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Chapter 8

International Postgraduate-Students' Perceptions and Experiences of Peer Assessment in a UK University: a Case Study

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Introduction

Internationalization of higher education brings both opportunities and challenges for internationalizing teaching, learning, and the curriculum and assessment experience of all students (Ryan, 2013). Assessment determines student learning progression and completion, so international students (IS) who have made a significant investment to study abroad can be significantly stressed by the assessment practices they encounter (Brown and Joughin, 2007). IS from different cultural backgrounds have been influenced by different assessment systems in their earlier learning experiences, which may differ from those they encounter in the UK higher-education (HE) assessment system (Robson, 2011). As a result of a growing dissatisfaction with traditional forms of assessment, formative assessment, in contrast to summative assessment, has gained favor to encourage deeper engagement with learning and enhance learner autonomy and motivation; for this reason, it has attracted the attention of educational researchers. At the same time, a variety of innovative assessment approaches, such as portfolios, peer assessment (PA), and self-assessment, has been advocated to positively influence and promote student learning (Kvale, 2007). However, there has been relatively little research on how IS perform in innovative assessment environments and how this affects them.

HE has become one of the biggest export earners for the UK; for example, IS contributed £7.9 billion to the UK economy in 2009 (HEA, 2012). Therefore, the recruitment of growing numbers of IS is an important strategic objective for many UK universities (Altbach and Knight, 2007), especially in a climate of budgetary constraints and cuts to government funding. However, there is increasing global competition for IS from English-speaking countries like the US and Australia, countries in Europe offering programs through English-medium courses, and more recently from countries in the Asian region (OECD, 2004; Gu and Schweisfurth, 2011). Thus, UK universities have become more aggressive in competing for overseas fee-paying students. Along with the reputation of a university, ranking, fees, and the quality of teaching and learning are the main basis for marketing activities. Well-designed curricula and assessment can provide students with rich and active learning experiences, develop graduate competences for work and life in a global economy, and help their future careers. Hence, studies on IS' experiences of assessment in UK HE could contribute to the future recruitment of IS.

As increasingly diverse student populations emerge on UK campuses, financial benefits are no longer the main motivation for the internationalization of HE. Academic staff may also wish to increase research and knowledge capacity across cultures and deliver a culturally inclusive curriculum for all students (Robson, 2011). Internationalization at home has emerged as a key strategic aim in many institutions, with the intention that both staff and students can acquire international perspectives in their subject field and develop the ability to engage positively with cultural others in both their professional and private lives (Leask, 2007). Although the notion of internationalizing the curriculum has been a growing topic in recent years, and there have already been articles discussing it at abstract and conceptual levels (e.g. Jones, 2013; Ryan, 2013), we need further empirical research on actual practices to internationalize the

curriculum and assessment in real UK HE settings. Clifford and Montgomery (2011) suggest that the internationalization of the curriculum challenges current course design and pedagogy, and has the potential to offer a transformative education experience. With a growing interest in, and advocacy for assessment for learning, we may also consider assessment for intercultural learning as a way of internationalizing the curriculum.

Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) argue that assessment has an important impact on learner identity. Thus, we may expect that UK assessment experiences are a way to develop or transform IS' learner identity in order to help their adjustment to UK education and to develop their international perspectives, rather than merely providing challenging learning experiences. PA as a participatory form of assessment can engage students in discussion and make a fundamental contribution to students' personal development through involving them in making judgments about and/or providing feedback on the work of other students (e.g. Boud et al, 2001). As this approach provides opportunities for students to become familiar with, and evaluate the work of their peers, it can thereby also help them acquire new knowledge about other cultures and cultural perspectives. Nonetheless, there is little existing empirical evidence to support this argument.

Thus, we have conducted a case study to explore IS' experiences of PA and the implications of their experiences to inform considerations about assessment and internationalization of the curriculum. This empirical study focuses on five postgraduate taught modules (Business/BUSI, Education A/EDUA, Education B/EDUB, Chemical Engineering/CEM and Computer Science/CS) in a UK university over two academic years (2010-2011/phase I and 2011-2012/phase II). We collected data through questionnaires, interviews, observation, and a diamond ranking prioritization task, a technique that has been more commonly used to promote

discussion about a specific topic. Participants included 102 IS, 22 home students, and seven staff. Deploying Bernstein's (1996) concepts of classification and framing, we have gained insights into the impacts of PA on IS' academic transition and intercultural learning in different disciplines, identified the gaps between staff and IS perspectives of pedagogic discourses in the international classroom, and enhanced our understanding of current practices related to internationalization of the curriculum and pedagogy. Due to the space limitation, however, this chapter will focus on presenting and discussing students' perceptions and experience of PA in the five postgraduate taught modules.

Literature Review

Peer assessment

In navigating the literature, it is important to acknowledge different conceptions of PA. Falchikov (1995) defines PA as the process through which groups of individuals rate their peers. Explicitly, PA can be seen as an arrangement for peers to consider "the amount, level, value, worth, quality or successfulness of the products or outcomes of learning of others of similar status" (Topping, 1998, 250). PA can therefore serve "as a method in which students engage in reflective criticism of the products of other students and provide them with feedback, using previously defined criteria" (Van der Pol, et al., 2008, 1805). Wen and Tsai (2006) offer a similar view of PA in university courses as an alternative evaluation arrangement involving students assessing the quality of their fellow learners' writing, presentations or other performance, then providing feedback or marks to each other. Thus, PA can be summative, involving students in assessing or measuring the learning outcomes, or formative, involving feedback of a qualitative nature to improve learning. Based on Torrance and Pryor's (1998)

notions of convergent and divergent formative assessment, formative PA can be further categorized as convergent, focusing on the completion of tasks, and divergent, involving more open engagement in the discussion of peer feedback.

In the past two decades PA has become a progressively more common topic in HE publications, serving different functions depending on the learning environment, the needs of the learner, the purpose of the task, and the particular feedback paradigm (Evans, 2013). The benefits attributed to PA are diverse, such as helping students to develop skills in the areas of self-evaluation, independent learning, and communication (e.g. Falchikov, 1986; Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Topping, 2000). Although PA has many potential benefits for learners, there are nevertheless some challenges. For instance, some students perceive peer feedback as ineffective (Boud, 2000), unpredictable (Chen, et al., 2009), or unsubstantiated (Strijbos and Sluijsmans, 2010). Additionally, reliability and validity issues might arise given the social context of PA, such as a lack of trust in self or others as assessors, or over-generous marks being given as a result of friendship marking, or collusive marking, which can result in a lack of differentiation within groups (e.g. Falchikov, 1995; Dochy et al, 1999). Hence, findings on the effects of PA on learners remain inconclusive, and it is unclear under what conditions PA is effective.

In UK universities, there is a growing emphasis on the development of skills such as communication, scholarship, and critical analysis (DfES, 2003). An awareness of such skill development by the individual requires innovative approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment. PA is a form of innovation which aims to improve the quality of learning and empower students, in contrast to more traditional methods which may disengage students from the assessment process (McDowell and Mowl, 1996). In the process of PA, students who inquire

into learning through active engagement in dialogue and collaboration with the tutor and other course participants can develop essential skills. With regard to IS, there are few studies which have reported on students' perceptions of PA techniques. Williams (1992) and Cheng and Warren (1997) reported that although the students in general felt that they had made a fair and responsible assessment of their peers, many of them did not feel comfortable about carrying out PA. Gatfield's (1999) study of students' satisfaction of PA in Australia showed that home students (Australian) and IS have significantly varying perceptions of PA and group work, and suggested that the differences expressed by the home and overseas students may be related to cultural differences in the students' country of origin. However, the coverage of studies focusing on IS' experiences of PA in UK HE is somewhat sparse, despite a growing interest in the internationalization of the curriculum.

Bernstein's pedagogic discourses

Bernstein's work provides a framework for "conceptualising the production and reproduction of knowledge, associated pedagogical practices and related power issues" (McAlpine and Greatorex, 2000, 4). The main concepts from this framework—'classification' and 'framing'—were adopted in this study to explore how knowledge or messages are constructed and transmitted to IS through the implementation of PA in different curricula. Classification refers to the strength of the boundaries between contents of different subjects such as mathematics, economics, or English, or between divisions of labor such as student, teacher, or policy makers in the educational setting (Bernstein, 1996). Where classification is strong (C+), there are insulated boundaries between the contents of the different disciplines or areas of work; where classification is weak (C-), there are blurred boundaries between the contents of the

different disciplines or different work streams (ibid).

The concept of framing refers to the strength of the social rules in the educational setting, and is concerned with how knowledge is transmitted and received in the classroom or what is and is not allowed in the pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the learner (Bernstein, 1996) and between learners in peer review in this study. Where framing is strong (F+), there are sharp boundaries between what can or cannot be transmitted; there is clear or visible pedagogic practice, and the transmitter has explicit control over the selection, pacing, and criteria in the classroom (ibid). Where framing is weak (F-), there are blurred boundaries between what can or cannot be transmitted; in this case, the pedagogic practices are likely to be unclear or invisible and the acquirer has more apparent control in the learning process (ibid). Thus, classification and framing are useful for exploring how staff structure and transmit knowledge to IS and how students structure and transmit knowledge to their peers.

In order to perform effectively within a particular cultural group, Bernstein (1996) proposes that the individual needs to understand the 'recognition rules' that determine people's awareness both of what is expected and legitimate in the context, and the 'realization rules' that concern how we put meanings together and behave legitimately within that social environment. Therefore, these recognition and realization rules may help to frame our understanding of whether IS have been successfully integrated in the learning situation and whether they understand the implementation of pedagogic activities (e.g. PA). In turn this may improve staff awareness of possible communication difficulties with IS from different cultural and educational traditions. This knowledge may bring new understanding and insights into the workings of the international classroom to help staff design and deliver appropriate curricula and assessment approaches for internationalized HE settings.

Methods

In educational research, a variety of research approaches have been employed in previous studies on PA, such as quasi-experimental research (e.g. Kim, 2009) and case-study research (e.g. Prins, et al., 2005; Vu and Dall'Alba, 2007). Yin (2009) defines case-study research as empirical study of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Case-study research was selected in the current study as it recognizes the importance of contexts, enables in-depth analysis within a limited time scale, and also allows the flexibility which is needed for the dynamic processes involved (Yin, 2009). This research was carried out in one cosmopolitan university located in the North East of England, where the student demography is already highly internationalized. The participating modules applied various forms of PA: some incorporated formative assessment, including divergent assessment with peer feedback; whereas some incorporated summative assessment with peer marking, which was a part of the final module marking. Typically, a module was composed of students with four to eight different nationalities, and Chinese students were predominant among the IS.

The study used a qualitative dominant mixed methods approach to collect data, because we think this approach addresses subjective meanings from different people who have participated in PA while also acknowledging the usefulness of quantitative data. The combination of methods includes semi-structured interview data and open answers in questionnaires related to participants' attitudes and experiences to PA, observational data related to students' actual performance in the process of PA, along with statistical measurements of perceptions of PA by different variables undertaken through questionnaires and diamond ranking. In this way, the qualitative study may include a quantitative dimension to help determine what to investigate in-depth, and the quantitative study enhances the generalizability of qualitative findings.

The research included individual interviews with 17 students and seven staff, produced data extracted from researcher observations, and collected 124 pre-questionnaires, 68 post-questionnaires and seven sets of data from the diamond ranking prioritization task. Thematic coding was used to analyse the qualitative data, while statistical analysis was used to analyse quantitative data, playing a complementary role to supplement the qualitative findings. Each module was analysed separately as a small case study, in order to gain insights into what really happened in each module. Then, a cross-module analysis was conducted to compare IS and UK students' perceptions of PA across the five modules, test the influence of some independent variables on IS' views of PA, and synthesize individual learning outcomes through PA in relation to academic transition and intercultural learning. Due to their disciplinary perspectives, staff had different understandings and different aims in using PA, and thereby they used various procedures and pedagogic discourses. Table 1 presents the similarities and differences of using PA in the five modules.

Table 1: similarities and differences of using PA in the five modules

Disciplines	**Mark & Feedback**	**Value at the final mark**	**Formative & Summative assessment**	**Anonymity**	**Classification & Framing**
BUSI	Mark Feedback	30%	Formative (phase I) Summative (phase II)	Yes	C- F-
EDUA	Feedback	0%	Formative (divergent)	No	C- F-
EDUB	Feedback	0%	Formative	No	C- F-
CEM	Mark Feedback	30%	Summative	Yes	C+ F+
CS	Mark	25%	Summative	Yes	C+ F+

Results

Five modules in total were investigated in this study. Each of the modules provided a small case study. However, this chapter focuses on the cross analysis of IS' experience of PA in order to compare IS and UK students' perceptions of PA across the five modules, and consider the influence of some independent variables on IS' views of PA, academic transition and learning outcomes, including intercultural learning.

Perceptions of PA by country (IS VS UK students)

Although there were IS from Africa or Europe in this study, more than 70% of IS participants were from Asia. Just two clear differences between IS and UK students were found in the post-questionnaire in phase I and two in phase II. Thus, the findings concur with Shi's (2006) previous report that the difference between the current generation of IS and their Western peers is not as great as before. Staff should therefore avoid stereotypical responses, such as using Confucian theory to understand IS (East Asia students in particular) (ibid), and should instead be open to learning from IS and where possible to ~~flexibly~~ design and deliver a more flexible inclusive curriculum ~~for all~~that is responsive to students' ~~according to their~~ needs and dispositions.

Comment [G1]: Are all international students in the UK Eastern/Asian? This comment suggests they are. Perhaps something needs to be said about this earlier.

Comment [sr2]: Highlighted sentence above has been inserted to address this

Comment [sr3]: You're right Gordon, this was a bit of an ideal scenario and may be difficult to achieve with limited resources

Comment [G4]: Are there any constraints on such a curriculum? What if the IS are from 10 different countries—how can the curriculum be so inclusive?

Perceptions of PA by framing

Three module leaders used F- discourse and two module leaders used F+ discourse. Since only the F- context was found in phase I, the analysis of the variable of framing was just conducted in phase II. Three differences in the use of PA in the F+ and F- contexts by IS were found:

1) IS in both contexts felt discussion and interaction could be promoted through PA, but more IS in the F- context than in the F+ context felt this, 80% compared with 50%

(p=0.050, Mann-Whitney U=60.000, Z=-1.963). This suggests that in the F- context, PA offers students more opportunities to explore issues by themselves.

2) 60% of IS in the F+ context were not sure what staff were looking for when using PA, while just 30% of IS in the F- context were confused by this issue (p=0.049, Mann-Whitney U=57.000, Z=-1.969). Thus, we may consider that as long as staff and students share their understanding, even in the F- context students may still be given a clear direction; however, in the F+ context in which staff give explicit and direct instruction, students may still feel confused, particularly when they meet a new situation where there is less shared understanding between staff and students.

3) 40% of IS in the F+ context thought that they should simply give a positive mark/feedback to their peers, but only 10% of IS in the F- context thought this way (p=0.038, Mann-Whitney U=57.000, Z=-2.073). Therefore, we may assume students in the F- context can be more objective and critical in PA, which is probably due to the freer environment and more relaxed social relations between students created by the F- context.

The findings suggest that there are some differences of IS' perceptions of PA in the F+ and F- contexts, which provide a new perspective to explore IS' assessment experiences.

Perceptions of PA by forms of assessment

Since all the modules in phase I used formative PA, the analysis of the variable of assessment forms was just conducted in phase II. Two modules used formative PA, and the other three modules used summative combined with formative PA, but since they had more characteristics

of summative assessment, ~~and~~ they were categorised as summative assessment in this study. Table 1 (see page. 9) shows the details of forms of assessment in each module.

Comment [sr5]: 'and' should be deleted. Sentence below was also missing- sorry about that

Comment [G6]: Something's missing at the end of this sentence

The study clearly found six different perceptions of PA in the two assessment forms by IS:

1) and 2) 53% of IS in the summative assessment-dominated context were not sure what the staff were looking for, compared with 23% of those in the formative assessment context (p=0.043, Mann-Whitney U=64.000, Z=-2.025). In these modules using summative assessment, staff gave little explanation for their rationale for using PA. Within the formative assessment context, those IS who were not sure of staff expectations were all from EDUB. Thus, it can be assumed that the induction of using PA by the module leader in EDUA was the more successful. In addition, 38% of IS using formative assessment agreed or strongly agreed that monitoring, intervention, or assistance from staff throughout the PA process was necessary, but more than 82% of IS using summative assessment thought in this way (p=0.040, Mann-Whitney U=64.500, Z=-2.059). This result suggests that staff using summative assessment did not provide a clear explanation of the use of PA or provide sufficient support during the implementation, so IS in summative assessment required more help from staff. Hence, whether in F+ or F- contexts, or whether using summative or formative assessment, this suggests the importance of awareness of students' recognition and realization rules in the classroom, and supporting students' needs throughout the learning process.

3) and 4) Regarding the peer marks, 29% of IS in the summative assessment-dominated context did not think that peers could assess fairly, compared with 8% of those in the formative assessment context (p=0.031, Mann-Whitney U=87.000, Z=-2.160). Moreover, 59%

of IS in the summative assessment dominated context agreed that consideration of friendship with peers resulted in a dishonest mark or feedback, compared with just 8% of those in the formative assessment context (p=0.012, Mann-Whitney U=55.500, Z=-2.504). All three modules deployed summative PA using peer marks as a part of the semester mark, while the peer mark was not needed in the other two modules deploying formative PA. Thus, it is not surprising that more students in the summative assessment-dominated context doubted the accuracy and validity of peer marks.

5) Just 23% of IS using formative assessment preferred anonymity during PA, but more than 70% of IS using summative assessment preferred anonymity (p=0.039, Mann-Whitney U=56.500, Z=-2.344). Students using summative assessment needed to give peer marks, and thus anonymity might be better for them to give objective marks, whereas students using formative assessment needed to talk with each other, so anonymity was not necessary.

6) 62% of IS using formative PA acknowledged the barrier of language in the process of PA, while just 29% of IS using summative PA perceived this barrier (p=0.039, Mann-Whitney U=64.000, Z=-2.068). This seems reasonable as they had more discussions and oral communications during formative assessment, but little communication in summative assessment.

Perceptions of PA by gender and by age

Gender effects are often discussed in social research, but Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) pointed out that there has been little work on gender effects on PA. In this study, there was only one statistically significant difference between male and female IS in rating each item in phase I and two in phase II, in terms of useful peer feedback (p=0.028, Mann-Whitney U=43.000, Z=-

2.203), assessing fairly (p=0.047, Mann-Whitney U=58.000, Z=-1.987) and reducing stress (p=0.043, Mann-Whitney U=60.000, Z=-2.022). Overall, the data suggest that there were only small differences between male and female IS' perceptions of PA, and gender was not a significant focus of this study.

Loddington, et al. (2009) found that only more mature students recognize support and teamwork developments brought about by PA. In this study there was no evidence to suggest differences between the three age groups (21-25, 26-30, >31) in relation to IS' perceptions of PA in phase I, and only one difference in phase II, which was that the older group (>31) tended to think that PA developed their communication skills more than younger groups (21-25 and 26-30) (p=0.032, $x^2(2)$=6.863, Chi-square=6.863, df=2). Overall, the results suggest that age was not a contributory factor influencing IS' perceptions of PA in this study.

Conditions for successful implementation of PA

Diamond ranking is an activity designed to elicit student talk and promote exploration and clarification of individual and collective 'value positions, feelings and thoughts' about a specific topic (Rockett and Percival, 2002, p.99). Clark (2012) argues that diamond ranking can be useful as a research tool to identify priorities once a set of relevant issues have been found. During the student interviews in phase II, participants (six IS and one UK student) were invited to use this tool to rank priority factors influencing the implementation of PA in the international classroom. Slightly different from the traditional use of diamond ranking, 11 factors related to the use of PA were extracted from the literature and the findings in phase I and provided to participants for the ranking exercise.

The 'purpose of using PA' was ranked as the most important factor influencing PA, followed by 'critical skills' and 'clear explanation of procedures.' 'Language,' 'dialogue between

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students and tutors or between peers,' and 'personality' were placed in the middle of the ranking. 'Previous experiences of PA,' 'anonymity,' and 'training of PA' were considered less important. 'Familiar cultural or religious topics' were not considered to be contributory factors. The results from the diamond ranking task accord well with results from other data collection methods. For instance, the highest ranking factor, related to clarity of 'purpose of using PA,' is in accordance with the result from the post-questionnaire in phase II in which 73.4% of IS agreed or strongly agreed that explaining the purpose of PA is important. The interview data also reflect this result; for example, a Chinese student (male, BUSI, phase I) said, *'I think the lecturer has to make us understand the effects of PA, why we have to use it'*. These results support the suggestion that staff and students need to share understanding of pedagogic activities.

Discussion

Academic transition

This study suggests that many benefits of PA which have already been reported in the literature can also apply to IS, such as improved interaction with other students, the promotion of a deeper understanding of subject knowledge, and the opportunity to reflect on one's own work and the work of others. These beneficial outcomes can not only enhance IS' subject knowledge, but also contribute to their academic transition, assisting them in adjusting to the UK educational system. As a Malaysian student (male, BUSI, phase I) commented*, "It (PA) gives me an opportunity to know the assessment process and criteria (in the UK)."* Since learning is a social process (Vygotsky, 1978, p.186), such a collaborative approach has "benefits on cognitive development over learning in isolation." PA encourages interaction between students and allows them to enter the zone of proximal development, where a less able peer, or more accurately in terms of this

study a less experienced peer, is able to enter a new area of potential development through discussion with someone more experienced or more adjusted to learning in the UK. However, not all IS had a successful academic transition through PA in this study, and to interpret this we may deploy Bernstein's concepts of recognition and realization rules to help understand IS' various performances in PA.

According to Bernstein (1996), recognition and realization rules strongly influence a student's performance in a specific educational context, so the student's successful orientation within that culture can be seen if he or she has appropriate recognition and realization rules for the classroom culture. For instance, following Bernstein's suggestion, through observing participants' reactions during peer discussion in EDUA, a Vietnamese student (female, EDUA, phase II), of the three IS in this group, had high recognition rules as she perceived the F- context and actively engaged in the discussion which was expected by the module leader. Thus, she successfully adjusted to formative PA within the F- context. However, two Chinese students (both female, EDUA, phase II) had relatively low recognition rules for the F- context, as they did not recognize the expectations of the situation they were in or the module leader's intention in the F- context. Neither of these students perceived the benefits or sense of empowerment that might be gained from formative PA. Instead they sought precise confirmation from the module leader and appeared to regard the teacher as an authority rather than a supporter. Hence, it is not surprising that they were not satisfied with this experience.

In this study, 50% of IS in phase I and 75% of IS in phase II had never experienced PA in their home countries. Perhaps for this reason, PA raised anxiety in the majority of IS during the initial stage. During and after the practice, some of the IS had a successful experience of PA. From the observation, those who had successful experience of PA had relatively high recognition

and realization rules in the classroom, and so they navigated the implementation of PA more effectively. For instance, a Chinese student (male, CS, phase II) in the F+ context presented his academic transition through PA. Although he was too shy to work in a group at the beginning, he was able to successfully complete the group project and develop personal skills because he sustained a high level of recognition and realization rules and finally began to appreciate group work and PA. By contrast, those students who had not had successful experience of PA had usually not been accustomed to discussing and assessing other's work. With these students, PA had a tendency to oppress them when they had relatively low recognition and realization rules in both the F+ and F- contexts. They were not sure why staff used PA or played a low key role during peer discussion.

The research findings support Bernstein's concepts of recognition and realization rules and extend their application to the international classroom in HE. IS with high recognition and realization rules are likely to experience a smoother transition to the UK HE system either in the F+ or F- context. However, IS with low recognition and realization rules are unlikely to make a successful transition to the UK HE system in the F+ context, and might have a slight transition in the F- context. Therefore, the results suggest that F- discourse is more likely to assist ISs' academic transition.

Intercultural learning

Harrison and Peacock (2010, 125) argue that internationalization in HE "place(s) an increasingly high academic premium on intercultural learning, an appreciation of cultural diversity and the development of cross cultural communication skills across all subject areas." Intercultural learning can be facilitated through innovative academic development approaches, including formal and informal learning experiences (Pettigrew and Tropp 2000, cited in Robson, 2011). In

this study, some IS reflected that during and after PA (divergent PA in particular), they had a better understanding of learning in the UK, gained knowledge of other cultures and developed the ability to work effectively in diverse social and cultural settings. For instance, a Chinese student (male, BUSI, phase I) commented: *'In the mixed group, I improved my oral English and also gained some cultural and religious knowledge in the communication…PA developed my evaluation skills and I'll be more confident in working with foreigners in future'*.

With regard to intercultural experiences in the UK, IS often complain they have little social integration with home students (Middlehurst and Woodfield, 2007). Some IS also raised this issue in the current study. For example, a Vietnamese student (female, EDUA, phase II) commented that one-year postgraduate students rarely interacted with each other or shared social activities, but PA offered her the opportunity to interact and build friendships with students from different cultural backgrounds. If staff form the groups to ensure a cultural mix or encourage students to do so when they conduct PA, students may learn about multicultural issues that they would not otherwise have done. Thus, the findings in this study suggest that PA has the potential to promote intercultural learning.

Cushner and Karim (2004, 292) note that studying overseas is "a significant transitional event that brings with it a considerable amount of accompanying stress, involving both confrontation and adaptation to unfamiliar physical and psychological experiences and changes." IS particularly confront stresses like culture shock (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001, cited in Choi, 2003) and learning shock (Yamazaki, 2005). Nevertheless, successful intercultural experience can lead to personal growth (Furnham, 2004) and even transformation for individuals as global citizens (Killick, 2013). Some IS reflected that they would think globally and consider issues from a variety of perspectives if they work or communicate with foreigners in future. For

instance, a Chinese student (female, EDUA, phase I) said*: 'If I teach in HE in the future, I will consider foreign students' differences and individual needs in my class'.* Nevertheless, not all modules in this study positively promoted intercultural learning or fostered students' international perspectives through PA. We assume the reasons for this were varied, including intrinsic factors such as personal awareness and motivation, and extrinsic factors such as curriculum and pedagogy. Although we can do little about intrinsic factors, we may approach the desired outcomes through developing academic understanding of the potential benefits of these approaches.

By engaging students in discussion during the process of PA, both dialogic and dialectic talk were identified in this study. Bakhtin (1981) proposes that dialogic talk in student relationships helps students to learn to see from at least two perspectives, their own point of view and that of others. When dialogic talk occurred in this study, students could hear different voices (in terms of discussion or peer feedback), and they could decide to accept or reject these voices (in terms of changing or amending their work according to received peer feedback). Sometimes these interactions raised cultural differences in mixed groups, such as discussing other cultural perspectives on the field of study. Thus, intercultural learning was likely to occur in this context. For instance, in EDUA students both provided feedback for others and received feedback from others. During the discussion, all valued hearing different voices, gaining knowledge of other cultures (e.g., educational systems in other countries in this case) and awareness of how and why these were similar to, or different from, their own perspectives. This was a process of mutual learner construction and reconstruction. No matter whether they accepted different opinions or assimilated different cultural perspectives, they had opportunities to develop mutual understanding and respect. In this way, students create an inclusive space for dialogue within

which they mutually construct and reconstruct each other's learning.

Dialogic talk in this study took place more frequently in formative PA and in the F- context that not all IS accepted easily. The traditional education experiences of the IS involved in this study were characterized by F+ discourse and summative assessment. Many of them used Vygotsky's dialectic talk, which interprets differences as contradictions to be overcome in order to achieve a final solution. This pattern of talk was more easily accepted by ISs, by conducting group work or implementing summative PA in BUSI, CS and CEM. Through discussion they overcame differences to reach a consensus about the task, and they preferred to receive precise answers from teaching staff and were particularly focused on the agreement of peer marks. On the one hand, dialectic talk is more easily accepted by IS, since it is in accordance with their familiar learning strategy of passing exams. On the other hand, this pattern may help students succeed in subject knowledge learning or the completion of tasks, but have fewer implications for intercultural learning or self-awareness than dialogic talk.

Due to the increasingly globalized and multicultural workplace, employers value employees not only with a UK degree but also with greater intercultural competence. In this study, intercultural learning did not necessarily take place each time students were placed in mixed cultural contexts. The findings reveal that intercultural learning was more likely to take place in the F- context where students had opportunities for formative PA with dialogic face-to-face talk with peers from different cultures, some of whom could potentially become a part of their professional and/or private lives. This study does not deny the possibilities of fostering intercultural learning by dialectic talk. A Chinese student (male, CS, phase II), who conducted group work and used summative PA, finally reflected that his cross-cultural communication

skills have been developed. However, there is insufficient data to support this point more generally in this study.

Implications for the implementation of PA

In the literature, many researchers have focused on practical issues of validity, fairness and accuracy in PA (e.g. Conway, et al., 1993; Topping 1998). In this study, IS reflected on these issues, and some of their opinions are congruent with results in the literature, whereas some reflect opposing views. This study has also identified some issues that have been less frequently discussed in previous studies. In the following section we discuss three implications for the implementation of PA.

1) Is peer feedback important in PA?

In the literature, definitions of PA are varied, with some researchers and practitioners considering it as peer marking in summative assessment, thus excluding peer feedback. Some researchers emphasize the importance of frequent, timely, and appropriate feedback to the learning process (Brown and Glasner, 1999), but it may be challenging for staff to provide multiple and meaningful feedback to individual students in diverse cohorts with a high staff-student ratio. Formative PA, which involves questioning together with increased self-disclosure and assessment of understanding, offers many opportunities to provide and discuss feedback. In this study, IS highlighted the benefits of peer feedback. Findings show that half of IS in phase I and 76.6% of IS in phase II agreed or strongly agreed that feedback from peers was useful. For instance, a Chinese student (female, EDUA, phase II) said, '*During PA, I often discussed with my peers to clarify the understanding of some theories, some writing experience… I found peer learning was useful when there was a lack of supervision from tutors*'. Some IS from modules

which did not use peer feedback suggested they would like to have feedback in PA. Thus, this study suggests that there is a demand for formative PA, to engage students directly in the assessment process and the provision of peer feedback with associated benefits.

2) Do students need training for PA?

Training students in the use of PA is often suggested in the literature (Vickerman, 2009), and the findings in this study are consistent with such a perspective. 42.3% of IS in phase I and 70% of IS in phase II agreed or strongly agreed that training was important. Falchikov (2005) proposed that support should be given to students to learn how to become critical and reliable assessors in assessment, no matter whether marks are required or not. Sluijsmans and Van Merrienboer (2000, cited in Evans, 2013) identified that defining assessment criteria, judging the performance of a peer, and providing feedback for future learning should be taken into account in any training. However, none of the participating modules followed all of these points.

This study has identified criteria and the purpose of adopting PA as two key components of the training, and on this point Cheng and Warren (1999) suggest that students need to be trained in how to establish criteria. 73.1% of IS in phase I and 76.7% of IS in phase II thought clarifying criteria was important. Brew, Riley and Walta (2009) note that staff need to communicate the reasons for adopting such practices with students to prepare them for effective PA. 53.8% of IS in phase I and 73.3% of IS in phase II thought explaining the purpose of using PA was important. 40% of IS in phase II were not sure what staff were looking for when using PA.[1] Thus, training needs to be ongoing and developmental, outlining the rules and criteria of PA, and addressing the expectations and beliefs of value relating to PA. Topping (2010) argues that

[1] Data were not available in phase I as this item was not designed in the questionnaires in phase I.

training alone would be insufficient, but that constructive discussion after PA between staff and students may help students to understand the whole practice and become more self-reflective.

3) Can students appreciate the benefits of talk in PA?

Talk can assist learners in understanding new knowledge (Barnes, 2008). In this study, the findings have provided evidence that oral communication is a key mechanism in PA (divergent PA in particular) through which to facilitate peer learning and produce educationally desired outcomes. For example, a Vietnamese student (female, EDUA, phase II) said, *"We discussed face to face (in PA). We like talking and meeting together. Creative thinking, critical thinking, co-operation, maybe interpersonal relationships were developed through our talk."* However, cultural pedagogies may offer diverse perspectives on constructing learning through talking (Ollin, 2008, cited in Turner, 2013). For instance, a Chinese student (female, EDUA, phase II) commented that *"Chinese students usually prefer to just listen to teachers without too many discussions, either with teachers or peers, as this has been our teaching and learning style since we were pupils."* The observational data of PA in EDUA in phase II also reflect this phenomenon. During the group meeting, the UK and Vietnamese students were more talkative than the two Chinese students. Their different behaviors were due not only to language challenges, confidence, or intellectual ability, but were also associated with pedagogical traditions, which are congruent with the findings of Turner and Robson (2008).

This difference in pedagogical tradition is a significant factor impacting on IS' recognition and realization rules of learning in the UK. As one Chinese student (female, EDUB, phase II) commented, *"I was not sure of the procedure of PA, so I was a little bit silent at that time. I paid more attention to seeing what others did, and I was also a little bit worried whether*

the feedback I provided to peers was too simple." Hence, some IS need encouragement to talk and join discussions and to conduct PA. Thus, explaining the functions of peer talk before conducting PA is important if students are to achieve more benefits from PA.

Conclusion

To achieve the agenda of internationalizing the curriculum, we need innovative approaches to encourage intercultural learning for students in both formal and informal learning experiences and assessment practices. This chapter reports an investigation of the use of PA across five different postgraduate taught programs in two academic years; the participating modules applied various forms of PA: some incorporated formative assessment, including divergent assessment with pure peer feedback, whereas others incorporated summative assessment with peer marking, which formed part of the final module marking; typically, a module was composed of students with four to eight different nationalities, and Chinese students were predominant among the IS. The research has identified that there are significant relationships between the provision of PA activities and academic transition and intercultural learning, and implied that dialogic pedagogy might contribute to the internationalization of the curriculum.

There is a climate of growing global competition for the international education market from English speaking and European countries, and more recently from Asian countries such as China and South Korea (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2011). While the findings from this study may be difficult to generalize due to the small scale of the sample, the methodology may prove useful to support the development of culturally inclusive assessment practices in other universities that are beginning the process of internationalizing the curriculum. In countries where traditional teaching and assessment approaches in HE may prove challenging for IS who have different prior educational experiences, Bernstein's theories of F- discourse and dialogic talk may be

helpful to support more inclusive teaching, learning and assessment practices. Staff practices and perspectives and our social cultural model of the impacts of assessment on international students' learner identity will be presented in future articles.

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