ideas, which create certain expectations in relation to all aspects of tertiary education. These are often based on prior teaching and learning experiences, as well as cultural and social values held in a particular country or society.

The majority of FFP students in the public tertiary sector institutions of New Zealand are of Asian citizenship, e.g. in 2001 Asian students represented 83% of all FFP students of this sector in New Zealand. The leading countries of citizenship of FFP students in 2001 were China, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan (in this order). In particular, there continued to be a significant growth in the number of public tertiary FFP students from China, with a 271% increase from 1999 to 2000, and a 209% increase from 2000 to 2001. Many Asian students come from

countries with deep-rooted Confucian tradition, the ethics of which has influenced all aspects of life, including education¹.

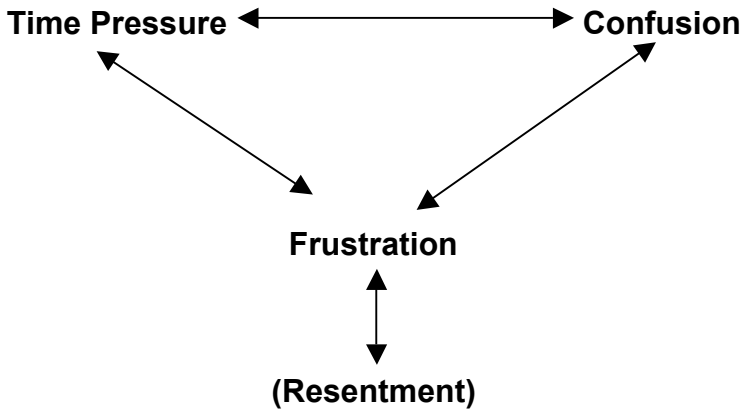
As recent research has shown (Ward, 2002), there is a considerable mismatch between initial expectations and the actual experiences of Asian students in New Zealand, in terms of their ability to understand New Zealand English, express themselves effectively in English, get good grades, form friendships with New Zealanders, understand New Zealand social customs and be accepted by New Zealanders. In all of these categories the actual experiences reported by Asian students were considerably less positive than their initial expectations, this gap being the widest in relation to getting good grades, with 87% expecting to get good grades on arrival and only 28% getting good grades (within the first six months of being in New Zealand).

This mismatch between expected and actual levels of academic achievement is of great concern to IS and local lecturers alike. The aim of this publication is to consider some of the factors contributing to this mismatch, and to suggest effective ways of teaching IS.

Two main reasons contributing to problems with teaching IS, according to Ballard and Clanchy (1991), are 1) time pressure, associated with the perceived need for a higher time investment when teaching IS, and 2) confusion related to the lack of knowledge about and/or experience of teaching students from other cultures. This problem is, of course, magnified by the confusions experienced by IS, who initially rely on their own tried and true study techniques, methods and experiences only to discover that many of them do not work in a new environment. "This combination of time pressure and confusion about how best to proceed very commonly produces frustration. If the situation is not resolved, then resentment can follow. Academic staff may increasingly begrudge the time they spend on overseas students; overseas students, working under the same pressures, may decide that their problems are really due to racism or to victimisation by unsympathetic staff" (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991: 3).

1 It is important to acknowledge that we are not suggesting that all FFP (foreign fee paying) students are Asian, or that all Asian students are from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC), or that all NESB (non-English speaking background) students are FFP students.

Figure 1. Mutual reactions of staff and overseas students (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991: 3)



A successful IS teaching situation results from anticipation and early resolution of the potential problem related to staff and student reactions to the IS situation, which prevents the negative reaction from being escalated to higher levels. In this publication we suggest that academic staff can address the time pressure challenge by investing time in developing teaching approaches and procedures that would benefit both international and local students – *good teaching practices*. The confusion, on the other hand, can be avoided if staff and students’ teaching and learning expectations are made explicit from the very beginning, and if course requirements are stated clearly and lecturers make sure that they are understood correctly by the students. The confusion can also be avoided by identifying and correcting students’ misconceptions about the New Zealand tertiary education requirements and academic staff misconceptions and stereotypes about students coming from non-Western cultures, especially those from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC).

2. Perceived and real difficulties: misconceptions and beliefs of teachers and learners

Biggs (1999: pp.122-123) identifies the following three *cultural problems* with IS:

Socio-cultural adjustment: Adjusting to living in a new country can be a stressful experience, especially if for some reason a student fails to get adequate access to support structures.

Language: A certain English language proficiency threshold is necessary for IS to study successfully in their host country. *However, many problems that appear to be related to “poor English” are often, in fact, the result of differences in educational requirements between students’ host and home countries.*

Learning and teaching problems due to ‘cultural differences’: For IS, socio-cultural adjustment also includes new ways of thinking and learning, which may be vastly different from the ones practised in their home countries. This situation may bring about teaching and learning difficulties. For instance, students who come from CHC backgrounds often carry different educational beliefs and expectations, and need time to become aware and to adapt to the new style of teaching and learning. This includes teacher-student relations, approaches to knowledge and authority, attitudes to plagiarism, academic writing style, etc.

The problems described above are real and need to be addressed in the process of teaching IS (they are being considered in more detail in later sections of this publication). However, there are many perceived problems and misconceptions, both on the student and staff part, which reinforce false expectations and misunderstanding, leading to confusions and frustration. As the main audience of these Guidelines is academic staff, we will primarily focus on teacher misconceptions about IS, particularly students from CHC backgrounds.

3. Teachers’ misconception about IS

Each of you has probably been in a situation where a colleague teaching IS, and especially Asian students, would complain that some of these students are misfits in their classes, or that they are simply unprepared to study in New Zealand: their English is poor and interferes with their ability to study effectively, they expect lecturers to tell them everything they need to know for their courses, they do not have their own opinion, and they do not participate in class work, etc. Many of these concerns were expressed in a recent email discussion on the VUW electronic ‘Teaching and Learning’ list.

Fortunately, many of these so-called ‘characteristics’ of CHC students are simply Western misconception, as basic processes such as

memorization and motivation can take on a somewhat different meaning in the case of CHC students. In the Western culture the notions of memorisation and understanding, achievement and social motivation, collectivism and individualism are often opposed, while in the case of CHC learners these distinctions may not be useful at all. Of course, some of the issues (as it has been explained earlier) are real and are brought about by poor language skills, the culture shock and CHC students' teaching and learning expectations formed on the bases of their previous learning experiences in their home countries. However, it is important to point out some of the common erroneous beliefs that lecturers teaching IS need to be aware of.

Table 1: Teacher misconceptions (partly based on Biggs, 1999)

<p>CHC students are rote learners, they cannot think critically, they are surface learners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lecturers may misinterpret the cognitive processes CHC students are adopting. For example, memorization can be used as a means of understanding², as an actor, for example, would memorise his or her part before proceeding to interpret it on stage.• Research studies have shown that CHC students' approaches to learning proved to be higher on deep than those of Western students in Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as in Australia (for overviews of these studies see Biggs, 1999; Volet and Renshaw, 1996; Watkins, Regmi and Astilla, 1991; Watkins and Biggs, 1996).
<p>CHC students are passive, won't work in class, do not participate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quietness in class should not be mistaken for passivity. It may simply be related to the 'inside / outside' rules³ based on students' previous experiences.

2 Note that memorisation sometimes does equal rote learning, especially if students' language proficiency prevents them from fully understanding their course material.

3 Biggs (1999) uses the term 'inside/outside' to describe the appropriate and inappropriate behaviour from the point of view of the student. For example, based on their prior experiences, students may view talking in class as inappropriate behaviour.

At the same time the same students may appear talkative and even loud in a cafeteria discussing their next assignment, simply because this behaviour is seen as appropriate. The lecturer's task then is to "turn the outside in – for example by setting up learning partners, which makes it very difficult to attack academic tasks without talking to your partner ..." (Biggs, 1999: 128).

Western teaching methods won't work with CHC students.

- Problem based learning and action research worked well in Hong Kong (see Gow, Kember and McKay, 1996; McKay and Kember, 1997; Whitehill, Stokes, and MacKinnon, 1997).
- Our own research indicates that IS willingly participate in online learning (Elgort, Marshall and Mitchell, 2002) and technology supported teams (Elgort, Marshall and Pauleen, in progress).

CHC students need to be spoon fed to take notes.

- CHC students are highly cue focused. They may be waiting for a cue from the lecturer to start taking notes.

Asian students stick together and do not want to mix with locals.

- Research by Ward (2002) shows that Asian students want to form friendships with local students, but often find that they don't have enough opportunities.

Don't easily adjust to local conditions

- As far as teaching is concerned CHC students are very adaptable (see Volte and Renshaw, 1996).

4. CHC learners' expectations

IS arrive in New Zealand with their own sets of expectations based on their previous learning experiences in their home countries. Often these are students who did really well academically at home, and believe that they would continue to do well in New Zealand (Ward, 2002). However they discover sooner or later that many of their learning strategies and beliefs about education do not work well in the new environment. If lecturers are aware of these expectations, they can help their students by pointing out good learning strategies and techniques that would help them achieve the learning goals set for their courses.

Table 2: CHC students' expectations about learning

In-class behaviour	CHC students believe that it is inappropriate and rude to publicly contradict their teacher,
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<p>(inside / outside rules²)</p>	<p>or even their class mates, because their own culture calls for face-saving communicative strategies.</p> <p>CHC students may think that it is rude to question or dispute anything that comes from a lecturer, because their own knowledge of the subject matter is greatly inferior to that of their lecturer's.</p>
<p>Writing style</p>	<p>Students' initial conception of writing requirements may be inappropriate for the new environment. Indirect flowery writing styles, with extended introductions that give a lot of background information, which are sign of good writing practice in their own culture, are considered inappropriate for academic writing in English, which requires a balanced argument and students own conclusions.</p>

Course / lesson structure	Students may expect to see the course and lesson structure to closely follow a textbook, be sequential, and for the lecturer to provide the right answers.
Attitudes to knowledge	CHC students often believe that knowledge should be conserved and reproduced, rather than questioned or challenged ⁴ .
Attitudes to authority	CHC students are comfortable with relationships based on power and authority, whereas local students expect to be treated as equals by their lecturers. [Note: Lecturers should respect Asian students' attitudes to authority, for example, first name terms should NOT be forced if students are uncomfortable with them.]
Assessment	CHC students may expect mainly recall-based assessment, and thus may be unprepared for the requirements to critique, interpret, and apply what they have learned. [Note: These requirements should be clearly stated and explained early in the course, and students need to be provided with plentiful opportunities to practise these new skills and receive feedback on their performance.]

4 Ballard and Clanchy (1997) illustrate the idea of different approaches to knowledge in Western and CHC societies by quoting from two great minds of the two cultures: Confucius and Einstein:

Confucius: *I do not invent but merely transmit, I believe in and love antiquity.*
Einstein: *We must resist the chimera of final notions.*

Motivation and orientation in learning	The balance between extrinsic, intrinsic and achievement motivation may be different for CHC and Western students, with achievement motivation being much more common among CHC students. In conjunction with these students' cue focused approach to learning, CHC students' achievement motivation can be made to work to their advantage, as it will help them adapt to the new educational environment, provided the course requirements are made clear and relevant cues are given by the lecturer.
Plagiarism	As CHC students may believe that knowledge needs to be conserved and passed on from generation to generation, their attitudes to citation is also different. In their cultures it may be commendable to quote verbatim from authoritative sources without indicating the source of the quote, as it is expected that the source would be easily recognised by educated readers, and the reference may only offend them, implying that they are not familiar with the source.

Reasons for academic success	CHC students tend to attribute success to hard work, effort and self-discipline. Therefore, the internal attributes of success are controllable, i.e., if you increase your effort you will achieve better results. This is a more optimistic approach to success, compared to the Western view that success requires ability more than effort, and therefore is less controllable by the individual.
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5. Approaches to teaching IS

There are two commonly practised approaches to resolving the 'IS problem': one can be described as the **assimilation approach** and the other as the **accommodation approach** (after Biggs, 1999). Both of these approaches are essentially deficit approaches, as both assume that IS are inferior in one or more ways to local students. Biggs (1999) also suggests a third way of approaching the IS issue, which he refers to as the "**Teaching as Education**" approach.

The **assimilation approach** is based on the view that because IS chose to study in New Zealand (or any other foreign country for that matter), they *must assimilate*, i.e., adapt to the Western style of education. This approach focuses on differences between IS and local students, which are often generalised and stereotyped. The assimilation approach reinforces teachers' misconceptions, such as CHC students are rote learners, they are passive in class, they are surface learners, etc.⁵ Essentially, this is a '*blame the student*' approach to the problem, which shifts the balance of responsibility for successful learning outcomes heavily to the learner, claiming that IS need to look for additional coaching and special learning support. Thus, the assimilation approach is a deficit approach to teaching IS.

5 In fact, research indicates that these qualities are much more characteristic of Australian and American learners than CHC learners (see for example, Biggs, 1991; Stedman 1997; Baumgart and Halse, 1999).

The **accommodation approach**, on the other hand, focuses on how a lecturer's teaching behaviour can be adapted to the needs of learners coming from different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Ideally, in the accommodation model the teacher needs to learn as much as possible about the IS' socio-cultural background, understand their education system and use teaching techniques that work for these students. However, it is unrealistic to expect that lecturers would do this for each group of IS and that they would adjust their courses accordingly for every individual group of such students. In fact, even if it was possible to do this, this approach is likely to lead to an increased time pressure and consequently, frustration. Thus, a compromise solution may be better for teaching classes, which include groups of IS from different ethnic backgrounds, where only those methods and procedures that can be qualified as good teaching practice and are likely to benefit all students, are adopted by the lecturer. Some general good procedures include (e.g., Ballard and Clanchy, 1991, 1997):

- making course requirements, rules and procedures clear to students from the very beginning of the course;
- making the recordings of lectures available for students to review;
- making handouts available for each lecture, and distributing them before the lecture;
- when giving a lecture, speaking clearly, slowly and avoiding too many colloquialisms;
- providing visual support;
- providing cues for note taking;
- providing opportunities for students to use their background knowledge in the course;
- modelling good study behaviour, etc.

These techniques are useful to bridge the language and expectations gaps characteristic of IS, but they are primarily about course management, and not about the teaching itself. The other important thing to remember about this approach is that, similar to the assimilation approach, it also focuses on the differences between local and IS, and is based on the deficit view of IS, only instead of placing the responsibility for bridging the gap with the student, it shifts it, at least partially, to the teacher.

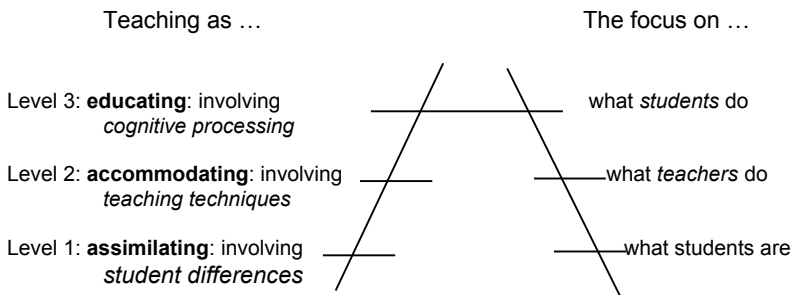
Biggs (1999) suggests another way of approaching the IS issue, which he refers to as the “**Teaching as Education**” approach. Instead of focusing on the differences between local and IS, the Teaching as Education approach stresses that cognitive processes underlying all students’ learning are universal,

“The strategy is to focus on activating students’ learning processes as appropriate to the objectives, as does good teaching anywhere. The means of activating those learning processes, however could well differ between cultures”.

(Biggs, 1999: 134)

The most important difference of this approach to teaching IS compared to the other two approaches, is that instead of focusing on what IS are, **it concentrates on what they do**. Thus, instead of being a deficit approach it is a contextual approach, i.e., it aims to create appropriate contexts to extract certain learning behaviours from students. From this perspective teaching IS is not so different from teaching local students as the challenge is to engage students in the right learning behaviours to achieve the set learning goals. This approach to teaching is inclusive.

Figure 2: The focus of cross-cultural teaching (from Biggs, 1999: 125)



If we agree that good teaching is focused on what students learn (or *do* in the process of learning), then we have to view teaching as a broader task of educating students. Therefore, we should be concerned with helping students choose effective cognitive strategies⁶ to learn appropriately. Therefore, encouraging all students, including the IS, to take a deep approach to learning becomes the primary goal and the main challenge.

6. Good learning practices

6.1 What is deep learning?

It is important to understand that a student's approach – deep or surface – does not represent intelligence or character (or personality). It represents a relationship between the student and what he or she is trying to grasp.

A student using a **surface learning approach** will give the impression that s/he is seriously trying to learn, but will do that through using superficial levels of cognitive processes, for example rote learning and memorisation. A task might be completed but its structure will be distorted. These students will focus unthinkingly on the

6 Cognitive strategies refer to controlling and managing the mental processes involved in learning, e.g. strategies for attending, thinking and memorising and dealing with novel problems (Nicholls, 2002).

superficial signs (formula for problem-solving, words and sentences in the text), or on unrelated parts of the task with a limited understanding of the whole. They will memorise, unreflectively associate facts and concepts, will be unable to differentiate between principles and examples, and they will experience tasks as external impositions (for example, by assessment, the lecturer) (Nicholls, 2002, p32).

On the other hand, a student using a **deep approach** to learning would exhibit the following behaviour (summarised by Nicholl (2002, p 31), based on Entwistle and Marton's work (1984)):

- Intention to understand.
- Student maintains structure of task.
- Student focuses on 'what is signified' (e.g., the author's argument or the concepts applicable to solving the problem).
- Student relates previous knowledge to new knowledge.
- Student relates theoretical ideas to everyday experience.
- Student relates and distinguishes evidence and argument.
- Student organises and structures content into a coherent whole.

6.2 How do lecturers help to create a surface approach to learning?

One of the key things to understand about effectiveness of learning approaches is that the level of success is closely related to students' perceptions of the teaching requirements. *Different forms of teaching elicit different kinds of learning approaches.* If our teaching approach features such practices as the following, we should expect that it would incline students towards surface learning and using memorisation as rote learning:

- excessive amount of material in the curriculum;
- relatively high class contact hours;
- a lack of opportunity to pursue subjects in depth;
- lack of choice over subjects and methods of study;

- anxiety provoking assessments, or superficial assessments testing low level factual knowledge.

6.3 How do lecturers help to develop a deep approach to learning?

On the other hand the following features can contribute to developing deep approaches to learning:

- **Motivational context:** students need to realise the relevance of what they are learning.
- **Learner activity:** getting learner to do something encourages deep learning.
- **Interaction with others:** peer work creates an environment that encourages interaction.
- **A well-structured knowledge base:** linking new concepts with students' prior experiences and existing knowledge promotes deep learning.
- **Different learning modes:** group work and problem solving are important means of fostering a deep approach (e.g., active learning, cooperative learning, problem-based instruction).

7. What is good teaching practice?

The Teaching as Educating approach to teaching IS which is advocated in this publication takes the view that good teaching practice is universal. Therefore, Chickering and Gamson's (1987) *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* are as true for teaching IS as for any other students. These seven principles are:

1. Good practice encourages **student-faculty contact**
2. Good practice encourages **cooperation among students**
3. Good practice encourages **active learning**
4. Good practice gives **prompt feedback**
5. Good practice emphasizes **time on task**
6. Good practice communicates **high expectations**
7. Good practice **respects diverse talents and ways of learning**

Several studies have added to this list, but Cross and Pierpoint (1996), reduced the list to six, with three **environmental factors** and three **classroom factors** identified through research. Whereas the environmental factors often lie outside the lecturer's control, the three

classroom factors stress that there are certain basic principles of good teaching that can be used to help all students, including IS, to learn.

Environmental factors [reinforced by the educational environment, provided by the university experience as a whole]:

- *'coherence and reinforcement of a consistent educational message'* – wider than the core curriculum, it starts with residential living and extends to a coherent message supporting the development of continuing lifelong intellectual skills underscored by a coherent and integrated curriculum;
- *'socialization of the student into the values of the institution'* – developing leadership potential, using group projects and cooperative learning to reinforce the development of people skills and institutional values, increasing student interaction with each other and with lecturers, inferring more consistency university wide than the occasional use of these techniques by one lecturer in one course;
- *'integration of education and experience'*– including practical reinforcement of theory by application in a work environment (work based learning).

8. IS and environmental factors

Changing environmental factors influencing the teaching and learning environment for IS is mostly out of the hands of the individual lecturer. Environmental factors such as *'coherence and reinforcement of a consistent educational message'* and *'socialization of the student into the values of the institution'* should be planned for and changed at institutional and school levels. These are important planning issues, that are to some degree addressed in the University Internationalisation Plan, but they are not the focus of these Guidelines.

On the other hand, the lecturer can have an input into planning for changes in environmental factors at the course design level, by taking into account *'integration of education and experience'* and using experiential or work based learning as part of the curriculum.

The focus of these guidelines, however, is on what the individual lecturer can do to improve the teaching and learning situation for IS. It is useful, therefore, to focus on the following three classroom factors that lie within the lecturer's control.

Classroom factors [intentional factors usually associated with accountability in the classroom]:

- *'communication of high expectations'* – depends on accurate diagnosis of what students can achieve with reasonable effort, includes setting tasks that are realistic and attainable with effort, infers setting of challenges that are set high enough to encourage growth;
- *'encouragement of active student learning'* – builds teaching and learning in the classroom on the premise that students must be mentally engaged in order to learn;
- *'provision of assessment and prompt feedback'* – acknowledges that students need feedback on performance in order to improve.

As confirmed above, good teaching practice is more than the lecturer's classroom performance. Good teaching practice focuses on the student, how to motivate and help the student to learn best. That is true for all students, not only international students. The difference between IS and local students might lie in accurate diagnosis of realistic achievement along the way, of what would be necessary to achieve appropriate intellectual engagement, and a special sensitivity to the kinds of feedback that would be useful for the IS to improve their learning.

Learning is essentially interactive. It is by both the actions of the lecturer, and the actions of the student, that the quality of the learning that takes place will be determined. (Nicholls, 2002).

When working with IS it is important that the lecturer accepts the responsibility to provide a teaching and learning environment in which the students can develop appropriate strategies for deep learning. It is equally important that the IS are made aware of expectations and the roles that they have to play in their own learning.

9. IS and assessment

Teaching IS helps us acknowledge that assessment is more than testing the successful transmission of knowledge, carried out at the end of a section of work in order to help us (the lecturers) with grading (sorting and judging). Facing the issues of assessment for IS

in our classes brings the socially constructed nature of assessment to the forefront. Thus, assessment has to be viewed as part of the learning process, and has to be negotiated to account for specific needs of IS for guidance and feedback (Alderson, 1996, p. 4).

9.1 Assessment Challenges

A recent Australian study (CSHE, University of Melbourne, 2002, pp. 55-56) identified six **assessment challenges** for students who are not familiar with their assessment practices, and we can safely assume that our IS are facing similar challenges regarding assessment:

- *Lack of local cultural knowledge* (Assignments and readings based exclusively on local content deprives IS of application of theory in a broader context and local students of being enriched by their experience and knowledge.)
- *Unintentional cheating* (IS do not necessarily understand the implications of plagiarism as they previously had to replicate the words of experts. These students need to learn how to use the words and ideas of others. They need information, resources and support.)
- *Tutorial participation* (This could become a problem where students are assessed for participating in tutorials. It is important that the cultural, confidence and language issues are addressed in order to provide IS with an equal opportunity to participate.)
- *Group work* (IS may value group membership, but find the local subtleties difficult to understand. They should be offered options, to work with students from the same background, or to work with students from different backgrounds.)
- *English language skills* (Even with high IELTS scores they might find difficulty understanding the local accent and idiom. Writing essays might be even more problematic, writing in a non-native language without prior experience of the expectations of essay writing could provide almost insurmountable problems at first. These students need exemplars, modelling, guidance, and help from student services. They also

have to be encouraged to immerse themselves in English – reading, writing and speaking.)

- *Oral presentations* (IS experience the same kinds of problems as in Tutorial participation. They should be provided with extensive information about the scope and detail of the content of the presentation; the format, including the length the use of aids and props, and preparation for class questions; and the grading criteria).

One of the main challenges remains to design **fair assignments** that would allow acknowledgement of academic achievement, showcase appropriate capabilities and knowledge, without disadvantaging IS and NESB (non-English speaking background) students. One such method is to assess students on a **portfolio** that could include some of the following: a learning log or journal; review(s); annotated bibliography; posters; visual art; video or audio taped reflections; written assignment(s); any evidence of the achievement of set criteria. Combining the portfolio with other more traditional forms of assessment might provide a balance that would help IS or NESB students with the opportunities to provide evidence of learning while not only relying on the written word (CSHE, University of Melbourne, 2002, pp.58-59).

The power of assessment to guide student learning provides the lecturer with a powerful incentive to foster deep learning in his/her students. Students are strategic in their approach, and will approach their learning in a way they perceive that would provide adequate preparation to be successful in the assessment tasks (Biggs, 1999, p.141).

With IS the perception of what is necessary for success might be clouded by previous learning styles and success achieved in a different educational setting. This could surprise the lecturer who is not prepared to communicate the expectations clearly, or who does not appreciate the importance of good guidance and effective feedback.

9.2 Three Step Approach to Assessment

In order to help IS (NESB students, all students), the following three step approach is advised (CSHE, University of Melbourne, 2002, pp.53-55) – it is based on clear communication, the clarification and demystifying of requirements, repetition, and good feedback aimed at providing the information necessary for personal improvement:

Step 1: ‘an *assessment briefing* to communicate requirements’ during the first lecture, with students, tutors and all markers present. This verbal briefing should outline broad assessment-related expectations of students and explain criteria for marking. Plagiarism should also be mentioned and explained. Written guidelines (handouts) should contain unambiguous instructions, criteria, and exemplars that model appropriate thinking, writing or performance – to guide students in completing assignments and examinations. Information on relevant policies, resources and the grading system should be included. Ask the students to study the written information and bring questions about assessment practice to the assessment debriefing session.

Step 2: ‘an *assessment debriefing* to clarify requirements’ should take place in the second week, again including all tutors and markers if possible. Use methods to help student formulate their questions about assessment (like using small groups of two or three students to summarise main questions, individual students handing in questions) and spend time in class on the questions, usually of a narrow range. Avoid assuming that the IS assessment problems always relate to language. It could be due to a lack of cultural knowledge or unknown jargon. Warn IS to expect adjustment to the new assessment regime and remind them of the importance of focusing on continuous improvement.

Step 3: ‘*providing feedback*’ is important to IS – they check marks and comments carefully for clues to improve performance. Individual feedback is important, but add general feedback in some form (common strengths and weaknesses), provide marking guides, provide

redirection to student learning support when necessary, and ensure consistency between markers.

Assessment is a central issue in the teaching and learning situation. It is the most powerful way of focusing immediately on 'what students do' and getting away from a deficit approach. It is worth spending some time and effort in getting it right from the start.

10. Teaching and learning strategies to help IS and NESB students

When looking at the challenges facing lecturers working with international students and students from non English speaking background, it is essential to note that we do not want to further a deficit approach. We do not want to focus on what students are or what lecturers do, but *what students do*.

Let's see what we can do to help our students to help themselves!

The following section is a combination of ideas collated from SLSS experience provided by Karen Commons, VUW research (see Ward, 2002), UTDC experience and previous workshop guidelines, Biggs (1999), Ballard & Clanchy (1997), CSHE, University of Melbourne, *Assessing Learning in Australian Universities* (2002); ERAU, University of Canterbury, *Guidelines for Teaching Asian Students* (2002), and Trish Baker's *Practical guidelines for matching the expectations of New Zealand tutors and Asian Students*. Wellington Institute of Technology, 1 July 2002.

10.1 Perceptions and expectations: awareness of cultural diversity – impact on learning

Lecturers complain that students:

- Expect too much of them and don't work independently
- Insist on individual attention after lectures
- Expect them to provide all the knowledge they need
- Expect them to provide the questions and the answers
- See them as the 'final' authority

Possible Reasons: IS perceptions impacting on learning

- Great respect for teachers, as keepers of knowledge and people who are above them in the social hierarchy
- A wise teacher is a model to be emulated – not contradicted, as a student's knowledge is inferior to that of the lecturer's
- Worthwhile knowledge should be preserved and reproduced, not challenged
- The teacher is responsible for providing all worthwhile knowledge
- A hardworking student will pass, and visa versa, if a student fails s/he is lazy
- Students expect to be successful (to pass), if they are diligent, thoroughly study all the given material and spend longer hours studying
- It is a great shame on the family to be lazy and to fail
- It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that all students work hard and pass, i.e. the teacher was negligent in his/her professional duty when a student fails

What can the lecturer do?

- Show an interest in cultural diversity, try to find out about students' perceptions and expectations
- Accept that some students would find familiarity uncomfortable and accept the respectful 'distance' they find comfortable (for instance regarding modes of address)
- Recognise the cultural roots of learning habits and styles – share reasons for differences and expectations with students whenever possible
- Show respect for cultural differences and the impact on students' learning behaviour – do not assume superiority but insist on appropriate learning styles for success in your subject/class
- Explain appropriate learning styles for success in your subject field - be very explicit about what you are trying to achieve, what you expect they have to do to succeed
- Explain clearly how you see your role as a lecturer – and what you expect from them in return (the VUW context, roles and expectations)
- Engage students in discussing their perceptions about appropriate learning whenever possible
- Model appropriate learning, styles of learning – build this consciously into classroom teaching
- Encourage good study habits by designing effective assignment work
- Make use of 'scaffolding' (building up to a specific higher level of intellectual engagement) in designing assignments and give timely and encouraging feedback to entrench deep learning techniques

Your notes

10.2 Participation in small groups/tutorials

Lecturers complain that students:

- Do not join class/tutorial discussions
- Form their own study groups that could lead to collaboration and cheating
- Can't think critically

Possible reasons: Cultural Differences

- Students may be uncomfortable with critical exchanges, because this is considered inappropriate in their cultures
- Students might be surprised by 'disrespectful' behaviour of local students (familiarity & critical questioning), and unwilling to participate in what seems an 'improper' questioning of lecturers and tutors
- Students may believe they must 'know everything' before asking questions
- Students may want to avoid being wrong and 'losing face'
- Students may not see any point in participating in group discussions as they expect their teacher/lecturer/tutor (expert) to 'transmit' everything they need to know for assessment purposes
- Students may form their own study groups outside the classroom to help each other learn (memorise)

Possible reasons: Language (NESB students)

- Students do not have the confidence to express themselves in English, because they believe (regardless of whether this is true or not) that they cannot express ideas adequately
- Students' do not have the actual language ability to express their ideas
- Student do not understand the questions/comments of other students/lecturers/tutors because of colloquialisms, local content, speed and accent

What could the lecturer do?

- Explain why participation is important (use incentives/ assess participation based on specific criteria to stress importance if necessary)
- Establish rules for participation – make them very clear from the beginning
- Provide students with structured ways of asking questions, and participating in group discussions
- Prepare tutors to deal with situations that might arise, encourage them to use student names
- Explain appropriate behaviour that would be culturally/ socially acceptable to help foreign students indicate when they want to participate in a discussion (turn taking rules in English may be quite different from these rules in other languages)
- Explain the role and function of the tutors as facilitators to IS
- Structure the discussions based on small groups – use cooperative learning techniques – it helps students to participate and ‘save face’ by sharing responsibility for answers
- It is often easier for students to formulate a response as a pair or group than to struggle individually to formulate answers in a foreign language
- Experiment with different combinations of students in small groups (foreign students might be allowed to ‘cluster’ together at first, but change the groups regularly after three/ four weeks)
- Keep students speaking English to each other and encourage thinking in English as far as possible
- Try to make use of the ‘study groups’ that students naturally want to form to help each other – guide them to support each other appropriately and point out the dangers of collaboration leading to plagiarism and cheating
- Model good reading techniques during tutorials – show them how to extract information from a prescribed article
- Allow time for individual discussions with students; make further appointments after class
- Use non-local examples whenever possible, make use of foreign students’ experience – to help them gain confidence, and to enrich the learning situation for local students
- Be careful not to use language/expressions that foreign students might find hard to understand

- Speak clearly and don’t rush (face the students when you speak)
- Ask students to repeat their answers if you can’t understand their English, but do it tactfully - be patient, be honest, and stay courteous

Your notes

10.3 Large classes: note-taking, visual clues and active learning

Lecturers complain that students:

- Too busy taking detailed notes of everything they say and don't have time to process ideas and concepts
- Learn and reproduce textbooks and notes faithfully, but do not evaluate critically what they learn

Possible reasons

- Students believe the lecturers are the experts who will transmit all useful knowledge
- They believe that they will pass if they reproduce class notes and textbooks faithfully
- They believe they have to learn everything 'transmitted' by the lecturer/tutor

What could the lecturer do?

- Make the outline of the lecture clear on the OHP/PowerPoint
- Make the outline, main points and objectives of the lecture available to all students (use handouts, Blackboard)
- Use non-linear outlines, use mind maps to highlight main points
- Undertake to provide a summary of the main points (on Blackboard, handout) after an interactive lecture
- 'Recap' previous lectures before continuing, repeat and reinforce main ideas
- 'Signpost' main points as the lecture continues
- 'Preview' the next lecture
- List technical words and make available/explain meanings and usage
- Use unambiguous language, speak slowly, face the students, check your pace

- Make note-taking interactive - guide students to 'complete' the open spaces on a handout – use it in the lecture to promote intellectual engagement (and guide students gradually to move away from memorisation as 'rote' learning)
- Do not expect students to take full notes of the lecture – it enforces the wrong message, 100 level students might not have the skills, and NESB students might not have the language ability to make adequate notes
- Consider allowing students to tape the first few lectures to help them to get used to your accent (you could provide them with a cut-off date after which you would not allow that – to protect your own intellectual property, to force them to move forward with more confidence in their own skills)
- Consider videotaping some of your most important lectures and making them available through closed reserve in the library to help the NESB students
- Use good visual clues for students to take notes
- Use visual aids (don't forget the whiteboard and coloured pens!)
- Use diagrams, pictures, and graphs where possible (provide handouts, Blackboard)
- Use a textbook (or good student notes/printed guidelines/Blackboard) and provide good references to appropriate reading for preparation before lectures
- Take time to ask good questions – concentrate on open-ended questions with no right or wrong answers, that encourage sharing of opinions
- Use active learning techniques to help students think critically while engaging with the content (plan to *make them do* something that will stimulate thinking, teach them to evaluate their own learning, e.g. using classroom assessment techniques like the one minute paper – see UTDC Guidelines Informal Feedback for more ideas)

- Combine various techniques to stimulate students with different learning styles to engage intellectually with the content and develop intellectual skills (plan to use contrasting approaches such as: global 'big picture' vs linear arrangement of material, visual vs words, practical vs theoretical, group/social vs individual methods, etc)
- Model critical thinking while lecturing – show them that you welcome critical questioning
- Plan for breaks during the lectures and use them well to get the maximum attention span (every 15 to 20 minutes)

Your notes

10.4 Assessment

Lecturers complain that students:

- Persistently seek to know what the lecturer wants in assignments
- Memorise and regurgitate facts ('rote' learning)
- Don't know how to approach different kinds of assessment, e.g. they do not guess or estimate when answering multiple choice questions
- Do not know how to write critical essays

Possible reasons

- Students (CHC) believe that material is worth studying only if they are sure the lecturer 'approves' it
- They expect to be successful when complying with requirements – by reproducing the 'approved' text faithfully
- They may resent having to produce thoughtful answers under time pressure because of the cultural belief that quick and superficial answers reflect a superficial mind
- They may find it improper to guess an answer – they do not allow themselves strategic guesses or estimates
- Students from some Asian, Eastern and European (e.g., German, Italian) cultures might have a different philosophical basis and may be used to different academic writing styles. Therefore, they might approach the critical essay in a different way (which might be considered unnecessarily wordy or longwinded here)

What could the lecturer do?

- Provide the students with all the possible information about assessment in an assessment briefing (the local system would be very different from where they come from)
- Provide written assessment guidelines with all the information, examples and criteria (also the meaning of the grading system)
- Provide a chance for asking questions during a debriefing session (questions could be verbal or written and handed in before the session)
- Include markers and tutors in the briefing and debriefing sessions to encourage consistency
- Provide extensive, timely and motivational feedback, with suggestions for improvement, to help students prepare for the next assessment
- Model good practice, make model answers available, where appropriate, model interpretation, analysis, critical thinking throughout, make students aware of what you are doing and why
- Send students to ask help from SLSS or make use of the editing service
- Consider using a portfolio system for assessment – include a variety of types of assessment, and allow the NESB student to gradually pick up the pace if possible
- Try to structure assessment with fairness in mind – make sure that you assess what is necessary for determining the stated learning outcomes (and not English Language ability – especially not at first)
- Do not overemphasise local content in assessment (consider suitability for all students)
- Consciously design assignments with cross-cultural communication in mind (especially useful in group work)
- Use clear unambiguous language in writing assessment tasks
- Point unintentional cheating out – do not let them get away with it, but be reasonable
- Give very clear guidelines where you want to assess participation and group work
- Oral presentations should be assessed on clear criteria, known to all students, that would also allow the NESB student to participate fully and expect to be graded on those criteria that matters most according to the learning outcomes of the course
- Know what and how you want your students to learn – and reflect that in your assessment tasks (i.e. the assessment task should make it impossible for them to think that they would adequately fulfil the criteria by memorising and regurgitating facts)
- Be very specific about what would demonstrate the level of understanding that is required

Your notes

10.5 Language, writing and plagiarism

Lecturers complain that students:

- Form their own study groups that lead to collaboration and cheating
- Have real time pressures because they do not read strategically
- Have real problems understanding English
- Experience cultural antipathy when forced to provide thoughtful answers quickly
- Misread instructions
- Reproduce the words of others without acknowledgement (plagiarism)
- Do not know how to write critical essays

Possible reasons

- Students help each other to make 'complete' notes to study (CHC)
- They help each other to memorise - as a first level of knowledge, in order to gain understanding (CHC)
- They help each other to memorise facts to overcome language deficiencies (CHC)
- They share work because of time pressures (NESB, CHC)
- They consider it rude to acknowledge ideas, because that would indicate that they do not think the lecturer (expert) knows the source (CHC)
- They find it hard to paraphrase ideas in their own words (in English) (NESB)

What could the lecturer do?

- Provide students with reading material in advance to allow preparation for lectures/tutorials
- Provide case study material in time for students to read and understand the material before having to discuss any questions in a tutorial or workshop setting

- Provide students with clear outlines and unambiguous information on what you expect in an assignment (send students to SLSS to receive individual help with structuring assignments)
- Demonstrate carefully what you want in the first assignment – allow time for students to question and discuss issues
- Scaffold assignments – build them up to increasing complexity
- Give formative feedback along the way, pointing out strengths and weaknesses, and ensure it is encouraging and give guidelines on how to improve
- Use guidelines on writing and referencing, with clear examples – available for library
- Explain plagiarism – and demonstrate the meaning
- Consider arranging a special workshop (through SLSS) on writing research essays, referencing and plagiarism
- Demonstrate paraphrasing and referencing
- Teach students how to prepare for different types of assessment (e.g. the multiple choice question versus the essay or the case study)
- Explain that you do not only want notes/textbook regurgitation – but use examples and model what you want carefully (use small group discussion for students to clear up misconceptions amongst themselves)
- Provide a marking guide to all students/clearly indicate marking criteria - before they start the assignment or learn for a test
- Use peer feedback to teach students to help each other and improve their own critical thinking skills
- Model, practice and repeat the type of answer you want from students in class/workshops/tutorials before expecting that in assignments or tests

Your notes

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Notes