

INCLUSION AND EQUALITY IN INTERNATIONALLY DIVERSE POSTGRADUATE CLASSROOMS: PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AND LECTURERS

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MY CONTEXT

- English Language teaching
- English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher at universities in Japan and China for 12 years
- Lecturer in EAP at the University of Bath then Bristol for 10 years
- Currently doing a Doctorate in Education at the University of Bath

MY ROLE AS AN EAP TEACHER

- At the forefront of the “cultural tensions” between UK universities and the previous educational experience of international students (*Rae & Woodier-Harris, 2012*)
- “Bridging the gap”
 - Critical thinking / Active participation / Essay structure
- Deficit model
 - Focus on what they don't know and can't do
 - Based on assumptions
 - Adaptation or Assimilation
- Prepare international students to receive the education we provide in the way we provide it (become more like home students)
- rather than bridging the gap could we meet them half-way

‘ONE-WAY’ INTERNATIONALISATION

*“ ‘one-way’ learning
expected to contribute
scholarship*

Internationalisation of doctoral education

Possibilities for new knowledge and understandings

Janette Ryan

University of Oxford, UK

The past decade has seen a rapid increase in the number of international students undertaking doctorates in Anglophone universities such as Australia and the UK. In 2009, 11,500 international students were undertaking postgraduate research in Australia, with a 20 per cent increase in doctoral enrolments over the previous year (AEI 2011). In the UK, international students comprise 50 per cent of full-time research degree students (UKCISA 2011). The postgraduate research student cohort in these countries has thus radically changed as these students have brought with them different academic cultures and intellectual traditions.

‘TWO WAY’ INT

“a reciprocal exchange
world views to gain
know

Journal of International Students

Volume 14, Issue 3 (2024), pp. 171-191

ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)

jistudents.org



***We have to change; they stay the same: Chinese
international students’ academic experiences at an
Australian university***

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ABSTRACT

In the current climate of global international education, overseas student integration and difficulties in adjusting into the academic life of the host country are often posited as personal failures.

POSITIONING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- Consumers/economic contributors/beneficiaries (Hayes, 2017)
- Passive recipients of knowledge (Huang, 2022)
- Negative discourse around international students (problems /challenges/ struggles/obstacles) – perceived as being in deficit and needing support (Lomer and Mittelmeier, 2021)
- International students should be seen as knowledge agents, actively contributing to the university culture and academic environment (Madge, et al, 2014, Cockayne, 2025)

MY RESEARCH AIM & RQS

Developing a transcultural pedagogy: perspectives of teachers and students on inclusion and epistemic equality in the classroom

Research Questions:

- 1) How do HE institutional policies and practices around internationalisation facilitate the inclusion of students as epistemic equals?
- 2) How do teachers conceptualise and practice inclusion of students as epistemic equals in the classroom through their pedagogy?
- 3) What are the perspectives and experiences of international students and teachers on the factors that facilitate their inclusion as epistemic equals in the classroom?

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INTERCULTURAL / TRANSCULTURAL

“One culture acknowledging, respecting and interacting with other cultures but emphasising difference and, crucially, maintaining the dominant culture” (Smith, 2020)

= learning about

- “a mutually beneficial **dialogue**” “a **new, shared culture emerging** from the interaction of two cultures” (Song & Cadman, 2012)
- contact with other cultures leading to the emergence of a new culture (Antor, 2020)
- diversity as transformation of us all not simply the integration of others (Wilson et al, 2020)

= learning from and being changed by



CONDITIONAL BELONGING

Belonging is **dependent on meeting certain expectations, performances, or norms**

*"Whilst the concept of belonging in higher education often emphasises the importance of creating inclusive and supportive environments for all students, it is equally important to consider the ways in which belonging is shaped by **underlying, often unspoken conditions and expectations such as academic standards, institutional values and dominant views within an academic community about who 'fits'**" (Chiu, et al, 2025)*

"belonging that is conditional for some and effortless for others" (Chui et al, 2025)



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

Definition: Some knowledge is regarded as more legitimate and valued i.e. privileged than others. This inequality in knowledge production replicates inequalities in society where some groups are marginalised.

- **Testimonial injustice** – a speaker's contributions are dismissed or undervalued due to bias (*Fricker, 2007*)
- **Hermeneutical injustice** – marginalised communities **experiencing a deficit because they don't share the same frameworks or conventions of knowledge making** so their perspectives and experiences are overlooked or misunderstood e.g. international students may feel silenced because their perspectives and experiences are not understood within accepted discourse conventions (*Fricker, 2007*)



METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative study
- semi-structured
- 20 teachers & 14
- PGT students

Nationalities		Disciplines	
Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
UK German/Spanish Turkish Greek Brazilian Chinese Polish Colombian Dutch American Latvian Korean	Iranian Omani Taiwanese American Indonesian Chinese Thai Indian Greek Hungarian Bosnian/Swiss	Policy Studies Business / International Business Marketing Economics Engineering Psychology EAP/Academic Skills Computer Science Education/Linguistics	Policy studies Educational Psychology Law Sociology Accounting & Finance HR Management Computer Science

REFLEXIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2022):

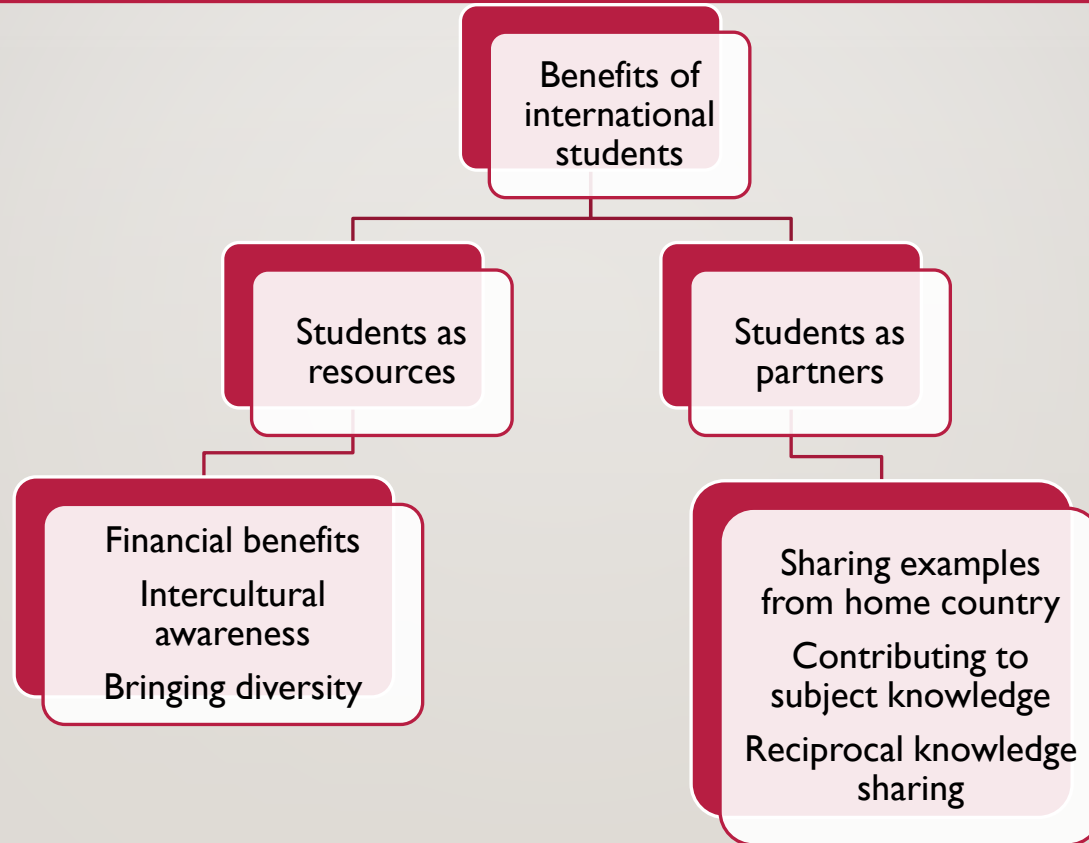
- aims to contribute a "rich tapestry of understanding" to the field of knowledge
- themes do not emerge but are "actively generated" by the researcher
- values subjectivity rather than seeing it as problematic

"Reflection means interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author"
(Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2020)

"It's not a case of deciding what's the 'right' interpretation, you need to think about 'what story do I want to tell based on my data?'" (Braun, Clarke & Hayfield, 2022)



THEMATIC MAP #1



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS A RESOURCE

[Intercultural awareness benefits] *“So international students bring this variety of, diversity of views and cultures and languages to our campuses” (TA9)*

[Intercultural interactions] *“You know, being in the same place with other different background people with a different, I don't know, ideas, religion and style or other things. It was really good and helpful for me” (SAI)*

[Diversity of nationalities] *“I would say, you know, give us better perspectives and you know, how...a great experience for all students” (TA9)*

[give a 'global' feel] *“It helps University A have a sort of global presence, you know, because we have this network of alumni [...] , obviously you know, they greatly enrich, they make University A a much more cosmopolitan place” (SAI)*



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS PARTNERS

[two-way reciprocal knowledge sharing] “I learned from them because it also kind of relates to my own research and otherwise there is really no way I can learn about this sort of details from China because it, sometimes it will require some reading, some material in Chinese, so my students may bring this to me and I also learn from them”. (TA5)

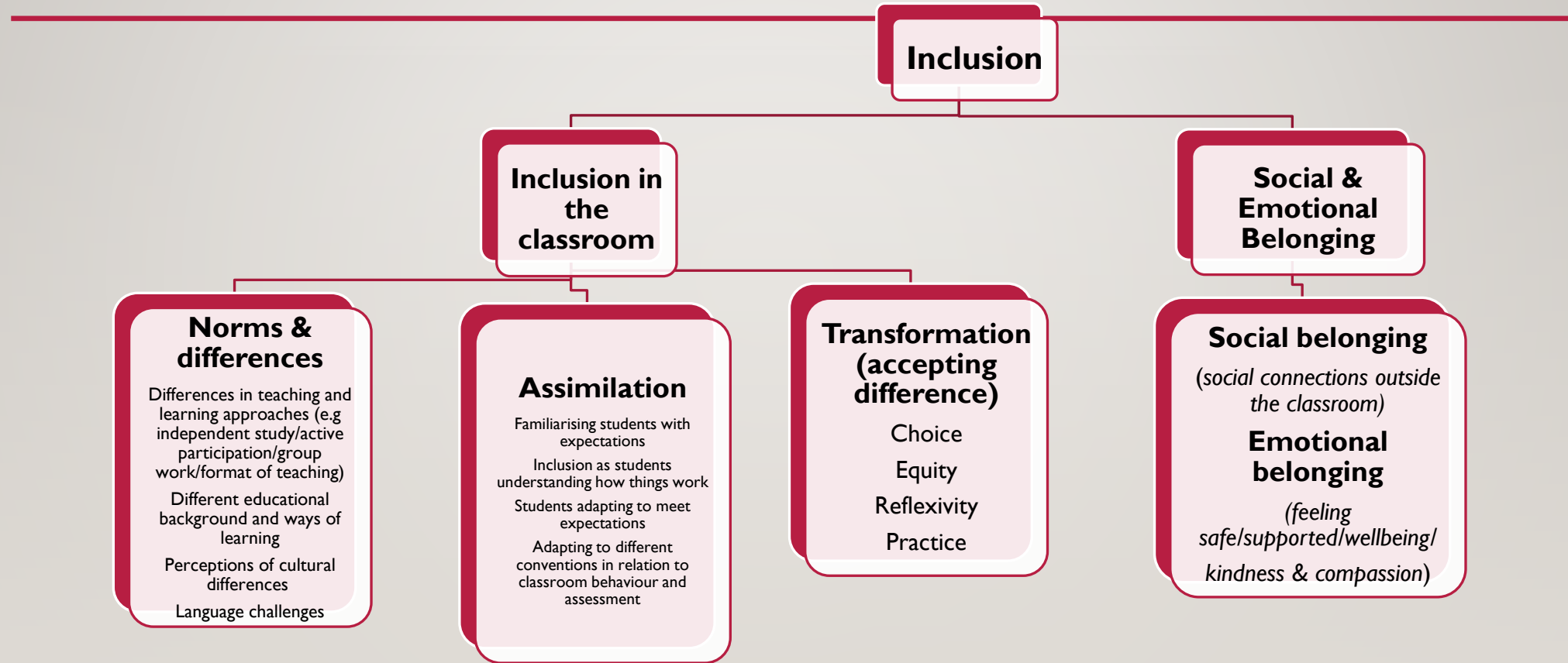
[students as contributors of knowledge] “I found is more diverse group, the more interesting because they all bring like different examples or something. I'm learning from them and they can learn from one another. So that's very, very important (TA7)

[bringing disciplinary knowledge] “When I attend some seminar, I need to present something, I always start from comparison, comparison from different countries and from different like sociologists in different countries. So I think that's what can I bring”. [SA8]

[one-way knowledge transmission] “I always encourage them to think about some examples from their own background, their own context for them to better understand the concepts, the terms, theories we're trying to teach in higher education here” (TA7)



THEMATIC MAP #2



QUOTES: INCLUSION AS ASSIMILATION

[Familiarising students with expectations] “You should be meeting every student in the middle and figuring out where they need to go and what they need from you and **being able to articulate what you need them to do better as well and what support they can access to be able to do that**” (TA10)

[Familiarising students with expectations] “Obviously, we would assume that you would go and look beyond the literature. So I know that if we've got a lot of people from China, let's say or India, [...] I would really emphasise that no, you need to do work on your own and then come back to us, you need to look beyond the literature. If it's home students, I assume, and I know they've done a bachelor's degree, I tend to assume that, OK, you know how the system works pretty much. **So that that makes a difference in how I would approach things**” (TA4)



QUOTES: INCLUSION AS TRANSFORMATION

[Student choice] *“Making sure that where we do group work, it is more intercultural . There's more opportunities for students to explore topics from their own cultural background , so they get more choice in assessments (TA6)*

[Co-creation] *“My starting point is effective learning and what do I want them to know at the end of it and how do I want them to think at the end of it? And I think that is a negotiation with the students. If you don't negotiate with the students, you fail” (TB3)*

[Equity] *“it's clearly useful for us to, you know, practise and learn about different academic cultures. But it's, similarly, I think equally an experience for other students. [...] it's a conversation. I think that's how we should see it. You know, we're all part of this community” (TA1)*

[Reflection] *“In the context of the seminar, silence is often portrayed as a problem. But actually it might just be a sort of moment of reflection. Right? So kind of, you know, reflecting a little bit more explicitly about the unconscious bias is that one might have in the you know, my own cultural baggage” (TA1)*

[Challenging assumptions] *“I wonder if every teacher brings the implicit assumptions of their background into the classroom and then, you know, those unsaid expectations and maybe you're not aware of, about how this is going to work and how this is going to be might have an impact in there. But I wonder how you would explore that “ (TB3)*

INCLUSION: THE STUDENT VIEW

[Inclusive teaching] “I think in the university, um...I can get the feeling of inclusion because everyone is, if I suddenly forget what I'm saying, they give me time and patience for me to rethink what I'm saying, what I'm talking about. So, yeah. I think I can feel inclusive” (SA8)

[kindness, compassion] “All of my teachers, they have patience to the students. Some of my friends, they can't speak English frequently [fluently?], so my teacher will have patient and ask if they mean this and that, that's really impressive” (SA7)

[Being valued] “It's the idea that everyone has some sort of value and importance to contribute to a community of people, and so we should welcome and encourage all of those people, and all of those ideas because of that importance, and, and kind of encourage sharing experiences and different ways of thinking”. (SB3)

[Learning community] “I think the teachers go out of their way to, to make us feel that there is not really that distance between us, so that there shouldn't be, that there should be the sense of camaraderie between students and teachers instead of this higher level or higher lower position.....[] it very much has made a difference in terms of how willing I am to ask questions, to go up to them after class, to write an e-mail” (SB3)



INCLUSION: THE STUDENT VIEW

[Being Seen] “They ask one to just speak, and even if you don't like to speak, when you see they asking and they seen you about, what's your opinion it's, you know, it's had a good feeling that OK, I don't have any opinion but they see me, that I'm a student here” (SA1)

[Inclusive teaching] “I know that now, a lot of the times, my teachers use things like polls through lectures[...]they're using polls so that students can actively give an answer as the lecture is going on, or phrases like, What do you think? Does anyone know or have an idea or... and when someone answers it's often, usually rewarded as well like thank you for that insight” (SB3)

[Respect for opinions] “I feel like they listen. I feel like they've never shut down anybody and I don't feel like any peers or anybody else in the class shut down other people. And it was always very respectful” (SA4)



FINAL THOUGHT

"Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance" (Verna Myers, 2016)

Inclusion is helping to organise the party, choose the food, music, venue

Diversity is being in the **classroom**, inclusion is being invited to **speak/contribute**

Is that enough?



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Thank you for listening

Any questions