

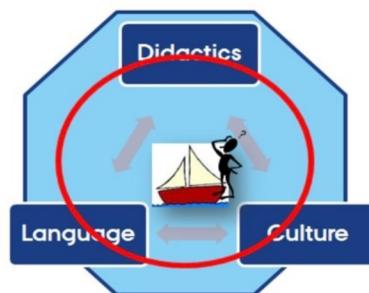
RISE: Researching the International Student Experience

Purpose

The RISE project aims to provide academics with practical advice on their teaching, derived from the experiences of international students. We have gained an understanding of the experience of international students at three sites across the University of Bristol through interviews with academics, observations of teaching settings, and focus groups with students.

Conceptual foundations

Lauridsen's (2015) description of the 'Bermuda Triangle' was created when educators and students were unable to resolve the complex set of relationships in international classrooms between the didactics or pedagogy, language usage and (inter)cultural influences. These three 'variables' provided us with a foundation for the investigation of the experiences of students in international classrooms across the three sites.



Methods

Semi structured interviews with key academic staff:

Topics raised by senior academic staff informed the observation tool, e.g. integration, staff-student relationships, language, cultural differences, learning environment, electronic devices, curriculum, groupwork, etc.

Teaching observations (lectures, case-based learning, practicals):

Observations identified both promising and potentially problematic practice within and across disciplines, e.g. balance of visuals and words

Student focus groups:

Students offered valuable insights on observations, e.g. reasons for lack of participation in case-based learning, groupings, use of technology

Examples of Top Tips voiced by students

"At the expert lectures, they kind of don't explain everything, so we don't know what we need to know. Like we don't know if the information we found is right or is it enough."

Spend time explaining to students why you teach the way you do, and reiterate this throughout the course, to help them understand the educational value of your teaching methods.

"It's good when they stop to ask questions after explaining a concept, and people do tend to throw out pretty good questions, and it kind of makes you reconsider what you've learnt."

"Polls help to test our understanding and keep us engaged."

Create opportunities for students to ask questions or complete polls to demonstrate their learning (this could be done anonymously using digital tools).

"It's not just an issue with international students. Locals also make grammar mistakes"

Be aware of the need for all students, not just international students, to develop academic communication skills.

"There could be an asterisk and then the definition at the bottom. It would be good if they can hyperlink it to the glossary so when you click it, it goes straight to the definition."

Provide definitions and glossaries of key terms.

"We only have pictures but not really their definition. We need to know. So when that happens I have to listen to the recordings many many times to understand."

Use both words and images together to aid understanding.

"I think teachers should provide us with more drop ins. Before you submit your work maybe if you can see a teacher to check your work again that will be useful because I want to pass."

Arrange and advertise drop-in sessions so students can make the most of these one-to-one opportunities.

"Making other people aware that people like you exist breaks some of the misconceptions."

Remind students of the benefits of working in diverse groups, e.g. breaking down some cultural misconceptions.

"Most of the examples that they provide are very UK focused, which is understandable, but one lecturer gave us more detail about how the local culture affected the project that he did and it was so interesting."

Ensure that cultural references and examples are inclusive and contextualised for an international audience.