

## Teaching Students From Other Cultures



Many Materials programmes have students from non-European cultural backgrounds, with Chinese and Indian sub-continent students being particularly significant cohorts. There is proper concern that such students may not engage with a UK programme in the same way as UK and EU students. It has been suggested that these students may not be comfortable in teams or groups, and some evidence that they can be disadvantaged by unintended cultural bias in assessment. These issues have been addressed by Biggs in his book 'Teaching for Quality Learning at University' (SRHE and Open University Press 1999, Chapter 7).

Biggs' analysis is reassuring in that he posits that Chinese students, for example, actually do very well in final degree classifications but exhibit behaviour when within sight of academic staff which appear to inhibit learning (for example not asking questions). On the other hand there is evidence of differential performance between Chinese and UK students.<sup>1</sup>

There are also national projects, such as the Prime Ministers' Initiative (PMI & PMI2) for International Education, which aim to develop work either at disciplinary or generic levels to enhance the academic experience of international students<sup>2</sup>. The funding council for England, HEFCE, is concerned at the extent to which this might disadvantage UK (home) students whose ethnicity and home cultural background might impair their access to the full range of outcomes (e.g. degree levels). In a report by the former DfES (now DIUS)<sup>3</sup>, it was shown that being from an ethnic minority group was generally found to have a statistically significant and negative effect on degree attainment. The research also showed that females are more likely to obtain higher degree classifications than males, except when it came to attaining a first.

The HEA has addressed this issue via a project entitled 'Minding the gap: ethnicity and gender disparities in degree attainment in higher education'. The final report of this one-year project addresses unexplained differences in degree attainment with respect to gender and ethnicity, although the authors point out that the causes of degree attainment variation were complex and are unlikely to be reducible to single knowable factors. The project has been undertaken jointly by the Higher Education Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit, funded by DIUS<sup>4</sup>.

### Resources

A project to address cross-cultural learning styles has been established by academics at universities in Singapore, Thailand, Germany and Austria and has produced some useful leaflets, available at <http://www.communicon.info/files/folder%20EU%20ASEAN.pdf> Their website also provides useful links to many online articles relating to learning styles. Similarly in Europe, the Network Intercultural

<sup>1</sup> The attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education. Richardson, JTE. Studies in Higher Education, Vol 33, Issue 1 Feb 08, pp33 – 48

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pmi-overview.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Ethnicity and Degree Attainment, Broecke, S., Nicholls, T. DfES report RW92 at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RW92.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/Ethnicity\\_Degree\\_Attainment\\_project](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/Ethnicity_Degree_Attainment_project)

Learning in Europe (NILE) has been set up across 20 countries to promote intercultural learning in adult education, and their findings are available at <http://www.intercultural-learning.net/nile/>

The *Journal of Intercultural Learning*, available online at <http://www.interculturallearning.net/>, provides access to numerous articles from around the world and archive publications are also available dating from November 2005.

## How can we help?

### UKCME can help by:

- Putting you in contact with one or more staff at UK universities who have encountered and considered cultural issues;
- Running an awareness-raising workshop in your Department, Faculty, School or College.

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## Higher Education Academy Resources

- A project entitled 'World-wide Horizons across the Curriculum' is currently underway which describes a programme of curriculum review across the undergraduate and postgraduate provision to investigate and enhance the international/cross-cultural capabilities and global perspectives of the student body. This is available at [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resources/casestudies/cs\\_132](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resources/casestudies/cs_132)



- Also available through the web link to the project 'Minding the gap: ethnicity and gender disparities in degree attainment in higher education'<sup>4</sup>, are the results from other relevant studies including a survey of the views of ethnic minority students at English HEIs, the policies and practices at English HEIs, case studies and qualitative data, in addition to the main project report.