



Critical Thinking and International Postgraduate Students

Author: Zoë Bennett Moore, Lucia Faltin and Melanie Wright

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'With a one year MA, you just have to hope you can learn bloody fast.' (student from New Zealand)

Introduction

What do we mean by critical thinking? There are broad assumptions in the UK educational context that it includes identifying, interpreting, analysing and evaluating arguments. But do international learners share these definitions? If they do not, how far can we encourage them to develop 'our' type of critical thinking? Is such teaching desirable? Do the approaches to teaching and learning in other countries raise questions about our understanding of what critical thinking is, and about its value for learners who are interested in co-operation, creativity, and dialogue?

This paper results from a PRS-LTSN funded research project, which examined the definition and place of critical thought in postgraduate programmes in Religious Studies and Theology. Although many of the questions raised are

not unique to international learners, the study focuses on their experience, especially in relation to taught Masters programmes. In our own practice, we have found that many international learners are educated in systems with values other than the critical thinking which forms such a strong element of both the generic skills and the specific learning outcomes assumed to be essential to Masters level work in the UK. So, focusing on international learners' experiences throws our assumptions into sharp relief, whilst at the same time suggesting strategies and insights that could be used with many students in the field.

1.1 Why it matters

There are several reasons why it is important to think about critical thinking. Significantly, as MacDonald Ross highlighted recently, in 2003-2004 institutions will be required to implement the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) qualifications frameworks, which attempt to define and standardise the achievements and attributes represented by each of the main higher education qualification titles.¹ The word 'critical' appears frequently in the descriptors of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications, as do references to a range of activities commonly associated with critical thinking. For example, the framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland's descriptors for qualification at Degree (non-Honours) level require students to demonstrate a 'critical understanding' of principles and subject-matter, and the 'ability to evaluate critically' approaches to problem-solving. At Masters level, students should engage in critical self-reflection and evaluate critically 'methodologies', and 'current research and advanced scholarship' in the discipline. Since implementation of the descriptors will require us to demonstrate that all students (including international learners) awarded a qualification have met these outcomes, it is important that we articulate our understanding of 'critical thinking' and its development and practice in particular subject contexts.²

The prevalence of critical thinking language in the QAA frameworks resonates with a wider, growing interest in critical thinking in the UK. For example, in 2001 Critical Thinking was introduced as an Advanced Subsidiary (AS) qualification; in 2002 pupils wishing to achieve Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs, which supersede Special papers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) had the option of sitting an examination in Critical Thinking. Whilst the latter do not (in theory) require additional teaching, the introduction of these qualifications implies that it is possible to identify widely agreed definitions of critical thinking, and also that critical thinking is teachable, either explicitly (as in preparation for AS examination) or indirectly, in the course of teaching other subjects (as 'preparation' for the AEA). The implications of these developments?and of the qualifications frameworks?remain to be worked out. But the likelihood is that UK students will enter and progress through higher education having received increasingly coherent and uniform grounding in critical thinking. Concomitant with this UK tendency to standardization (at least at a rhetorical level) is the potential for the gap to widen between UK understandings of critical thinking and the expectations and experiences of international learners, who come from contexts where different definitions of critical thinking operate, or from places where critical thinking is not fostered or rewarded academically. Ironically, in 2004?the precise moment that the qualifications frameworks claim we will be able to generalise about the critical thinking skills and competencies of UK students?EU enlargement will facilitate a growth in the numbers of central and eastern European students taking courses in the UK. As this paper illustrates, students from EU candidate countries (for example Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) will bring with them markedly different experiences of teaching, learning and assessment. The increasingly diversified and international body of students who embark on taught Masters programmes today requires us to examine our own teaching practices in a self-critical manner.

1.2. What is critical thinking? Some brief notes

One of the findings of this study is that there is no universally agreed definition of critical thinking. Moreover, single definitions rarely go far enough in specifying the depth and breadth of what critical thinking entails. This section summarises some approaches to defining critical thinking, but should not be understood in isolation. Throughout the article, we continue to address the task of describing and exploring what we mean by critical thinking.

Many descriptions of critical thinking focus on a list of thinking skills associated with the handling of argument. For

example, one typical list of critical thinking skills includes the ability to:

- identify reasons;
- evaluate reasoning of different kinds, including common and important species of reasoning;
- recognise and evaluate assumptions;
- clarify expressions and ideas;
- produce reasoning appropriate to a given task.³

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) modifies this definition slightly when it describes critical thinking as 'a form of reflective reasoning that uses a combination of skills, attitudes and information of knowledge, which facilitates good judgement and is sensitive to context.' It moves away from the potentially mechanistic practices listed above (critical thinking is 'reflective') and acknowledges the cultural constructedness of thinking forms (critical thinking is 'sensitive to context'⁴).

One of the broadest understandings of critical thinking is offered by Barnett. He argues that the predominantly skills based approach to critical thinking is producing 'critical thinking without a critical edge'⁵ ?a kind of 'painting-by-numbers' approach to academic work, which cannot deliver the freeing of the mind that the rhetoric surrounding critical thinking often promises. As part of his effort to see critical thinking developed, Barnett argues for a shift from skills-based language to a discussion of the university's role in the development of critical being. This entails:

- fostering critical thought so that students move beyond the practice of 'intellectual games' and are liberated, to realize that 'they are free to build their own cognitive universe';
- modifying the pedagogical relationship, so that the teacher becomes a participant in a joint inquiry after truth;
- empowering students to understand themselves critically and to act critically, so that they are 'not subject to the world' but are able to 'act autonomously and purposively within it.'⁶

These three accounts differ in their conceptualisation of critical thinking. Their emphases and implications will be returned to throughout the article. At this stage, however, it is worth noting two points. First, it is clear that whichever definition is operative, critical thinking requires considerable time to develop and practise. This is a significant factor to bear in mind when considering the situation of international learners enrolled on taught postgraduate programmes, who may be studying in the UK for a very short period of time (nine or twelve months). Second (as will be returned to in the conclusion) ideas about critical thinking are profoundly political. They may be predicated on assumptions about human society and individuality that international learners (and perhaps this is especially true of those working in Religious Studies and Theology?) do not share or value.

2. Method

2.1 The research context

The research focuses on the experience of international students enrolled in two taught Masters programmes. The MA Pastoral Theology is part of a portfolio of courses offered by the Cambridge Theological Federation, (which comprises seven member- and two associate-institutions involved primarily in initial and continuing ministerial and theological education). 240 students are currently studying for the MA, including 16 international learners. The other programme is the MA in Jewish-Christian Relations, taught in Cambridge and by distance learning (via the Internet and by correspondence) by the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations. It has 84 registered students, of whom 21 are international (11 of these are distance learners and may visit the UK rarely or never during their MA studies). The programmes are validated by Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) as part of its policy of collaborative and regional

partnerships, and they share both a common modular structure, and some teaching, especially in the area of study skills provision.

The characteristics of our research context have implications for our approach and findings. First, both programmes are of course primarily academic. They are subject to the processes of review and assessment that apply to other courses at Anglia Polytechnic University and in the UK higher education sector generally (for example, Quality Assurance Agency review). Second, many of the students on our programmes possess some kind of religious affiliation. The Pastoral Theology MA is aimed at those engaged in Christian ministry; involvement in this is a criterion for admission. The Jewish-Christian Relations programme does not require or pre-suppose an affiliation, but experience indicates that many students, including many international students, are members of a faith community. The same could be said of many UK programmes in Theology and Religious Studies. The profile of our international students further complicates the investigation of their attitudes towards and experiences of critical thinking. Are the challenges which they face rooted in differences which are individual, cultural, theological, denominational, or inter-religious?

2.2. Research design and implementation

The research project grew out of our reflection on the experiences of teaching and managing the two postgraduate programmes, and was conducted during the 2001-2002 academic year. Having formulated some initial ideas about critical thinking and our international learners, we held a focus group meeting with new and continuing international MA students (we approached all international students; those who volunteered to participate in the research came from Russia, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Israel, Canada, and USA 8). This meeting was divided into two main sections. The first took the form of an unstructured group interview, whilst in the second, students were asked to reflect on their experiences of study in a more structured way, through the completion and discussion of a written exercise. This generated a substantial quantity of useful material, some of which echoed our own insights, and some of which was new to us. An explanatory and consultative meeting was held with tutors on the MA programmes (classroom based and distance learning versions). This enabled us to compare student experience with tutor perception, and to identify the kinds of strategies that tutors are already deploying on an ad hoc basis in their work with international learners. At the same time, questionnaires were used to elicit ideas and information from international graduates of our programmes and from distance learners unable to travel to Cambridge.

Our original intention was to move next to the development and piloting of a programme of intensive study skills (broadly defined) development with a self-selecting group of international learners. This would form the basis of a more extensive programme of action, implemented across the MA programmes in 2002-2003 academic year. However, as we collated the findings from the meetings and questionnaire, and brought these into dialogue with existing research on critical thinking, we realised that it was neither feasible nor profitable to pursue the research plan as initially devised. The issues which emerged in the meetings were too complex and subtle to be translated so rapidly into finalised action plans. We realised that both the development of higher level critical thinking, and the delivery of quality support to international students, were in no small part matters of institutional culture. It takes time to foster a context in which students from different academic and religious backgrounds can feel able to risk failure and experiment with new ideas. In the first year of the research project, it has been feasible for us to consult with staff, and thereby to do some consciousness raising work with them. It is also feasible for us to develop some concrete strategies for implementation at the induction stage. But a further year of work is needed to address the issues for teaching and learning in sufficient depth, across the programmes.

Like all methodologies, ours is open to critique. For example, the focus on just two programmes, and the kinds of interview data that we have collected, makes it hard for us to generalise about the experience of international learners on postgraduate programmes elsewhere in the UK. However, there is a positive value in the responsible collection and sharing of even fairly anecdotal data. Doing this at the very least heightens attention to the cultural dynamics in our own classes, and leads us to be more deliberate and more specific about processes and method in the teaching of Theology and Religious Studies. Our conversations with and within professional bodies and groups also suggests

that our findings are not in fact unrepresentative.⁹

3. Findings Overview

Our findings focus on three areas, reflecting the key stages of the international student's relationship with their higher education institution in the UK: pre-course recruitment and induction; studies in the UK; return to the home country.

3.1. Pre-course

The UK is one of the major destinations for students from around the world and international learners opt to study here for a variety of reasons.¹⁰ For example, some are motivated by the perceived quality and standing of UK qualifications in the learner's home country. Others wish to pursue a specialism not offered elsewhere. (For example, one student indicates that she opted to study in the UK because the courses available seemed to offer more chances to 'do more practical things' than a postgraduate course in her native Germany would have done.) Particularly at postgraduate level, the availability of scholarships may be a major factor motivating some applicants. This diversity of motivations is matched by a range of levels of knowledge of UK education and culture. In fact, the material gathered in our interviews suggested that most students arrived in the UK with comparatively little knowledge of living and studying here. Some reported a kind of academic or educational 'culture shock' when they arrived. One student observed, 'In the UK, the educational approach and the religious perspective are totally different. In Russia, you can ask questions, but this happens within boundaries.'

It is therefore important that the induction of international learners begins prior to arrival in the UK. (In the case of distance learners who will not travel to the UK, but will study a course designed, delivered and assessed within a UK framework, induction should begin a few weeks before the course start-date.)

The pre-arrival stage should be carefully, and as far as possible, individually designed. For example, students who were offered the possibility of email contacts with a mentor? a programme graduate from his or her own country? invariably accepted the offer and found it extremely worthwhile. This kind of individualised induction is an effective means of bridging the UK and home contexts between which the student will move during the next twelve months or so. Almost all UK institutions produce some kind of written guide for international applicants, typically covering: the UK academic system; accommodation and living expenses; travel advice; immigration and health insurance requirements. They may also discuss language requirements and support, and outline process issues relating to study (e.g. attendance requirements and enrolment procedures¹¹). However, this information will need augmenting. It may be aimed primarily at undergraduates, rather than postgraduate students. It is also likely to say little about specific academic expectations and the experience of studying particular subjects.

Issues relating to language and culture have emerged as important to cover with international students enrolling on taught postgraduate programmes in Religious Studies and Theology, and are discussed in detail below. Also significant for some students is the perhaps new experience of living and studying in a context of pluralism. UK society is diverse (far more diverse than international stereotypes of 'the English' imply) and UK universities and colleges have by and large embraced the values of pluralism. Many international learners may come from societies which are less diverse than the UK (or societies in which diversity takes different forms). Alternatively, they may be 'used to' certain types of diversity but not others (e.g. ethnic but not religious diversity, or vice versa). This type of 'difference' is particularly noticeable within Religious and Theological studies. For example, one student from Poland reported surprise on learning that in most UK universities, staff teaching Religion or Theology are not required to be members of a particular church. Similarly, a student from Israel was initially concerned about the experience of living and studying in a country whose majority population was not Jewish: would this be a broadening experience, or a frightening one? Helping students to negotiate pluralism takes time but is necessary if the student's experience is not to be marked by a series of disturbing and puzzlingly 'chaotic' moments.

3.2. Studies in the UK

Our informants confirmed that international learners are used to a variety of teaching and learning styles. They are best illustrated by impressions expressed respectively by an Israeli and Hungarian on-site student, and a distance learner from Canada:

There are so few courses [classroom sessions] here, and more time working by yourself, more independence ? In Israel, you would feel more bothered by ?people? than by ?studies?. Here, I am more focused on research than on the demands made by the teachers.

At home we write fewer essays and have more oral exams ? I didn't spend so much time in libraries?.there were textbooks for every course ? How do UK students do it? Have they learned how to read texts ??

In Canada/US, marks are given for a variety of work, including participation, analysis, critical thinking, originality, group work, etc ? Difference in terminology was also confusing.

As is explored later, many of these differences have implications for the international learners' practice of critical thinking in the UK. Moreover, it is not simply the case that students may be struggling to adapt to new teaching and learning methods in the UK context. Some students who were used to oral assessment in their home country were not comfortable with this type of assessment in the UK. Our Hungarian and Russian informants said they found this kind of semi-formal group communication difficult, believing that domestic students could 'waffle without hitting the point', an 'easy option' not open to non-native speakers. They also feared that in the follow-up discussion, they were not 'pushed' as hard as their UK peers, and so had fewer chances to shine in front of an assessor: 'English people may disagree, but fear rocking the boat, or think ?she comes from a difficult place?, so I don't get as much feedback as I would like.'

Our research further revealed that comparatively little attention is given to the international learner's return to his or her home country, and to the specific challenges associated in retaining links with international *alumni*. There are several reasons why it is important to attend to this aspect of student experience, in general terms, and also vis-à-vis the practice and development of critical thinking.

Students regularly report a concern that their UK qualification is of uncertain value at home. One student writes, 'In Germany nothing from the things I did over here will be recognised. It just does not count. It is like a year off.' In a different vein, one student from New Zealand observes, 'I get some opportunities to speak both in the church and publicly ? My ?Cambridge MA? (rightly or wrongly) gives me extra credibility.' Whether correct or (more likely) incorrect, how students perceive their time in the UK will be evaluated in the future will affect their state of mind during the course itself.

Some students express the fear that coming to the UK may be seen as a 'betrayal of loyalty' to one's home department or professor. A year abroad may take them out of a patronage system, and make future studies, scholarships, etc., harder to organise. Like worries about the recognition of a UK qualification, these fears may demotivate the international learner, and impact negatively on his or her performance whilst here. It is therefore important to address these issues, even at the induction stages. Students should be encouraged to articulate how a year abroad fits in with their longer term study and career plans, and where possible to retain occasional email contacts with an interested teacher in their home department, whilst they are in the UK. In this way the successful reintegration of the student into his or her home life and education is more likely.

The need to attend to students' experience both before the course and afterwards highlights the extent to which successful inter-institutional relations are important in determining the quality of international learners' experiences in taught postgraduate programmes. At the recruitment stage, some UK institutions (including our own) rely on international partner organisations to assist with the selection of suitable candidates. But do these partners identify

those students best suited to study in the UK context? Our findings on the different teaching and learning styles prevalent in various countries, and on the place they give to critical thinking, suggest that learners who have fared well in a context where critical thinking is differently defined, or actively discouraged, may not be those best suited to UK learning and teaching styles. In order to select learners who can demonstrate not just academic attainment in their home context, but also the potential to cross educational cultures successfully, deeper link

Negotiating the student's return to their home country can also be helped or hindered by a willingness or reluctance to work with partner organisations. Like many taught postgraduate programmes, we do not have large numbers of international graduates in any individual country. However, a meaningful sense of ongoing community can be constructed even when numbers are small. A number of British Council branches are willing to facilitate such activities, and at the very least, typically provide libraries and Internet access, so that alumni email groups and joint study or research projects are increasingly practical options.

3.2.1 Induction

The following section further elaborates on the experience of international students during their studies in the UK, with focus on induction, teaching and learning, and assessment.

Dear Chrissie. I'm beginning to think your people were right to look doubtful about this place. It's so cold, oh Chrissie it's so cold. I'm always cold. They gave me a cold clothes allowance when I got to London (I must say they are generous and I do feel grateful?you can tell them th at at your end?here there's nobody to tell), but I have to live on it till my first grant comes th rough ? They've also put the university on the top of a hill, just to make sure it's as windy and co ld as possible. And it's quite a way from the town, and the only way you can go to town is on a bus, and the bus stop is underground, and I can't tell you how horrid it is down there? Oh dear. I stopped just now and tried to find something nice to say about this place but I swear I can't ? Th is is my sixth day here and I haven't talked to anyone except my supervisor for fifteen minutes on Wednesday ? I've started but I don't recognise any of the stuff I'm supposed to read?still, I supp ose it will all fall into place ? I think all the people on my floor are on courses together because th ey all seem to know each other. We say 'Hi' politely in the kitchen and that's about it. 12

Ahdaf Soueif vividly depicts Asya's arrival from Cairo to 'a university in the North of England' to do postgraduate study. Cold, loneliness, disorientation, cultural isolation, academic confusion?all stand out in this excerpt. We are alerted to the most basic conditions of life for many students coming to a foreign country, and it is no good our trying to work with people at the higher levels of cognitive development if we do not also attend to the material and emotional conditions which they are negotiating in their lives.

The induction of international students to a study programme is an ever-expanding circle of responsibilities and possibilities. It requires a more expansive scope than the induction of UK students, often involving substantial induction to social life, and attention to language issues. It also requires a more expansive time span. Clearly identified in student responses to our research is the need for guidance and help, which might normally be associated only with an introductory period of orientation, to continue over a much longer period of time. Our research indicates five significant issues. Induction of international students should:

- be context-specific;
- be rooted in a social context which enables deep rather than superficial possibilities of communication and personal involvement;
- be thorough and comprehensive in its introduction to the academic expectations placed on students;

- pay attention to issues of language and communication, which goes beyond the provision of separate language classes to integration within the context of the course, its seminars, its assignments and its informal aspects;
- be regarded as an ongoing task which is not completed in the first few days or weeks of the academic programme.

These five issues all have a direct bearing on the development and deployment of critical thinking. International students may have come from contexts where critical thinking is either not valued or, more likely, defined in a way different from normal UK expectations. For example, we found Canadian, German and Israeli students, who had extremely high levels of understanding about what was meant by critical thinking in their own context, but this differed from what was expected in ours. Explanation of expectation is therefore crucial. This is much better assimilated if given in an ongoing context of supervision and feedback rather than as an indigestible and deracinated 'lump' at the beginning of the programme. A student from Germany movingly commented,

What I really needed ? was somebody who would ? try to understand the differences in the way I was used to study in ? to the way they expected me to study in the UK. With that understanding I think a tutor could help me to overcome my difficulties and could help me learn how to reflect, how to develop independent ideas, what is okay and what is even too independent over here.

Social and communication issues also affect students at the deepest level, enabling or disabling confidence and concentration, peer discussion and presentation skills. Ready ability in these areas enhances both the development and the articulation of critical thinking. Finally, an appropriate understanding of the contextual and institutional factors determining a student's actual situation is an essential prerequisite to providing what is needed to support the development of critical thinking.

We shall now elaborate the five key issues outlined above. Induction of international students should be context-specific. Even within two closely related programmes such as ours, students recorded substantial differences in the helpfulness of the induction they were given. This correlated with differing structural and institutional arrangements. The Jewish-Christian Relations MA is run by the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations (CJCR), a small scale institution with a tightly knit structure of informal personal contact. The MA is offered both onsite and by distance learning. The Pastoral Theology MA is offered by the Cambridge Theological Federation, a more loosely knit group of colleges and courses, where much of the academic and tutorial guidance, and indeed the academic and social induction, is delegated to component institutions. A marked contrast was observed in the questionnaire replies between the CJCR distance learning student who reported excellent induction, the CJCR on-site student whose experience was primarily positive, and the student from an institution of the Federation who felt that induction to the MA had been inadequate. There are questions here both about what induction was given, but also about how that induction was received. There are questions about diversification of responsibility for induction, about focus in induction, and about the direct relatedness of induction to the task in hand. This diversity of student experience within two programmes, which work closely together, suggests to us that the precise institutional context and relatedness of the student is a significant factor. Close listening and attentiveness to the particular context of the student is important if we are to offer effective induction from which the student can receive full benefit.

Induction of international students should be **rooted in a social context** which enables deep rather than superficial possibilities of communication and personal involvement. 'The English are polite and don't want to offend'. This perceived politeness, however, conceals dangerous rocks. International students repeatedly bemoan their inability to dig beneath this polite exterior to understand what is really going on. What is she really thinking? Does he mean that invitation sincerely? What did they really think of my seminar paper? There are so many subtleties and subtexts that

reading and understanding what is going on becomes impossible.

This has implications for seminar style learning and for academic communication, but it also has important implications for the social induction of international students. Formal programmes of introduction to life in the UK are important; equally important are the informal social contacts among students and staff. Addressing issues of language and culture effectively requires specialist input from personal and academic tutors who are knowledgeable about the international student's home context. It is important to enter into a conversation with the student's background. This helps facilitate the transfer of skills and learning, including critical thinking, to the UK context. Some of the induction can be delivered via printed materials, but face to face sessions (or individualised email discussions) are also needed. Where possible, efforts should be made to accentuate the social dimension of the induction experience. Reflecting on the process of adapting to UK study methods, and in particular, the emphasis on independent learning at postgraduate level, a student from Germany reports:

I find this very difficult for a foreigner who has no contacts whatsoever in the UK, and who longs to meet people in lectures in order to get contacts, but is very much housebound with reading and studying books.

As this illustrates, the relatively low levels of class contact time typical in most UK MA programmes result in equally few ready opportunities for international learners to come together with their peers. Planning special social activities for international learners to meet (as a distinct group, and with other learners) can help them to make friends and in effect construct an informal support network, to which they can turn when experiencing problems. It is within a rich and healthy context of social meeting that deep learning is enabled. Without it the international student feels isolated, sometimes depressed, unsure of their ground, and lonely. Such conditions do not allow dialogue and growth in learning through the sharing of ideas and the testing of critical perspectives. As Barnett points out, 'the development of critical reason calls for the development of whole persons'. Moreover, '[a] critical higher education has to be sensitive ? to the social character of thought. Criticality is both social and personal.' 14

Low levels of class and social contact time do not offer opportunities to approach staff or fellow students with basic questions and misunderstandings. Such things are often discovered and set right 'accidentally'. Formal procedures for consultation are more daunting; their possibility may indeed also be missed by international students in the welter of information overload.

Furthermore, the learning is not all on the side of the international students. Good social contacts allow the perspectives which international students bring to the UK academic context to be appreciated in their own right. The values, the methods and the justifications of a diversity of perspectives may be naturally shared in a non-threatening context. UK students may gain a critical perspective on their own academic ways; international students may gain the self-confidence to share their insights further in more formal contexts.

Induction of international students should be **thorough and comprehensive in its introduction to the academic expectations** placed on students. 'Academic expectations' in this context covers a wide range of phenomena. There is the question of what happens in the classroom. The students in our focus group spoke of previous experiences enormously different from what met them in their MA classes in the UK?of high classroom contact time spent entirely taking notes till 'people get blistered hands' and of regular tests in class on the reading and work of previous weeks. What is expected outside the classroom may also differ widely. Students from many parts of the world are used to a much more prescriptive attitude to reading, and with that, highly specific guidance, concentration on key texts, and testing?either oral or written?on their reading. Faced with a booklist six pages long, a general encouragement to read and reflect widely, and a high value placed on diversity of reading among the class, many international students are highly disorientated. What may be presented as a mature, self-directed, postgraduate level **modus operandi** is experienced as unfocused, superficial, and downright confusing. Some international students interviewed noted what they regarded as superficial levels of learning and ability to analyse texts in the UK students.

This general background of expectations is important because familiarity with teaching and learning styles employed on the course will enable confidence in critical thinking. (Or, at the very least, unfamiliarity and disorientation will *dis*able such confidence.) Beyond the general, however, specific attention must be paid in induction to the nature of what is expected and indeed rewarded in the course. The issue of *independent thinking* featured strongly in student responses, both in the focus group and in the questionnaires. The general view of this was positive; encouragement to think independently was described as being 'allowed to fly' (Hungary), being 'free' (Israel), 'broadening my imagination' (Russia). What was, however, also clear was that such freedom could be unnerving and, most importantly, thinking independently, and expressing that thought in an appropriate academic way, was a skill which needed to be taught, thoroughly and in an ongoing way throughout the course. Again, this is an issue for induction, but also for continuous attention.

A further issue of expectations emerged in the specifically religious context of our MAs. The kind of critical and independent thinking encouraged by us and indeed demanded by M level descriptors nationally in the UK, posed specific problems to students on both courses who had come from academic backgrounds in religious seminaries where boundaries are set on such thinking. For example, students from both Orthodox and Reformed Christian seminaries in Europe had been used to setting 'creeds of faith' outside the boundaries of critical discussion even in a fully academic context. To include them was variously experienced as inappropriate or liberating. By contrast, a student from Israel, brought with her a strong ethos of the academy as secular?'for us all holy cows have been slaughtered already'.

This discussion of religious and political context and its effect on academic process and values assumes a high profile in some students' experience. There is a clear issue here for induction; teachers need to understand the perspectives with which international students are coming, and the religious and political locations from which they come. Students need to understand what are the religious and political values which underlie the academic process and expectations in the UK.

There are also bigger issues here, which go beyond induction. Listening to the views of others, coming to terms, with what is negotiable and what is not in our faith commitments, understanding the religious and political factors which shape human existence, are matters of life and death in our contemporary world. The presence of so many international students on MA courses with a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds?religious, social, political?offers an important opportunity for dialogue and mutual understanding, especially in Religious Studies and Theology. We will miss this opportunity if we so concentrate on instilling a predetermined view of critical thinking that we do not open ourselves to the understanding of other approaches.

For example, we may be led to question the normative UK approach which rewards an objectively critical methodology and allows any appropriately critically argued conclusion to stand in an assignment, in other words espouses liberal values in method but does not impose them in conclusions. Markham controversially argues:

We need to return to an older view of education. Education is training in a tradition: it involves the cultivation of certain virtues within a world view. Liberalism is a tradition, even though it has not always appreciated that this is the case ? 15

While this is an argument for 'liberal' values, some of our international students would identify with such a view of education from the perspective of other traditions.

We may also be led to question our sometimes exclusive emphasis on criticality as the means to 'true' understanding. The priority given to critical reflection often squeezes out other ways of knowing, for example the contemplative, the performative, the imaginative and the participatory. A student from central Europe on the Pastoral Theology MA wrote a dissertation on a prominent religious figure in her own tradition, which was at first heavily criticised as 'hagiographic' and 'uncritical' by tutors. The student proceeded to write an excellent defence, based on current writings in Pastoral

Theology concerning symbol, imagination, and participation in holiness, justifying her method.

Induction of international students should pay attention to issues of **language and communication**, which goes beyond the provision of separate language classes to integration within the context of the course, its seminars, its assignments and its informal aspects. Most institutions require international applicants to demonstrate language proficiency, but these tests do not cover the specialist vocabularies of Religious Studies and Theology. Moreover, studies suggest that language proficiency tests are poor indicators of a student's ability to understand metaphor. In fact, English proficiency may be detrimental to student comprehension of reading matter or oral discussions where **metaphor** is frequently deployed (as it is in much Religion and Theology discourse). Those with a good command of English (and with high IELTS scores) may be more satisfied with, and confident about, their own (**mis-**) understandings of a debate, and so less likely to seek clarification from a tutor or fellow students. For these reasons, some kind of pre-course reading or training may be advisable. This is particularly the case where students may have learned International, or American English, rather than British English.

Language raises acute issues in a seminar-based course. The international students in our group raised the following questions: 'Do my fellow students understand what I say?' 'People from the UK are more 'comfortable' in seminars. They can waffle; it's more difficult to sustain fifteen minutes for those who just have to go straight to the point.' These are issues about being socially at ease; they are also issues about academic participation and about parity of assessment.

Language may also raise some specific issues for those doing assignments which involve empirical research. Misunderstanding about the meaning of key terms is more likely to occur where culturally conditioned understanding varies. For example, the use of the word 'ecumenical' in a cross-cultural context caused a substantial misunderstanding for one student doing an empirical research project¹⁸. In questionnaire and interview work it is not only a question of teacher/student understanding as in other assignments, but a much wider community is involved. Misunderstanding can lead to wasted time and to lack of conceptual clarity.

That critical thinking is directly affected by language issues was clearly identified in our tutors' group. One tutor pointed out the 'sheer difficulty of doing academic study in a language which is not your own': first the level of critical subtlety you can obtain is lower, and then, second, 'you have to say it!' Evaluating argument is a key element of critical thinking. 'Critical thinking comes in many forms, but all possess a single core feature. They presume that human arguments require evaluation if they are to be worthy of widespread respect.' Actually spotting argument and counter argument in discourse is much more difficult in a language not your own. Cultural factors may also inhibit identification of argument; argument discourse is more or less 'blatant' in different cultures. This relates directly to the issue of 'English politeness' identified above.

Induction of international students should be regarded as an ongoing task which is not completed in the first few days or weeks of the academic programme. Induction at the beginning of a course is absolutely vital, and needs to cover a range of aspects of study. What has become clear in the course of our research is that 'induction', at least for international students, is a process which needs to go on throughout a course of study. What has also become clear is that there is induction of teaching staff which is just as important as induction of international students, indeed it is a prerequisite for the latter to happen properly. In all of the areas we have identified—context, social relationships, academic expectations, language and communication—induction cannot be seen as a task completed in the first week or two of the programme, nor can it be seen in an isolated way as 'induction of international students' apart from issues for the whole community of learning.

3.2.2. Teaching and Learning

The definitions of critical thinking referred to earlier in this article bring out to varying degrees the following elements—the techniques of reasoning and of evaluating the reasoning of others, the creativity to go beyond this to make good reflective judgements, and empowerment to act constructively in the enquiry after truth. Our discussion of induction has quite deliberately included factors which relate to techniques, creativity and empowerment. This is also

true of this section, on teaching and learning.

For international students, teaching and learning is the area in which critical thinking is both lost and found. In the questionnaire students were invited to reflect on the differences, if any, they experienced between the understanding of critical thinking in their home country and in the UK. They were then invited to expand on this by reflecting on the differences in the use of analytic and synthetic skills in their home country and in the UK. A key factor which emerged, was the contrast between a textual analytical definition of critical thinking, and a more reflective, independent and creative definition which was experienced in the UK context. This is summed up well in the following contribution from a Canadian student:

Critical thinking means learning to read material 'critically' ? This means analysing what is being said, whether the author has developed the material logically and coherently ? Critical thinking also considers what other information is relevant that could either strengthen or weaken the author's argument.

This is an analytical and text-oriented approach, without explicit attention to the creative or empowering constructive dimensions possible within critical thinking. A student from New Zealand, who observed that UK and NZ expectations of critical thinking were very similar, significantly added to the textual/analytical elements of his definition the words, 'and say where one personally comes out, and be prepared to defend that position'.

It is in the areas of independence and creativity that international students would appear to have to make the greatest transitions in their view of critical thinking when studying at Masters level in the UK. Although within Religious Studies and Theology there are specific issues about the dissection and analysis of authoritative religious texts for some international students (as there are indeed for some UK students), we find that high levels of textual/analytical skills may sit alongside much lower levels of synthetic and creative skills. One tutor identified the tendency in international students on his module to describe an argument, even to analyse it critically, but then to juxtapose their own view alongside rather than to engage the two elements.

However, the wider, more creative, emphasis in operation in our UK context was seen by some international students as having a negative side.

Much less knowledge is required on which you have to base your ideas but it is more expected to think for yourself and reflect on your experiences than in Germany. (Our italics)

This sentiment was echoed by a Russian student in the focus group, who pointed out that UK students can often fail to 'engage with the whole theological tradition ? they take something from science, and a bit of their experience and call it theology'. This criticism of the lack of foundational knowledge in UK students needs to be taken seriously. The problem may be exacerbated in taught MA courses when applicants are admitted from a variety of previous academic disciplines, and are then further expected to engage with not one but a multiplicity of new disciplines. It may also be connected with a complicated relationship between the encouragement of adult autonomy in learning, the respecting of professional expertise brought to 'vocational' MAs, and the difficulties of finding time for sustained study experienced by part-time students. Its connection in the minds of the international students we spoke to with a requirement to 'give your own view' as a component of critical thinking may, however, be a crucial factor.

So there is both losing and finding here, for international students, and potentially also for UK students. It would be quite inappropriate to work on the assumption that critical thinking is absent simply because it does not manifest itself in the ways expected in the UK system. What is needed is a mutual understanding between teachers and learners of differences in the understanding of critical thinking and of what are the particular obstacles which international students encounter in attempting to learn what is required by critical thinking in the UK. To explore this further we shall

examine four areas of the teaching and learning experience of international students?new content, new methods, relationships with tutors and relationships with peers.

New content

This is in part a straightforward issue concerning the study of topics which are in themselves completely new. It is, of course, impossible to generalise about 'international students here'; what is new depends on context. However, studying certain subjects within the discipline of Religious Studies and Theology is likely to be a totally new experience to many international students. Within our Pastoral Theology course two of these are social/cognitive psychology and feminist theology. The conceptual frameworks, the discourse and the implicit values of these disciplines are often unfamiliar and may be culturally threatening. This must be recognised and acknowledged. In a similar way a topic may be initially familiar, for example counselling, but its treatment and underpinning assumptions may be utterly different in a UK context from other contexts. The counselling example has surfaced, with different nuances, in the Pastoral Theology course in relation both to students from Africa and to students from the USA.

There is a particular issue about new content, which was expressed in the tutors' focus group as 'canon versus context'. What is the appropriate balance between the 'canon of the module'?the texts and subject matter which are specified for the module?and reflection on the context from which students come? There is a perceived need to integrate a foreign context into a local setting. On the one hand, students rightly expect that what they learn in their UK course should be useful in and appropriately integrated into their home context. As adult learners they should be invited also to draw on their experiences, which will primarily be experiences of their home context. On the other hand, the texts and the material content of our MA modules are normally primarily UK oriented, or at least Western oriented. Their canon arises within a context. This problem may be particularly acute in a degree programme, which is designed to invite students to reflect on their practice, such as our Pastoral Theology course, but we find it appears also in the Jewish-Christian Relations course. One manifestation is that, for example, 'Polish students tend to look only at Polish literature; Russian students only read Russian Orthodox material'²⁰.

As we encourage international students to engage in all three elements of the critical thinking task?the textual/analytical, the independent creative, and the purposively constructive?we must be aware of the difficulties of doing this where subject matter is alien and new?conceptually and in terms of implicit values. We should explore the 'canon versus context' problem in such a way as to maximise what the students can draw on from their own experience, to maximise the usefulness of their study for the future, but supportively to invite realistic engagement with what is new and strange to them. New methods As well as new content, international students may have to negotiate new methods of study. We have identified four aspects of masters level study which can cause problems. One is the prevalence of independent study. A high proportion of the study time for each module is designated 'student managed learning' (in our case, the standard for APU Arts and Humanities taught Masters programmes is 276 hours out of 300, with 24 hours class time.) Then we have an optional Independent Learning Module generic to the programmes, as well as the Dissertation. The ability to study independently is valued and rewarded in our assessment criteria. We have already discussed the difficulties of social isolation and academic disorientation which this may cause. Many international students are used to higher levels of class time, more continuous monitoring of learning and more controlled reading programmes. Independent study may involve less access to the tutor and to peers than would best suit international students.

A second aspect is the extensive use of seminars in taught Masters programmes. Active learning is a key element in the development of critical thinking, as is a certain 'developmental tension' in classrooms which promote critical thinking. Browne and Freeman point out that this may not be easy to handle:

Suggesting that the tension associated with controversy in the classroom is an effective strategy for developing critical thinking skills raises a serious concern for many teachers. Will controversy prove so potent a fuel that some learners will choke on its fumes? In short, can tension become antagonistic to learning? ? [A]ll ? paternalistic protection of learners from robu

st conversation fails to explain how students will ever grow to be participants in that conversation, unless they are encouraged to practice a critical engagement with serious discourse. 21

This proved to be a key issue in our student focus group, about which the group spoke animatedly. High levels of anxiety were associated by most of the students with seminars. Reasons they identified were language, vocabulary, lack of freedom to speak out, a sense that they were listened to politely but not really engaged with, and the consequent lack of feedback. Frustration was expressed about the English (British?) inability to ask a question: 'Some English people have a problem in that they can't ask a question?it turns into a speech. People just listen politely in England when this happens!'

Interdisciplinarity is an increasingly common feature of taught Masters programmes in the UK and may in itself contribute to the higher levels of critical thinking where 'critique opens the possibility of entirely different and even contrasting modes of understanding'²². As Barnett says, 'Interdisciplinarity is necessarily **critical interdisciplinarity**.'²³ This puts added burdens onto international students as they not only have to learn a new conceptual discipline, its norms and its discourse, but they have to learn more than one, perhaps several. For example, UK students taking the module 'Jews and Christians, literature and film' have to become familiar with the teaching of literary and film studies as well as Theology and Religious Studies. International students may have added to this burden the need to learn new ways of 'doing' Theology and Religious Studies. In the UK, the concepts of teaching and learning Theology may be entirely different from many other countries, such as Germany. Dr. Hannah Holtschneider, Affiliated Lecturer at CJCR suggests that,

[?] 'theology' is an example of a word with different meanings in the UK and in Germany. Most Theology Departments in the UK would not qualify as such. The study of a tradition within the boundaries of the tradition (always denominationally separate), that would be part of a definition of 'theology' in a German context, which then breaks down into the five disciplines necessary to conduct such a study (Old Testament and New Testament exegesis, church history, systematic theology, practical theology? Catholics divide slightly differently). Hence the understanding of 'discipline' would be different, interdisciplinarity again taking on a different meaning. When reading authoritative texts, what is encouraged is voicing one's own approach in the context of a tradition?and it is teacher specific. Teachers associate openly with a particular tradition and generally lecture on their research, which means that students choose to attend lectures of the people they want to learn from. Critical thinking here means learning someone's position closely and then either accepting it as one's own line ('my teacher X', in which case plagiarism in the UK sense is almost unavoidable) or distancing oneself (in which case the student would rarely choose to write an assessed essay for that particular lecture/seminar).

There are different types of interdisciplinarity. Thompson Klein ²⁴suggests three:

- bridge building: between disciplines that are perceived to be complete and firm entities?in effect an additive strategy?we 'add' something from another discipline to our 'home' discipline;
- restructuring: more radical, where the disciplines and the structure of knowledge itself are critiqued;
- transdisciplinarity: where integration of different knowledge, processes, takes place around an overarching paradigm/concept/ theory.

For any student, all the types of activities described above are challenging ones; they are even more challenging if a student is starting from a context where their 'home' discipline, and even the notion of disciplinarity itself, is differently defined, as is the case for many international students. Furthermore, performing these types of interdisciplinary activities entails a marked shift away from practising a clearly identifiable 'method', and becomes increasingly dependent on the ability to undertake processes linked with critical thinking (i.e. one needs to be good at posing problems, solving problems, integrating knowledge and approaches, and also to be self-reflexive). Interdisciplinarity requires us to step back from our own disciplines and think about how they characteristically look at the world. Finally, research methods, including specifically empirical research methods, are again increasingly valued in taught Masters programmes. While one tutor refers to the 'sheer fright of empirical research', she also states that international students 'appreciate the applied nature of the work as it enables them to make practical links with their own cultures. It seems they find this task ultimately very useful for their home situation.' There are, however, pitfalls here. We have already mentioned the communication issues which may affect international students doing empirical research. There are other cultural issues?for example one student was surprised that people took so long to reply to his questionnaire; he had expected friendship and politeness to be expressed in a quick return, and the resultant delay caused him to have to give in his work late. A further problem centres specifically around students wanting to research issues from their home context for their Dissertation. They find themselves in the dilemma of balancing the merits of staying in the UK to get the books and the first hand supervision, versus returning to their home context where the empirical research can more easily be done but the other resources and support are absent.

Relationships with tutors

We would like to make two rather diverse points under this heading. The first concerns the shift in the kind of relationship between tutor/teacher/professor and student, which many international students find themselves having to make. This difficulty cuts to the heart of even social relationships, as is well illustrated by Soueif's fictional Asya again:

'Ah! ? you mustn't call me Professor, you know' He gives her a quick, shy smile. 'You can call me Bill.' 'Oh! Right. Thank you.' Of course, she can't possibly call him 'Bill'. But now she can't call him anything else either.

It is not only the question of social relationship, or even just of regarding the teacher and her work as an authority to be respected, it is a question also of defining one's own work in relationship to the teaching and the work of the 'professor'. This is connected with the tendency amongst many international students to regard the work of certain teachers as authoritative texts. It is part of the academic task to analyse these but to analyse and understand them as **authoritative texts**. This approach makes it difficult for the student to feel they can legitimately voice their own views, and so to reach the higher creative and constructive levels of what is regarded as critical thinking in the UK. Our second point about tutors is a more positive one. Our study indicated that a good mentoring relationship between tutor (or tutors) and student is a vital component for the success and well being of international students. A student from New Zealand commented twice on the value of the one-on-one help he was given, and another from Germany expressed how much she would have benefited had more been offered, or had she had the courage to ask. A tutor commented,

The confidence to risk (which comes from the relationship between teacher and student) enables them to do their best. I make it clear that I am on their side: that they can ask me any questions ? The paramount issue in my experience is giving the international students confidence within a mentoring relationship, and making it very clear what I'm looking for.

Relationships with peers

This aspect of the development of critical thinking in the teaching and learning of international students has been implicit in our foregoing discussions, both of the definition of critical thinking and of the role of seminars. There are issues about comparability which is a vital issue in assessment. How do we assess the rather different, but often equally robust, definitions of critical thinking which international students bring? And how do we bring these profitably into dialogue with the different skills and understandings of UK students? Too often no such dialogue is facilitated. How do we deal with the issues, which international students have raised about their sense of being disadvantaged in a seminar context? The development of critical thinking in international students in taught MA contexts cannot be isolated from the learning development of the whole seminar group.

3.2.3. Assessment

Interest in critical thinking is in part driven by the exigencies of assessment. As we have noted at the outset, critical thinking and its components yield key elements in both the generic and the specific learning outcomes required of Masters level study in the UK. Because of this we paid specific attention to assessment in our research.

Previous experience

We noticed significant disparity in previous experience of assessment. We identified that a student from Russia arrived expecting free length essays and lots of them; a student from Israel arrived expecting sometimes to write just one page even at postgraduate level, but then also to write seminars up to twenty pages like a dissertation; a student from Hungary arrived expecting only oral testing; while the UK students have normally worked through undergraduate assignments which prepare them for what is expected the next level up in the UK system. Such variety makes the task of enabling students to interpret what is required of them in this particular context all the more difficult for tutors. The first step is to know and understand the point from which individual students start.

Academic conventions and requirements

A second important issue is to make absolutely clear the conventions and requirements of assessment. We have found that misunderstandings occur particularly in respect of plagiarism, interpretation of essay titles, word lengths, and differing notions of what the term 'critical argument' means.

In a UK context plagiarism, 'the deliberate and substantial unacknowledged incorporation in a student's work of material derived from the work (published or unpublished) of another'²⁶, is not only not rewarded academically, it is an offence which normally carries penalties. While at one level this convention is clear and straightforward in application, for some international students it cuts across an ethos of respect, even veneration, for authoritative texts and authors. To use the work of another person is to accord them honour. To concentrate on the exposition of authoritative texts, putting other people's words in a central position in one's own work, is the heart of academic study. 'Plagiarism' is closely akin to a spirit of hagiographic treatment of respected authors and texts. This approach is not highly valued in a UK academic context; it is so valued in other contexts.

The interpretation of essay titles may be another pitfall for international students. For example, we have observed several cases of students from the USA who regard it as entirely academically legitimate to use an essay title as a starting point for a free-ranging discussion or to fashion their own essay title using a few key words from the one set by the tutor. The high value placed on 'answering the question' in a UK context is alien to them. There is particular problem here for critical thinking. External Examiners and other teachers frequently encourage the use of critically framed questions precisely to ensure that the student engages critically, analytically and evaluatively in the subject matter. The question itself is an instrument of developing a critical approach as opposed to a merely descriptive one. This clearly does not work if students do not attend precisely to the wording and intent of essay titles.

Word lengths have proved a difficulty. This partly arises because of very different expectations in previous educational

contexts (see above) but also because many students whose native language is not English find it more difficult to say what they need to in the prescribed word length. This is an example of the deeper issues concerning language. It may be asked (and has been in our institution) whether such students are truly on a level playing field with native English speakers in respect of the actual assessment criteria if they are kept to the same word lengths.

Finally, assessment is the key area where differing views of what critical thinking and critical argument are come to the fore. In the exercise we gave the student focus group, there was a strong emphasis on the use and evaluation of sources, evidence and the correctness of factual detail. This indicates a high value given to some of the key tools and techniques, which are a *sine qua non* of critical thinking. Less in evidence were the 'higher' levels of critical thinking?the creative and constructive levels. The tutors bore this analysis out, suggesting that the 'why?' questions we re often missing in the critical approach of many international students.

Marking and tutors' feedback

Of immediate interest to our students' group was the question of whether particular allowances are made for them as international students. The straightforward answer to this is 'no'. We have seen in the case of word lengths that such a blanket approach does not actually make for a level playing field. However, to make a just and equitable system of allowances would be hideously complicated.

The emphasis in our context at APU is that study skills and other support should be given in the learning process rather than allowances made at the assessment point. A student from Germany pointed out how important feedback is in relation to the development of skills:

Unfortunately the comments did not help but only stressed the difficulties I already have seen myself with adjusting to the new system.

This suggests that feedback should not only indicate issues that need attention, but should actually offer the student ways of moving forward on those issues. Such feedback can take account of the particular context of the international student, even if the mark awarded does not. This, of course, becomes much more difficult in a context of anonymous assessment. It is worth noting that taught postgraduate students at APU, including those on Pastoral Theology and Jewish-Christian Relations, are substantially against anonymous marking. The known advantages are not thought to outweigh the advantages on the other side of personalised feedback and support in relation to assignments.

Although our research subjects did not raise this issue, it is also the case that assessment itself may be more or less an instrument of encouraging critical thinking. We have already mentioned the case of essay titles. McMahon, in making a case for the role of self assessment in the development of critical thinking, stresses the importance of developing the students' personal autonomy and asserts that 'the current prevailing autocratic approach to assessment would seem to be dysfunctional to this essential goal.'²⁷ Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning,²⁸ and it may be that learning outcomes rigidly adhered to and heavily larded with the words 'evaluate', 'analyse', and 'assess critically' may conspire *against* the deeper levels of critical thought.

4. Conclusion

Our research project on critical thinking began with an almost exclusive focus on learners, and with a largely skills-based approach to the critical thinking 'problems' facing international students on taught postgraduate programmes in the UK. However, during the course of research, our understanding of the issues was modified significantly. It has become clear that the key to addressing international learners' difficulties with critical thinking does not lie exclusively with student-focused activities (e.g. study skills training). Our findings have significant implications for staff development and support. The teaching and learning aspect of the project shows a need for more extensive *staff development*

. As we have identified international student needs and understanding, we have moved from a perspective of 'how might we provide materials to develop critical thinking in international students' to 'how might we foster understanding of what international students need and bring among our learning and teaching community'.

International learners' experiences should also be understood not merely within the narrow confines of a UK classroom, but in a wider context of relations between partner institutions at the international level. This particularly concerns academic assessment and its interpretation, and the application of UK-acquired education in the home country.

Our findings also raise questions about the definition and place given to critical thinking in the UK higher education system. Definitions of critical thinking are linked to cultural and political assumptions and values. To return to the OCR's syllabus for its Advanced Subsidiary examination in Critical Thinking, this document explicitly links the teaching of critical thinking to 'strong commitments' in 'our society' to the principles of '(a) non violent resolution of conflict ? , (b) toleration?based essentially on J.S. Mill's arguments in ?On Liberty? about reasonable belief and behaviour, (c) democracy'. Striking political references are also to the fore in Barnett's study, which links critical being to social radicalism. It uses as its frontispiece a photo of the 1989 stand-off between a lone protestor and the tanks in Tianamen Square. But how do these assumptions behind and justifications of critical thinking fit with the multiculturalism that imbues much UK teaching in Religious Studies and Theology? If UK models of critical thinking are grounded in assumptions about the universal characteristics of 'our society', is it fitting to ask international learners to adopt them? If critical thinking concepts are drawn from a largely secularist intellectual tradition, do they offer the most appropriate modes of thinking for students engaged in theological reflection?

Our research shows a need for a more active exchange of academic methods and intellectual traditions and its application to the national educational systems as parts of the international network. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that the British educational system is widely respected worldwide. Yet UK universities and other academic institutions would benefit from further self-examination by assuming an international perspective on such issues as critical thinking. This would enhance the role that our educational system continues to play in the international academic and intellectual community.

Endnotes

- G. MacDonald Ross, 'Information Article: External Pressures on Teaching,' *PRS-LTSN Journal* Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 2002), pp. 98-103.
- See http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crbtwork/nqf/ewni2001_textonly.htm for a printer-friendly version of the framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Site current in September 2002.
- These are the Specification Aims of the OCR's *Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Critical Thinking* (3821). Other lists are given in A. Fisher and M. Scriven *Critical Thinking: Its Definition and Assessment*, Norwich: Edgepress and Centre for Research in Critical Thinking, University of East Anglia, 1997, chapter 3.
- Quoted in 'Critical Thinking AEA Trial Examination. Projecritical thinking Summary. September 2001,' National Foundation for Educational Research at http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/outcome_popup.asp?theID=CTA. Site current in September 2002.
- R. Barnett, *Higher Education: A Critical Business*, Buckingham: The Society for Research into Education and Open University, 1997, p. 17.
- Barnett, Higher Education, p. 4.
- F. Morgan Gillman, 'Ask and You Shall Find Out: Some Multicultural Dynamics in Catholic Theological Education,' *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Vol. 3 No. 3 (2000), pp. 152-156 discusses similar issues in a North American context.
- While the Pastoral Theology programme does have some students from Africa, none responded to our

request to participate in the research. This may in part reflect difficulties in electronic communication experienced by African students who have returned to their home country. We are convinced that a study which included African students would yield further interesting and significant material that would complement the current research. Such a study might require differences in methodology.

- For example, the Learning and Teaching Unit, Anglia Polytechnic University, ACATE (Association of Centres for Adult Theological Education) and ILTHE (Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education).
- See Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom, **Briefing Note: International Students in UK Higher Education**, London: CVCP, 1998, para. 1.
- For example, the APU Guide for International Applicants, 2001-2002, Anglia Polytechnic University, 2001.
- A. Soueif, **In the Eye of the Sun**, London: Bloomsbury 1992, pp. 335-336.
- These definitions and differences are discussed further under 3.2.2. 'Teaching and Learning'.
- Barnett, **Higher Education**, pp 22 and 48.
- I. Markham, 'The Meaning and the Ends of Teaching Religion', **Teaching Theology and Religion** Vol. 1, No. 3 (1998), p.137. Markam's case studies are Holocaust denial, the problem of patriarchy, and accounts and models of divine providence.
- For further discussion of other epistemologies and ways of doing Theology see J.Henderson, 'What's Wrong with Pastoral Theology?', **British Journal of Theological Education** 13.2, forthcoming; Robert K. Martin, 'Theological Education in Epistemological Perspective: the Significance of Michael Polanyi's 'Personal Knowledge' for a Theological Orientation of Theological Education', **Teaching in Theology and Religion** Vol.1, No.3 (1998) pp. 139-153; A. L. Tomlinson **God's Spies**, Contact Pastoral Monograph No. 11(2001).
- For example, J. Littlemore, 'The Use of Metaphor in University Lectures and the Problems that it Causes for Overseas Students,' **Teaching in Higher Education** Vol. 6, No. 3 (2001), pp. 333-349.
- The perspective was derived from a context of Orthodox involvement with the World Council of Churches and was strongly theological; the research subject's angle came from a local, pragmatic British perspective.
- M.Neil Browne and Kari Freeman, 'Distinguishing Features of Critical Thinking Classrooms', **Teaching in Higher Education** Vol. 5, No. 3 (2000) p. 302.
- One of the authors of this paper has a vivid memory of a Bulgarian student wanting to write a paper on prostitution in Bulgaria and presenting her with the results of a literature search of books in Russian and Bulgarian, with the request to advise on which would be the best books to read!
- Browne and Freeman, **Distnguishing Features**, p.306.
- Barnett, **Higher Education**, p.7.
- Ibid. p.19.
- J. Thompson Klein, **Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity**, Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1996.
- Soueif, **In the Eye of the Sun** p. 330.
- **The Taught Postgraduate Handbook** 2000-1, APU, p. 107.
- Tim McMahon, 'Using Negotiation in Summative Assessment to Encourage Critical Thinking', **Teaching in Higher Education** Vol.4, No.4 (1999).
- For further discussion of this see Zoë Bennett Moore, 'Creative Risk-Taking: Feminist Pedagogy and Assessment Criteria', **Gender, Teaching and Research in Higher Education: Challenges for the 21st Century**, Aldershot: Ashgate 2002, pp. 155-166.

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