"Hanging together even with non-native speakers": Double edged challenges in the transition experience

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A successful transition into new international learning cultures can be dependent on an individual's ability to 'survive' and adapt. Current research has identified varied difficulties experienced by both academic and international student communities as the transition process is being challenged. This chapter explores two key issues in implementing successful teaching and learning methodologies to international students. First, a critical evaluation of the objectives and outcomes of existing transition processes is examined. Secondly, a systematic analysis of cultural, social and institutional practices underlying the decision-making and implementation of educational policy and practice is undertaken. Data from recent interviews relating to the international student's initial period upon arrival in Australia to commence their study are used to support out proposal.

Introduction

In this chapter we seek to explore key issues for implementing successful teaching and learning methodologies for incoming on-shore international students (OIS) experiencing the transition from their home country to the Australian institutional and social educational cultures. The chapter examines educational methodologies considered particularly from the student perspective. To date this has been scarcely documented relative to the funded research output (Harman, this volume). We claim that internationalization of teaching and learning is currently at a critical stage, which calls for systematic examination of our academic practices if we are to succeed as national providers of future international education offerings.

In our discussion we draw similarities between the OIS and mainstream students' transition experience into higher education (Levy, Osborn, and Plunkett 2003). We also contrast aspects that may render the international student experience an increasingly cumbersome one. We hope to raise awareness about underlying social and cultural value systems constructed in and by the daily teaching and learning actions and decisions that together constitute the Australian pedagogy.

While well documented in other parts of the world, there is relatively little funded Australian critical research reporting on the student perspective of the mechanisms involved in the international offerings in higher education. This

research is therefore exploratory in nature. However, in the latest account of the most recent research on internationalization of higher education research in Australia, Harman (ibid) states that there exists a considerable number of unpublished PhD and Master's research theses addressing areas such as student satisfaction, acculturation, learning autonomy and value, as well as differences in learning styles. The current chapter is a contribution into this area anchored in critical and systemic research outcomes.

The Mainstream Transition Experience

In the mainstream community, the transition process into tertiary education is well researched (see for example McInnes 2001). The notion of transition generally indicates the progression from familiar to the unknown and involves the adoption of new challenges culturally, socially, and cognitively. The transition period extends through the first year of tertiary study and there is now wide acknowledgement of it being characteristic of adjustment and other problems. Most academic failures can be traced back to problematic first year experiences (McInnes 2001; McInnes, James, and Hartley 2000). McInnis (2001) further reports that the mainstream first year university experience in Australian universities attributed cultural, pragmatic and discursive problems to differing assumptions and expectations held by the academic and the incoming student communities (Jepson, Turner, and Calway 2002).

The acknowledgement of a positive first year experience as a function of success has resulted in the implementation of valuable program initiatives. For example, the work carried out in Australia reporting on the success of mentoring in university wide programs (Burns 1991; Dickson, Krause, and Rudman 2002) and in the international context (Austin, Covalea, and Weal 2002) have yielded similar results in terms of advocating usefulness of academic integration. Among the examples cited (Dickson, Krause, and Rudman 2002) are transition programs that enhance the social integration, such as opportunities to meet with other students in semi-informal settings, facilitating the learning of new skills, such as library and information skills orientation and familiarisation with the university environment.

The research field investigating the 'hidden curriculum' is another case in point (for an overview see Ramsden 2002). There is now ample evidence available

on students' progression toward sanctioned but covertly enacted disciplinary practices in almost every discipline area of the academy (Ivanic 1998; Krause and Barr 2002). Most of the progression occurs very early in the first year of study. The research stemming from the academic reading and writing assistance area attests to the insufficiencies in mainstream first year students' knowledge about disciplinary cultures in the context of producing high quality academic work (see for example Barkhuizen 2003). The general conclusion from work in these areas is substantive in acknowledging the troublesome pathways, among members of the mainstream population, of their transition into successful tertiary education environments (Austin, Covalea, and Weal 2002; Dickson, Krause, and Rudman 2002; Krause and Barr 2002).

We claim that foreign language issues and alienation from one's social and cultural comfort zone brought on by the arrival in a foreign country exacerbate the international student transition experience. The most obvious is the language barrier that involves the learning of both verbal and non-verbal communication as well as pragmatic and literacy skills in a second or other language (Krashen 1987). Other challenges reported in the literature on the transition process experienced by OIS are embodied by both the students' self-concept and the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Ballard and Clanchy 1991; Biggs 1999; Hellstén 2002; Hellstén and Prescott 2002; Leask 2000; Volet and Ang 2000). The combination of these issues with the notion of balancing the transition into the public and private domains creates a double-edged challenge for incoming students.

Language issues have been recognized as interfering with efficient learning among OIS. The field of TESOL widely reports on research attributing less than adequate levels of English language skills as the main variable preventing students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) from learning effectively (Baynham 2002; Jones and Sim 2002; McKay 2002; San Miguel 1996). While it is acknowledged that language is a crucial component in the success of internationalization globally (McKay 2002), we argue for further critical examination of the underlying social and cultural enactment of educational delivery. Such enactment mechanisms can be seen as constituting the fruitless outcomes of some OIS experiences. These manifest in attitudinal differences, assumptions and culturally meaningful actions embedded into intercultural

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communication (Eglin and Hester 1992), the essence of which constitutes the effectiveness of the international partnership. Our conjecture is that the current cultural practices within the university reveal an ill-formed 'goodness of fit' between OIS expectations and the resulting on-shore experiences. The supposition is further that the ill fit is a result of culturally specific assumptions and resulting ways of enacting upon these, between the teaching and learning communities.

The philosophical underpinning here is the reflexive relationship between identifications of behaviour, beliefs, value systems and their consequential actions (Hester and Eglin 1997b) that constitutes the accomplishment of context, decision making processes and interpretations of particular versions of 'reality'. In this sense-making machinery then, language acts as the means of realisation (Sacks 1996a, b). It is a tool for understanding the accomplishments of meaning making and identification. Thus, the reflexive relationship between belief and action constitutes the context within which actions are manifest (Hester and Eglin 1997a). Thus, individuals and their actions, statements and observable behaviours are inseparable parts of the whole that constructs the 'reality' and thus the accomplishment of contexts such as the international education package.

Cultural Clashes Attributed to NESB and ESL Factors

One of the founding ideologies of internationalization is its impetus for expansion of cultural understanding. However, research in the area of English language teaching provides findings to the contrary; where cultural practices have been interpreted as obstructing the flow of understanding between lecturers and students (e.g. Levy, Osborn, and Plunkett 2003; McKay 2002; McNamara and Harris 1996). Cultural clashes have been reported in the contexts of lecturers' marking and feedback on assignments (San Miguel 1996). For example, particular sets of cultural patterns in structuring an essay guide the subsequent composition of the text in culturally bound ways. Thus, when the structures of writing in a disciplinary culture (for example. anglo-Australian) do not accord well with literary cultures in the international student's home background (for example. China), the result may see the OIS being penalised by low marks and confusing feedback on their written work. Some cited marker's comments found by San Miguel (1996) were: 'aspects do not flow logically', 'your argument needs to be

developed more fully and thoughtfully'. Such comments are routinely found in marked essays (Lea and Stierer 1998). The difference is that whilst an Australian student may recognise the conventional writing errors referred to by the comments, they have little relevance to OIS from, say, Chinese writing cultures. In fact such comments are more likely to result in confusion and puzzlement in the case where a Chinese student has followed the conventions of Confucian heritage stylistics (Kelen 2002). There have been calls for more rigorous and linguistically descriptive academic literacy training for international students (Jepson, Turner, and Calway 2002; San Miguel 1996). San Miguel also recommends professional development initiatives to address the issue of commenting on written works for lecturers. Since the date of her publication many such initiatives have been implemented. It is our experience however, that unless such programs are made compulsory, they seem to recruit merely low numbers of academic participants.

Cultural actions are deeply ingrained and are enacted with little hesitation in everyday interactive encounters. Indeed it is very difficult to change our cultural subtleties. These include those literary composition styles into which we are indoctrinated through schooling. It is now widely recognized that the structures of composition in collectivist cultures such as China differ greatly from writing structure in the West (Ballard and Clanchy 1991; Biggs 1999; Krause and O'Brien 2001; Leask 2000). For example, the focus on an explicit argument is avoided in collectivist cultures. Rather, ample use of suggestions and surrounding information is used allowing for the reader to form their own opinion as to the focus and argument of the composition.

Without explicit training in 'western' style academic writing then, some OIS acculturated into the Confucian heritage perspective may unintentionally transfer their culturally learned writing practices onto their composition of university essays in Australia. In this context international students from so-called 'Asian' backgrounds have been blamed for their inability to both write critically, and to form a coherent and strong argument (Biggs 1999; Volet and Ang 2000). The cultural academic writing transfer procedure is in most cases clearly accidental. Therefore, penalty for being uninformed about the 'preferred style' is highly unwarranted. The possible outcome of this culturally 'ill-fitting' academic process is harsh. The OIS may find themselves in a negative spiral, wherein they

are unaware of the writing errors that constituted their failure in achieving an acceptable grade for submitted work. The failure may pose further setbacks in terms of required resubmission of assignments and re-enrolment in study units.

This extended duration imposed on their initial overseas candidature may impose further negative effects upon the financing and logistical effort of their overseas candidature. Further difficulties arise due to culturally specific politeness practices that prevent some OIS from approaching their Australian lecturers. When a taken for granted, cultural norm dictates that a student must not pass judgment on persons in higher positions of authority, the questioning of a marker's knowledge and marking style is an unavailable option. A more likely outcome is that the student makes an inference from such contextually confusing interaction that their understanding of the university 'system' and its incumbent disciplinary assessment practices are in some way erroneous, leaving him/her in an unreciprocated situation, where no help is available.

The key point in this scenario is that it demonstrates, and makes available for analytic purposes, the interpretative power of inference-making in human actions, interaction and normative behaviour. Note, that it is the *commentary* exemplified in the above scenario, that gives rise to the inferences made about individual's thought patterns and value systems and the actions taken as a consequence; all of which have very real implications for the outcomes that are made possible in that particular and culturally constrained context.

Comments on Method

The methodology for our interview analysis is based on a data generative (as opposed to data gathered) process (Baker 1997). Thus, rather than being informed by a priori models or hypotheses we let the reflexive relationship between interactants provide the context for analysing the interview talk. This means that participants of the conversation are considered as competent cultural members of the interaction, rather than actors in an internalised world. Rather than evaluating interviews as more or less successful, the data driven framework considers as its measure of achievement the capacity of the researcher to present competently the type of customary enterprise that the interview participants (including the interviewer) do to make sense and to generate meaning to the intrinsic and external

worlds they describe. Interview accounts are thus viewed as occasioned reproductions of past events. This renders the analysis of interview data as generative only of the situated context in which it occurs. The analysis can in this light at best generate versions of possible conclusions about possible outcomes and possible 'truths'. A situated view of 'truth value' then rejects the existence of one absolute truth. Like truth, knowledge is observable in practical action and is generated culturally so that its specific cultural features are indeed unavailable to outsiders of that culture (Heap 1984). Within this situated perspective of data analysis then, we do not claim absolutes, but accept that other and different analytic outcomes are also plausible.

Describing the Interview Occasion

Following a pilot study undertaken in 2002, an interview schedule was devised with semi-structured and open-ended interview questions relating to the international student's initial period upon arrival in Australia. This allowed for the interviews to adopt a natural conversational flow that put the interviewees at ease.

Forty-eight students from sixteen countries volunteered to be interviewed (table 1). These students ranged in age from 18 to 50 years, 73 percent were female, and they were undertaking both undergraduate and postgraduate courses (table 2) under the international university enrolment program. While the proportion of students interviewed may not directly represent the demographics of OIS in Australian universities, it does sample a wide range of academic disciplines and countries, with the majority from Asia.

Table 1: Participants' country of origin.

Country	No.	Country	No.
China	16	USA	5
South Korea	13	Germany	1
Japan	2	Kenya	1
Hong Kong	1	Spain	1
Indonesia	1	Sweden	1
Malaysia	1		
Singapore	1		
Sri Lanka	1		
Taiwan	1		
Thailand	1		
Vietnam	1		

Table 2: Participants' course of study

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
Accounting	3	1	4
Actuarial	3		3
Commerce	1	2	3
Economics	1		1
Translation	1	13	14
TESOL		3	3
Linguistics	1	6	7
Languages	1		1
Education		3	3
Anthropology	2		2
Computing	1		1
Exchange	4	2	6

The questions centred on the participant's social and cultural experiences of their arrival in Australia, their friendship patterns, peer relationships and their beliefs about how they were 'coping' in the new system. Some questions also touched on identity issues of how the experience may change participants as individuals. Here we sought comparative descriptions of 'typicality' in the context of national cultures. Each interview thus generated a series of descriptions about the practices constituting institutional and in some cases disciplinary cultures, the local and national social discourse cultures and their infrastructures.

The Analysis

The data driven process of analysing the generated data samples consisted of an interpretative process (Gunn, Forrest, and Freebody 1995). On the whole the analytic process involved a method configured by Silverman (1997), whereby data materials are modified and re-modified into a coding scheme until all data and their incumbent features are systematically accounted for. After this process the coded interviews where then listened to repeatedly in order to locate the main characteristics, themes and conversational features (such as cultural features) associated with descriptions about the OIS experience which emerged from the taped conversations. The characteristics were noted for their representativeness of the issues most prominently emerging from all interviews. The end result is a body of data that is representative of the research issues on the effectiveness of OIS

transition process. This is linked to the pursuit for improvement of existing circumstances and implementation of strategies for enhanced effectiveness of the teaching and learning programs.

Results and Discussion

The aim of the analysis and discussion is to showcase the mechanism through which the cultural 'ill-fit' is produced in and by interview accounts of the OIS experiences in the host university. Recall that it is the reflexive relationship between identifier and action that is taken to constitute the meaning of the international student experience. The first instance exemplifies the 'case' of a sequential process of actions the OIS must move across in order to succeed in their transition into the Australian institutional environment.

When No Help Is At Hand

The initial culture shock inherent in the first months of the international student transition is well acknowledged (McInnes 2001). While acknowledging initial teething problems with finding one's way around an alien system, we are rather interested in the underlying practical mechanisms at play that render the experience as either successful or unsuccessful by the interviewees. It is plausible that the new incoming overseas student has a desire for information and guidance that would speed up their transition into their new environment. One example about the way in which assumptions about this information hunger are reciprocated by lecturers can be found in the following statement made by a lecturer in response to an approach for help with study matters.

> *I teach you and then like you have to learn it yourself. Well the ... lecturer before that he say that their duty is 'I teach you, you want to learn, you don't want to learn, that's up to you'. [Mary]*

Here the initial statement carries an underlying assumption about the relationships between lecturer and student. The inference embedded into this statement is that of power and subordination of that relationship. The second inferential feature is that the student stands alone on their transition pathway. In 'western cultures' the statement can be clearly understood as promoting learner independence, even though it may invoke surprise in its flippant nature. However, the cross-culturally salient problem with ambiguous

assumptions and misconceptions available from statements such as this is that it is very possible the utterance may be interpreted contextually. The lecturer and the system that he represents is understood as 'not caring' about their (note plural) students' learning. The way in which this statement is constructed makes it possible to also interpret the contradiction in 'duties' of a teacher.

The outcome of such teacher-student reciprocity is the feeling of isolation and being lost in a new system. The feeling may be exacerbated by the feeling that there really is nowhere a student can turn for help. Our data revealed many accounts to this effect.

> *You feel lost at the beginning, didn't know how, what to do in all your free time. You're supposed to read, but you are quite lost. [Diane]*

> *We are interested in what practical actions and consequences these cultural misconceptions make obtainable for the newly arrived international student. The initial interpretation is an outcome of confusion and possibly mistrust. Indeed we found many accounts of student's reluctance at approaching lecturers after an initial 'embarrassing' encounter in the context of seeking help.*

> *... the thing is they know that I'm struggling because obviously I go to them for help. But in the way they answer my questions or in the way they put it, it just makes me feel like, oh I shouldn't ask them again. Because I mean like, in order for me to talk to someone I have to say: "OK they want to help me." But I don't feel that. And just the way they answer me and the way they situate the looks on their face, it's like, it's not inviting. Their look is not inviting. So basically, even if I am struggling I know I'm not going to go there again because I embarrassed myself one time and I don't want to embarrass myself again.[Lucy]*

> *So, after class: "-Teacher, may I ask you a question?", "- okay, okay" and at the same time the teacher holds the bag and goes quickly out. Maybe I lose my confidence to ask some question. [Peter]*

The workings of the contextual conversational cues are self-evident in the above accounts. Lucy's convincing description of the subtleties inherent in the lecturer's demeanour reveals otherwise hidden value systems, and attests to the lecturer's seeming lack of duty of care. The practical outcome of this descriptive account is that the student refrains from approaching someone when in need of help, leaving the student on an isolated transitional path. Also available for analysis in this talk are the ways in which cultural meanings are mediated. Note that it is not what the lecturer said but the ways

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in which utterances were made which are interpreted as rejecting the student's attempt at seeking help in this instance. In the cultural context of these utterances and inferences then, we see the justification for the interviewee's feelings that no help is at hand when in trouble.

Note that we do not reproach the intentions by lecturers as discriminative or failing in their duties as members of the academic community. Our intention is rather to highlight the subtleties of contextualized talk in bringing into the analytic microscope inferential features otherwise considered hidden and unavailable for observation and scrutiny. We also demonstrate that these cultural readings of utterances make salient those features we argue as critical in the negotiation for implementing effective social and cultural teaching and learning strategies for communication within the confines of international education.

Surviving the initial shock of cultural and contextual teething problems is very clear among the students interviewed for this study. Once the concept of being independent is understood students begin to equate it with certain activities, such as extensive reading and visiting the library.

> *I think I should work harder because once I don't know I just ask my tuition teacher to explain to me. But in uni I think you just have to be independent. We have to find, find ourself first, read a lot of book and go to library. [Jenny]*

However, just what exactly is involved in independent learning seems to be still questionable in the minds of the students at this initial stage of transition.

> *You should learn by yourself ... rather than asking some questions to your teacher. In other words, that you shouldn't rely very much on the teacher and (unclear) and also you can't rely on others. You should, um learn by yourself. You should research a lot of things by yourself. [Christine]*

Thus, students' culture specific interpretations of the covert and overt workings of the host 'system' are constructed into activities that are crucial in the process of how the student subsequently is able to cope with their transition. In this context, survival is achieved by 'independent learning' which is constructed in a series of imposed actions such as: learning by one self; not relying on the teacher or peers for help and most importantly, not

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embarrassing oneself by making false assumptions about teacher support. The library has a central position in the construction of survival in this context. Many students made sense of the unanticipated expectation placed on them by spending large amounts of time in the library.

Library and reading activity was associated with 'research' by some interviewees. These students seemed to be able to understand the cultural and procedural implications of the various institutional and conventional practices of their new environment.

In sum, the transition process is depicted clearly by our interview participants as a progression from near or total sense of misplacement to the gradual realisation of the necessary course of action in the survival process. At stake in this progression is the sacrifice of personal characteristics. Such risks are described as a change in mind-set that sometimes requires arduous effort to accomplish.

> *It took me time to realise the difference between the Japanese way [of teaching] and Australian way and after I realised the difference, okay now I have to change the attitude, so it took me time as well. [Janet]*

While many of these experiences resemble those of mainstream students, the cultural transition involved in the international transition experience seems to come at a price for the OIS. It seems to us that to some extent OIS are unaware of the stakes before embarking upon their overseas study venture. While a case can be made that these experiences may be little different from those of non-OIS students, the realisation of the high cost to their personal integrity and identity may further complicate the ease of transition into the new educational environment. This leads to features of resistance (for example the previous quote from Lucy) toward the host 'system' and to its sanctioned cultural and social conventions.

The Cost of Time

Another prominent theme representative of the talk with international interview participants was the value afforded to time. Clearly, the international study candidature is both formally and financially confined to time. It seems however, that the concept of time gains amplified cultural meaning when polarised against the certain stakes of the international

experience. The probability of time working against oneself is very real for the interviewees. It has resulted in repetition of study modules, failures to follow verbalised instructions, failures in producing acceptable levels of work, not to mention the immense increase of personal and monetary costs as a result of repeated study units and extended visa status conditions. The concept of time carries enormous value for OIS in terms of learning efficacy, and access and participation in instructional sessions, and in terms of orientation during the transition period.

The issue of time produced extensive commentary. It seems to us that the international student learning experience is defined in terms of various time factors. In a cause and effect fashion then, time is a reasoning tool accounting for various conversational difficulties occurring in lectures, in comprehending written materials and in constructing personal traits such as confidence.

> *At the beginning ... I can't understand what the teacher said, but I can't stop the teacher, pardon, could you repeat again. So I just focus on my energy to understand, to pay more attention to understand. And little and little you just guess and try to understand and little and little you can understand what the teacher said. So, you just use your confidence, yeah, little and little. Anyway, you know in the classroom, just ... we have a few words the teacher must use and maybe according to the material, reading material, you can guess what the teacher said, yeah. So we can guess. Anyway, you can't stop the teacher, what do you say, pardon, can you repeat, yeah, just guess. [Peter]*

Guesswork is used as a back up tool in conceptualisation of curriculum content and delivery. A large number of OIS reported using approximation to fill the gap between what is understood and what is not, and as we have established above, often without approaching academics for clarification. With no feedback system in place, the verification of 'truth' is left unreciprocated leading to further misunderstandings and communicative uncertainty. The way in which these interactive cues are comprehended and put into practice by OIS mean that students are left to their own devices to draw conclusions as to the gist of the communicative content.

Efficacy of learning is weighed against time in a polarised way, in which the OIS is juxtaposed contextually with a native member of the student population.

I have to spend at least 8 hours; actually I'm spending more than 8 hours on each unit. I think compared with Australian students who speak native English and I think only 6 or 5 hours is enough for them. [Paul]

The interesting analytic feature in this statement is a comparison with assumed actions by native speakers. Whether or not the student knows the 'true' amount of hours spent by native speakers on study tasks, this excerpt shows that in order to make sense of their temporal study burden, the OIS need to assume comparisons with peers.

It takes me a long time to study. So say if it takes like my friend it takes an hour for her to study for her exam or whatever, it would like take me 2 hours, 3 hours. [Lucy]

In looking for the attributions provided for explaining time delays we received many explanations for providing the context of procedural knowledge of language use.

There's a big language issue, because it takes them double the time to read the assignments, the essays, you know, quotes and takes them double the time to write, yeah. Yeah, and then they tape record the lectures and things like that. [Sarah]

My first response to the native English speaker, I just translate their English into Chinese and then I will just translate Chinese into English, then I will speak out in English. [Christine]

Sometimes you want to say something or you want to interrupt, you want to say something, but you just can't find your words. Yeah, that's something that's really annoying. You open your mouth and you're about to say something and you go, oh, I lost it. [Anna]

The above statements are representative of early to medium stages of second language learning processes generally (Krashen 1987). These descriptions of intermediate language processing are reflective of the IELTS language levels of students accepted into most Australian higher education institutions. We raise the question of whether there is general knowledge within the academic community of the slower processing of languages among some international students. Our interview excerpts show that, at least in some cases, further awareness-raising of second language users' language processing as leading to specific communicative requirements is needed.

In most cases ... lecturers are fine, but some of the tutors speak real fast and they've got an accent, you know, it's hard to understand and

... I hate to always say, I beg your pardon, all the time. You know, 2 or 3 times in the tutorial is enough for the tutor.

If you are native speaker, you can response very quickly and you can think in English very quickly, but um, I don't know for other students, but in my case, when I think in English it takes me more time than in Japanese. [Janet]

Variations in communication styles are also experienced as problematic in the transition process. Individual accents of English or accents from another language may produce comprehension difficulties between OIS and lecturers.

I've met one ... tutor and he had a hard time even expressing himself and he's got an accent so bad I could hardly understand what he's talking about. So, finally I changed and went to another tutorial (Peter?)

The cultural politeness protocols may prohibit students from commenting on lecturer's individual speaking styles and pronunciation features. The action taken in this situation was avoiding confrontation and changing tutorial groups rather than approaching the program administrator for advice.

The overall inference available from the overall data analyses hint towards a troublesome transition experience. As is our intention here, we are highlighting the critical issues in the transition experience. The level at which the transition has been deemed successful is weighed against peer group criteria. We received many comments that were representative of the appreciation of the cultural exchange opportunities students receive outside their institutional learning environment.

Um... ah... yeah. I like the way the people hang together. Australian people hang together (...).
I: What do you mean hang together?
P: Hang together in groups and go out and meet, have chats and go for a beer, and they are very, very friendly and welcoming. Ah, ... even with you know, non-native speakers, foreign people.[Diane]

We found that the attribution of evaluating the entire transition experience is based on interactions in the private domain of peer groups and social environments. Students ordinarily summed up these experiences based on the assumption of inherent difference between 'non-native speakers/foreign people' and Australians. There is a sense of surprise

detectable in the last statement by Diane that signifies clearly an expectation to the contrary. That is, of the assumed nature as friendly and welcoming even to non-native speakers. Hence, we detect a clear contrast in observable attitudinal and behavioural characteristics in the discourse between the academic community and student peer groups. Would we imagine an easier transition if they were the same?

In sum, the excerpts of talk portrayed here collectively elicit the reflexive constitution of meaning-making inherent in surviving the transition experience into a new international education environment. Through the reciprocal process of identifying the meaning and the actions taken students make sense of their experiences. On the basis of the contextual descriptions provided by the interviewees and the ways in which the meaning and its consequential actions are interpreted we can draw some conclusions. For the students the Australian international experience may mean the following – each to a greater or lesser extent:

- Struggle and confusion
- Isolation (provides meaning for 'independence')
- No help is available from peers or the academic community
- Personal identity change, self-embarrassment and loss of confidence may be at stake
- The experience is attributed to time and its effects on learning, language processing and coping ability
- Learning is slow and arduous
- Participation in learning involves uncertainty and guessing of instructional content

Our in-depth analyses of the social and cultural enactment of teaching and learning in international contexts demonstrate a double edge challenge for the student body. One conclusion available from our analyses is that the perceived attractiveness of the international education package means more than educational access to superior career pathways. Once on shore, the international students are confronted with the enactment of subtle and covertly enforced social and cultural contexts that provide a challenging transition path. Within these challenging transitional practices the stakes for success are high in terms of personal and temporal investment.

Implication for teaching and learning in international contexts

According to the philosophical underpinning of this study, the international student transition experience is constituted in and by the actions that construct the practices. In this chapter we have demonstrated that educational practices are largely brought about by everyday conduct, held values and their attributive actions.

Some key implications available from our findings concern both the critical examination of academic teaching modes, practices and professional development initiatives. We present these in terms of two key strategies we see as critical for the implementation of effective teaching and learning practice.

In terms of the transition practices experienced by the incoming student body into Australian universities, the prediction is that we find few comparative differences in the cited literature, as experienced by incoming international students and mainstream first year students (Levy, Osborn, and Plunkett 2003). The smooth transition into successful learning environments is in this case based on effective teaching and learning generally. In this context, we draw on the implementation of inclusive practices in terms of communication and the integration of formal and informal learning environments in terms of teaching and learning.

We agree with Pearson & Beasley (1996) on the adoption of teaching methodology which is developed with international students in mind but which is implemented for the general university student population. In this way, the principles of clear communication, making of explicit rules, and addressing discursive assumptions about processes and procedures will be of benefit to all students. An integration of informal introductory sessions, orientation activities of university facilities and generic skills with clear instructions on the expectations of the lecturers in terms of student accomplishments is seen as providing optimal transition into a new learning environment. We believe that the latter process calls for a questioning of one's personal value systems and moral beliefs about the meaning of student achievement and the effects of individual diversity on sustaining learning success. It is these social and psychological constructs that

constitute the cultural practices that evidently are taken to be the essence of the international experience by the incoming student population.

Professional development initiatives addressing the need for psychological and cultural advocacy are relevant here. Such programs need to be made attractive to the academic community by being decentralised and integrated into the everyday workplace culture at local level. It is our contention that such programs should be made available not only in those departments with high international student enrolments, but should cater for the general academic teaching community.

Part and parcel of the university transition experience is also the move into acceptable academic literacy practices. The research shows many similarities between OIS and international students in the cognitive and linguistic processes involved, the difficulties experienced in orientation into disciplinary writing and conventions (Krause and O'Brien 2001). Whilst many effective programs are being administered at the moment, there is room for integrating further content into such programs that are inclusive of international students. The body of literature targeting non-english speaking students' reading and writing skills is of valuable importance. In response to such initiatives however, our experience of OIS conversation is that time constraints do not allow for additional reading of 'non-vernacular' materials. International students report spending extensive time on reading their subject literature and have little spare time left over for the foraging of additional readings.

Suggested implementation would see an expansion of academic literacy programs specifically targeted for international students and delivered by qualified personnel. For such programs to be effective however, the cooperation between teaching staff and lecturers is required in communicating the hidden discursive and disciplinary assumptions inherent, for example, in typical essay questions. The efficacy of delivery is then greatly benefited by cooperative learning settings in consolidation with subject lecturers. The sessions must make available the exploration of cultural issues around particular learning contexts. Advocating the explicit use of language and communication for the delivery of culturally sensitive teaching modes is crucial for continuing success. We assert that the mediation of the principles of academic literacy as a generic skill is the responsibility of not only the reading and writing assistance providers, but also lecturers must take on

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responsibility for the quality of academic literacy as a pedagogical component of their teaching.

In the international transition context mentoring programs (Austin, Covalea, and Weal 2002) and support classes and workshops (Pearson and Beasley 1996) have been trialled with pleasing results. For example, Pearson and Beasley instituted support classes and workshops with materials and activities specifically designed for international students but open to all students. This framework proved useful in providing much needed cultural change in institutional practices made relevant and culturally meaningful to both international and Australian students.

The implications of such frameworks provide initiative for developing educational practices that are inclusive of both local and international student needs. For example, making the curriculum and its discourses explicit and unassuming is a starting point offered by (Leask 2000). Provision of obvious and workable program and assessment guidelines that are sensitive to individual variation and diversity are also listed among her recommendations.

The teaching and learning guidelines should explicitly state the learning objectives (for example. clarifying the meaning of a 'satisfactory' assessment work, clarifying expectations, providing reliable access for students including visiting hours, and alternate ways of communicating with lecturers). In other words, the teaching and learning practices of culturally sensitive curriculum amounts to increased accountability of pedagogy generally.

International study skills texts such as those presented by Lewis and Reinders (2003) are a source of valuable information for how to survive transition into 'a new institutional system'. While the above publication particularly targets international student readers, there are important directives available also for lecturers. Procedural cultural know-how such as 'how to address your lecturer', 'how to explain yourself clearly', 'when to ask questions in a lecture', 'who decides when a consultation is over' given by Lewis and Reinders (2003: 174-176) ought to initiate attentiveness in the mind of a reflective lecturer. In the context of the interaction with OIS these conversational rules can be made an explicit part of the teaching discourse and thereby avoid mis-communication.

It is our general consensus that many of the issues raised by OIS in the interviews are not much different from those encountered by newly enrolled local university students. Most universities today meet the needs of first year students by effective mentoring and transition programs. The further development of these existing programs would benefit significantly from consolidating with OIS transition areas. Such initiatives are relatively effortless to implement. Among suggestions are mentoring programs introducing contact between established and newly-arrived international students. A 24-hour call centre operation is also beneficial for OIS who may feel they have no one to turn to if an emergency takes place after official office hours. Austin, Covalea and Weal, (2002) report favourably from one such trial. In that case the mentoring program was responsible for managing a mobile telephone service on a rostered basis.

Another cost effective strategy of integrating international students into existing transition programs is an online facility of general information about the institution, the local geographic area, study skills and management. The online facility could house a number of lecturers scheduled to answer questions about course work, particularly from the point of view of cultural and disciplinary assumptions. The effectiveness of such initiatives hinges on sound cultural awareness among the lecturers involved. To this effect, we suggest professional training and development in cultural communication skills as criteria for acting in such positions.

Reflective teaching practice

The adoption of reflective teaching and learning practices provides many advantages for the effectiveness of teaching pedagogy and practice. The continuous critical evaluation of one's teaching practices, followed by implementation and modification of teaching strategies is not merely limited to the context of teaching international students, but is of equal benefit to teaching generally. Effective teaching must involve critical perspective taking, self-critique and assessment of personal teaching methods. Such constitutive reflective practices yield effective teaching and learning environments.

Reflective teaching practices may involve clarifying one's personal assumptions, values and beliefs on issues that constitute difference in our society.

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Exploration of one's attitudes towards and belief systems about, for example, indigenes, refugees, homosexuals, spoken dialects, foreign accents, and politeness discourses provides a starting point that can be systematically addressed in a professional development environment. The exercises must be made accountable however, by following up on issues with effective implementation that reveal the consequences of actions taken as a result of certain beliefs.

Above all, there has to be recognition by academics that the enactment of culture is subtle but significant. Reflective practices allow for academics to see students as active members in the constitution of international education. It supports the reflexive constitution of practice and action in the educational partnership.

Conclusion

Our critical examination of current social and cultural practices in and around teaching international students in Australia has revealed the continued need for evaluating and reviewing the subtleties inherent in cultural interaction. Our review of literature on the first year experience and our analyses of international student talk in the context of their initial encounters with a new educational system and culture reveal a double edged sword of challenges. The inferential message of the student talk in our interview showcases a less than amicable transition into the Australian academic environment.

The conclusion available from our interviews reveals high expectations placed on incoming international students to Australia. These expectations are embedded with requirements of skills in orientation and navigation in a foreign country, language and culture. Conflicting with these transition skills requirements are the cultural navigation needs imposed upon the international student, and the unconstructive impact of reasoning misconceptions on the effectiveness of finding your way in the foreign cultural maze of institutional, disciplinary, interpersonal, geographical, general social and pragmatic discourses sanctioned by the host culture. Recognition is due of the dexterity with which OIS have managed this double impact transition to date. In many sites they have managed with less than amicable institutional or other support and at a high financial and personal cost.

The collective student voice exemplified in this chapter therefore, provides valuable feedback to the teaching community about the social and

cultural discourses and educational enactment inherent within but subtly visible to the incoming international student. We have in this chapter drawn together some common themes leading to implications for adopting strategies for addressing effective teaching and learning for international contexts.

The main implication of our discussion is that regardless of extensive and active discussions advocating the recognition of cultural diversity in the Australian higher educational setting, its everyday interactions and discursive practices do not confirm evidence of its accomplishment. This generates further implications for continued professional development incentives on culturally sensitive curriculum delivery, which critically includes inventiveness afforded to broad cultural change among the incumbent members of the international education partnership.

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