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Examples of international teaching situations

The importance and application of targeted activities

Daan Romein

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Explanatory notes for the table

The following table gives examples of various practical situations that may occur while teaching international students. The importance of each activity is explained per situation, and suggestions are made about how to incorporate them into your teaching. Four aspects of the teaching and learning process are highlighted: preparation, giving lectures, assignments and assessment & evaluation.

Please note: these examples may also apply to non-international students. However, you should be particularly aware of certain activities when teaching international students. Generally speaking, the more explicit you are, the better students (international or non-international) will respond to you. Try to see the instructions as illustrations designed to enhance your insight and make you aware of situations in which you find yourself, rather than 'hard facts'.

<u>PREPARATION</u>		
Example / situation	Importance	Practical approach
The introduction / initial contact with students when they start a new course unit; creating a pleasant, open and personal atmosphere; getting to know each other; dealing with a hierarchy / observing a formal or informal distance between students and lecturer.	The first meeting with students (whether international or not) is an important moment in which you can set out your goals and expectations and show the students what type of lecturer you are: for example, how should they address you? Some international students will have trouble addressing a lecturer by his/her first name.	<p>Show the students that you are aware of the international character of the group.</p> <p>Tell them that you are also aware of the possible differences between teaching here and in their own country.</p> <p>Adopt an 'open' attitude so that the students know that they can come to you with any problems. Being too strict or too laid-back might scare them off.</p>
Explaining the teaching system; give a more detailed explanation than you normally would.	Most Dutch students are familiar with our academic methods. Many of them learn to ask questions and challenge stances in primary school. This does not happen in all countries. Many international students coming to a Dutch university will have to get used to the academic climate in the Netherlands.	Tell international students what they should expect, how students and lecturers interact. Most international students attend an introduction day, where they are told about the academic environment. Return to this subject and try to shed more light on anything they may not have understood. Ask if they have any questions that you, as a lecturer, could answer.
Explaining what we expect from students with regard to independent study and personal responsibility; also in relation to the number of hours timetabled for lectures and independent study.	<p>Lecturers and students often have certain expectations about teaching, supervision or the time that is required. International students may expect lecturers to be personally involved with their progress and are not aware of the role of the study advisers.</p> <p>Some international students will not be used to independent study and taking responsibility for planning and completing their own assignments. They may expect more individual supervision.</p>	<p>Explain that students are expected to demonstrate more individual responsibility than they may be used to. So if they encounter problems -> contact the lecturer and do not wait for him/her to make the first move.</p> <p>State what you expect from your students: assumptions that have not been expressed or checked can lead to misunderstandings.</p> <p>By expressing the importance of, or reasons for, certain educational choices, you will help students to understand what is being asked of them.</p>

GIVING LECTURES

Example / situation	Importance	Practical approach
Giving an interactive lecture (to 50 - 100 students); encouraging active participation from international students.	International students often feel lost and invisible during large-scale lectures, particularly if they have not built up a social network. Actively involving students in lectures is not only important in terms of checking how your material is coming across, but also (as far as possible) for making sure that international students are coping and feel secure in the new teaching climate.	Explain that you will sometimes ask the students questions, which they may be required to answer individually. Say that you welcome reactions from the students as a means of personal feedback that allows you to modify your lectures if necessary. Explain that 'wrong' answers or the inability to give an answer will not be punished but interpreted as a possible reason for rethinking part of the lecture.
Make the content of your lectures interesting for the international students in the group; cite examples that they can relate to; resolve intercultural problems by encouraging students from different cultural backgrounds to work together.	Using the cultural backgrounds of students will make them feel more involved in the cases or lectures. Assignments can be made more significant and valuable for the students.	Ask students whether they can think of comparable or opposite situations or examples from their own countries. Use economic, geographical or other data from other countries to illustrate your point.
Giving tutorials in which international students take an active part: learning to ask questions; debating and discussing issues; forming a personal opinion; explaining own ideas; providing feedback; etc.	Some international students are not used to discussing or contending matters with each other or the lecturer; they often find it disrespectful or uncomfortable. Students may have great difficulty expressing their own opinions.	Explain why students are expected to take an active part in tutorials and tell them why this is relevant (by linking it to the learning objectives, for example). Treat students with consideration if they have difficulty joining in discussions. Students may benefit from practising. See if you can find an opportunity for them to practise first.

ASSIGNMENTS

Example / situation	Importance	Practical approach
Explaining assignments in which you require students to critically reflect on the subject matter, compare various theories / perspectives with each other.	We consider giving a critical reflection of someone else's ideas or theories to be a normal part of academic education. Some students may find this strange, as they consider literature written by important philosophers, for example, to be indisputable facts. Contending such work or expressing doubt about it is seen as disrespectful.	Explain the usefulness, importance and value of reflecting on other people's work. How does it benefit students and why is it considered so important?
Encouraging international students to give presentations and receive feedback; learning to cope with the poor English of some international students.	<p>Giving a presentation in front of a group can be difficult for international students. In addition to the usual tension, 'loss of face' can also play a role.</p> <p>Giving feedback can be a sensitive matter; care and caution are often required.</p>	International students who are not used to giving presentations in front of a group must be made to feel secure; fellow students and lecturers should give their feedback in a sensitive way. Presentation skills are obviously important, so it may be a good idea to refer them to the Student Service Desk if they experience serious problems.
Using clear and lucid language and setting assignments that cannot be misconstrued.	<p>Teaching material must be written in clear, straightforward language. Students who have trouble with English may easily misinterpret an assignment, which can lead to all kinds of misleading results.</p> <p>English does not come naturally to all lecturers either. Texts can be translated too literally if the lecturer does not have a good grasp of the language. If the students do not speak English properly either, literal translations can be very difficult to understand.</p>	<p>Have teaching material checked by an English-speaking colleague, for example.</p> <p>Keep a list of handy words and sentences within reach while giving lectures and try to be aware of your language. A sentence that has been translated word-for-word from Dutch into English can take on an entirely different meaning.</p>

EXAMS & EVALUATIONS

Example / situation	Importance	Practical approach
<p>Preparing for an exam and for the grading system (of the course unit); explaining plagiarism and the fact that it is unacceptable; explaining the types of questions that may be set; explaining about the grades they can attain, etc.</p>	<p>Our grading system cannot automatically be translated into other grading systems, and a Dutch 8 is not necessarily the same as an 8 at another university.</p> <p>Plagiarism is a normal and accepted phenomenon in some countries. Replicating some else's ideas is seen as a form of respect.</p>	<p>Explain what students need to do to attain a certain grade. Show them the evaluation criteria beforehand and provide the right answers to open questions. Show them what you will be looking out for.</p> <p>Explain that plagiarism is totally unacceptable and will be heavily penalised. Tell the students about plagiarism scanners. Show them examples of plagiarism and explain how they can quote correctly.</p>
<p>Explaining how a course unit is evaluated; student honesty is appreciated, etc.</p>	<p>Written or verbal evaluations provide the perfect opportunity to receive feedback about whether your teaching is meeting the students' expectations. This information is very important to lecturers as it enables them to judge whether international students are coping in a different environment and to rethink parts of their course units if necessary.</p>	<p>Tell students that evaluations are not intended for criticising the lecturer or the course unit, but for improving the course unit or the teaching. Constructive feedback and examples are therefore important.</p>