

# What does research with international students tell us about our practices?

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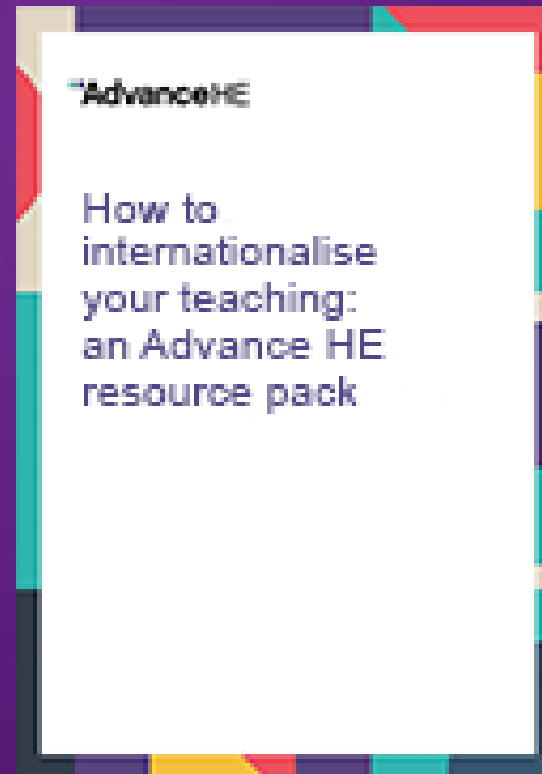
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# Our recent systematic literature reviews

- Mittelmeier, J., Lomer, L., Al Furqani, S., & Huang, D. (2024). Developing meaningful internationalisation that impacts students' outcomes and experiences in higher education: A scoping review of the literature 2011-2022. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 28(4), 503-525.
- Lomer, S., & Mittelmeier, J. (2023). Mapping the research on pedagogies with international students in the UK: A systematic literature review. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(6), 1243-1263.
- Mittelmeier, J., & Yang, Y. (2022). The role of internationalisation in 40 years of higher education research: Major themes from Higher Education Research and Development. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(1), 75-91.
- Lomer, S., et al. (2024) Social Inequalities in International Student Mobility: A Systematic Literature Review.  
<https://www.researchcghe.org/publication/social-inequalities-in-international-student-mobility-a-systematic-literature-review-working-paper/>

# Our work with Advance HE



## Across this work:

- A tendency for international students to be represented in research and practice through:
  - Deficit narratives and framings
  - Homogenisation of nationalities and identities
  - Othering (us versus them narratives)
  - Stereotyping

## Significant gaps in evidence

- Over-reliance on single-site case studies, often within the researcher's own professional practice
- Limited methodological innovation in evaluating practice (reliance on semi-structured interviews and questionnaires)
- Tendency to focus broadly on undefined 'experiences'
- Very few cross-contextual or cross-disciplinary analyses

**Bottom line: it can be very difficult to identify evidence-based practices with international students**

# Our approach - Reframing the narrative: Shifting the 'blame'

International students struggle with  
critical thinking

**VERSUS**

The expectation of how critical thinking is  
expected to be presented is often unclear.

# Our approach - Reframing the narrative: From individual to structure

International students write poor essays

**VERSUS**

Assessment support does not make clear the  
conventions expected for a 'good' essay

Existing assessment approaches do not value  
varied presentations of argumentation and  
rhetoric



- Support for international students often boils down to:
1. Recognising and acknowledging different educational values and approaches
  2. Reducing potential uncertainties where standards aren't negotiable



# So what works? (Mittelmeier et al., 2024)

- 1) Taking an embedded approach
  - Embedding expected skills across a programme of study, rather than outsourcing, is shown as most effective
  - This likely means embedding international and intercultural learning throughout the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, ILOs, extra-curriculum, etc.

# So what works? (Mittelmeier et al., 2024)

## 2) Centring inclusion and connection

- Recognising and confronting inherent social discomforts (example: the assumption of what is a 'good group member') central to the literature
- Proactively confronting potential xenophobia through pedagogical and curricular designs are important starting points for any meaningful approach

# So what works? (Mittelmeier et al., 2024)

## 3) Developing active and creative approaches

- Evidence-based pedagogical approaches with the strongest impact tended to be those which were active and creative
- Co-creation of resources were shown as one mechanism to overcome perceived uncertainties in the classroom

# So what works? (Mittelmeier et al., 2024)

- 4) Providing opportunities for reflection and personal connection
  - Learning about international and intercultural topics were likely to not feel meaningful, or actual reproduce harm, if not made personally relevant to students' lives and futures
  - Reflection activities were a key mechanism for embedding meaningfulness

# So what works? (Mittelmeier et al., 2024)

## 5) Explicitly scaffolding intercultural skills

- Recognising that students (including international students) do not come to university with inherent skills for working in intercultural settings
- Evidence-based teaching takes an embedded approach to scaffolding *how* to work together and encounter new educational values

## In summary: What does research tell us?

- There is a lot we don't know about evidence-based approaches that can work across contexts
- Uncertainty produced through encountering new structures of learning which provide limited clarity of expectations is a key barrier
- The best responses are proactive rather than reactive
- Deficit framing of individual students frequently limits the transformative potential of reforming structural inequalities
- Developing proactive inclusion is good for all students, not only international students

# Internationalisation Practitioner Network

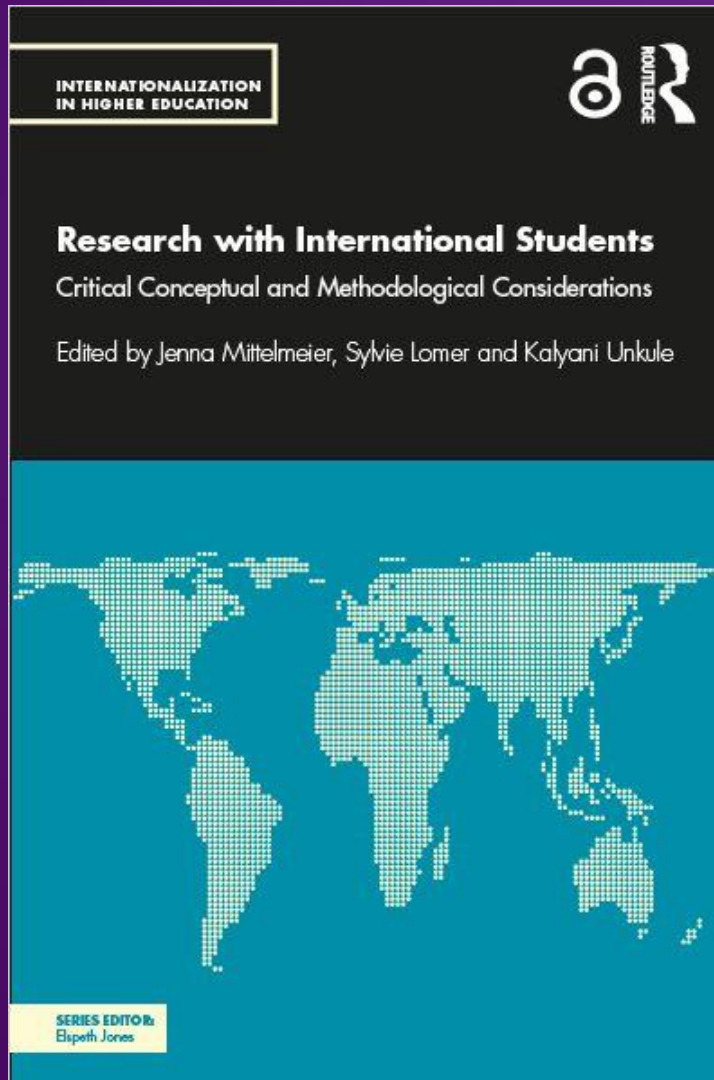
- An informal network of staff in all roles whose practices involve internationalisation
- Monthly online discussion chats around a specific topic or theme

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How might we rethink research with international students?

Our book: Open access!

## Research with International Students: Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations

Edited by Jenna Mittelmeier, Sylvie Lomer, and Kalyani Unkule  
(with entries from 49 authors)



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