

Empowering international students by embedding formative experience in course design

Description: Since a large number of international students who come from a different academic (and societal) culture typically have an unclear conceptualisation of the teaching and learning processes in the UK (as it tends to be different to what they have experienced), tutors are able to clarify what the British (i.e. UoG) expectations and requirements are and support students through creative embedding of formative experience throughout the course.

Proposal: Using the academic acculturation model that we proposed based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems framework (Elliot et al., 2016), I will start by briefly explaining the psychological perspective that underpins the seeming mismatch between international students' and host country's learning expectations as a result of their sojourn. Then, I will share practical strategies I implemented in my own class to provide students with the formative experience that can serve as a bridge between their previous and new conceptualisations of teaching and learning. These include: a) having a 'learning contract' in class; b) clarifying the concept and stressing the value of reflective and critical thinking as part of academic literacy; c) practical activities designed to encourage independent learning; d) exposing students to sound examples of reflection and critiques; e) group discussions where students are encouraged to debate, i.e. to choose and share their stance; f) formative (self and peer) assessment for a short piece of writing, and g) discussion of the essay requirements using a feedback template.

To make this intervention work: It is critical for students to see the purpose/value of each of the activities not only in successfully completing their course assessment but more importantly because the development of reflective, analytical and critical thinking is part of wider learning in British academia – a vital graduate attribute that they are expected to develop as part of their educational experience. This approach might be easier to implement for classes with a maximum of 30 students.

This won't work unless: Everybody is on board, i.e. both tutors and students acknowledge their respective roles in the learning contract.

This is of interest to other delegates: International students are regarded as student sojourners. Based on feedback received, embedding formative experience in the course design has been very helpful, particularly in scaffolding international students' learning – it helps them as they gradually shift from using their previous learning orientation to a new one, which is arguably crucial to their academic success in British academia. The bonus is that local students also benefit through more lively interaction and participation in class.