

# Loughborough University Teaching Innovation Awards

Name(s)	School(s)/Department(s)
Vicky Lofthouse [1 & 2], Val Mitchel [1], Erik Bohemia [2], Carolina Escobar Tello [1]	Design School [1] Design Institute [2]
Email	Phone number
<a href="mailto:v.a.lofthouse@lboro.ac.uk">v.a.lofthouse@lboro.ac.uk</a> ; <a href="mailto:v.a.mitchell@lboro.ac.uk">v.a.mitchell@lboro.ac.uk</a> ; <a href="mailto:E.Bohemia@lboro.ac.uk">E.Bohemia@lboro.ac.uk</a> ; <a href="mailto:M.C.Escobar-Tello@lboro.ac.uk">M.C.Escobar-Tello@lboro.ac.uk</a>	Vicky Lofthouse: 01509 222777 / 07932 732980

## Project title

Building empathy and understanding to support the teaching of Chinese Masters' students

**N.B.** Expand the text boxes as necessary. It is perfectly acceptable to use bullet pointed lists of outcomes, issues, activities, etc. if preferred

## Abstract (200-250 words)

This document reports on the activities undertaken in an 18-month project supported by a Teaching Innovation Award and a Santander travel grant, aimed at building empathy and understanding to support the teaching of Chinese Masters' students. Data was collected from a wide range of sources including a Literature review, 1 week visit to China (incorporating meeting with graduates from the UX degree course), 5 expert interviews (Dr Daniel Graff, Dr Ran Bhamra, Dr Paul Wormald, Dr Julia Goga Cook and Dr Daniel Shin) and a Student experience workshop (templates and audio recordings). This data combined with our own extensive expertise of teaching Chinese students was analysed to identify: insights into Chinese masters students in general; insights into our Chinese students perception of LDS; issues specifically related to critical thinking and examples of better practice which if utilised could benefit all of our students, amongst other things. These insights have helped to inform teaching and management of design programmes in LDS and IDI, and further afield via colleagues at other universities (e.g. Kingston University) who have shown interest in the project.

## Issue(s) addressed by project

- Enabled staff to build up a better understanding of the cultural background of our Chinese cohort
- Built a more detailed understanding of the issues that students face with regards to critical thinking and questioning
- Gained additional insight into why Chinese students struggle to engage in peer to peer feedback
- Identified some principles of better practice which will benefit all our students
- Identified some principles of better practice which will benefit our International students
- Gain valuable insights into the way that user centred design is taught in China
- Opened up debate with colleagues around better practice for the engagement of Chinese students

## Aims

To build a better understanding of the challenges that Chinese masters students face when engaged in user-centred design activities typically taught on design related programmes and propose ways in which these challenges can be faced, in order to improve teaching practice for all students.

## Specific objectives

To transform data collected on a fact-finding mission to China into a format that can be easily communicated across the campus so that:

- staff can learn more about the Chinese students that we teach;
- staff can better understand how to adapt teaching to recognise the cultural differences between a western and eastern education;
- home students are more able to appreciate the differences in approach between European & Chinese students and can better appreciate the positives that these differences can bring.

### **Activities/methodology**

- Data collection in China – observation, activities, interviews
- Literature review to contextualise the challenges under investigation
- Interviews with 5 Design related academics (in UK) with extensive experience of teaching in China or in the UK with cohorts of Chinese students
- Develop and delivery of a Student experience workshop
- Using thematic analysis draw out key findings from the study
- Validation of key findings with 5 experts and Chinese graduates keen to support our work
- Development of two 'slide decks' aimed at 'staff' and at 'students' to disseminate the key findings from the project
- Incorporate the new material into teaching practice and disseminate

### **Project outcomes/findings**

#### **Findings associated with Chinese students and Masters' programmes in UK**

*(Staff slide deck / final report)*

- Typically, in the UK we do not attract the best Chinese students. The elite tend to stay in China attending the top Universities such as Tongji, this is the most prestigious route to take. The next choice is typically to study in Hong Kong and then the USA. Predominantly we attract wealthy students who can afford to travel for their Masters. This means that they often have different motivations e.g. seeing Europe, living in London, not necessarily prioritising study.
- Students are attracted by the fact that they can do a Masters in 1 year rather than 2 which is typical in China.
- Obtaining a masters overseas is valued for the soft skills that they can benefit from.
  - Feedback from graduates suggests that the level of English that is exhibited is often seen as an indicator of the intelligence of Chinese students when they are in China.
- Many of the challenges we face in London (LUL) are because of the quality of the students, not their nationality. We are used to teaching very good students at Loughborough Design School (LDS) an UG level and need to adapt our teaching approaches if we are to continue to offer Masters' programmes to students with a 2:2.

#### **Findings associated with Chinese students and their perception of LDS**

*(Staff slide deck / final report)*

- Perceived benefits of studying at LDS:
  - Good QS ranking of Design / good quality teaching
  - Bespoke UX design course which is a rarity
  - Good for CV
  - Improved job opportunities
  - Meeting students from different backgrounds / international culture
  - Safe environment
  - We teach them to think in a different way and they are explicitly looking for this
  - The opportunity to intern in the UK

- Observation suggests that is hardly ever an opportunity which is taken up as is often difficult to arrange with UK companies because the Tier 4 visa ends in January and due to language issues.)
- Excellent facilities
- Low cost tuition fee (UX) and low living costs (Lboro)
- Near to London
- Lboro has a good reputation - recommended by tutors / large companies value the degrees
- Overseas degrees help students gain Beijing / Shanghai resident permits more easily
- Feelings about coming to Lboro
  - Anxious about language / environment / culture
  - Excited

### **Findings associated with Chinese students and our Design courses at Lboro**

*(Staff slide deck / final report)*

- The widespread involvement of agents in the preparation of applications / portfolios makes it difficult to recruit based on traditional design selection procedures. For design courses this means it is difficult to assess thought processes prior to application, which is fundamental to our UX design course in particular

### **Issues specifically related to Critical thinking**

*(Staff slide deck / final report)*

The National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking defines critical thinking as an *“intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.”*

- Irrespective of their nationality, many students struggle to think critically. Weak students especially struggle with this.
- The LUL Chinese students really struggle with inferring meaning, an activity which requires skill in reasoning. To be successful students need to trust their inference in order to be able to draw out insights and obtain an outcome.
  - It is not clear if they struggle because of their general ability or because of cultural.
- When working in a culture different to your own it is easy to assume that things happen in the same way as in your culture. International students especially need to be encouraged to challenge their assumptions with regards how they interpret what they see and experience. *(Could be useful for the student deck)*
- The biggest challenge for Chinese students seems to relate to the inexperience / cultural predisposition towards not asking questions. This means there is a tendency for students to take things they see and read at face value. This has a direct influence on their ability to think critically.
- Chinese students find it difficult to deal with the uncertainty of not knowing if what they are doing is right or wrong. They struggle with the idea of making mistakes.

### **Pain points identified by the Chinese students**

- To be able to ask a question in class the student needs to be confident that they understand the content and they need to know there is a question to be asked.
  - If the expectation is that you will be told what to do, then you won't necessarily realise that there is a question to be asked.
  - Critical thinking therefore needs to be part their learning process.
- Other identified pain points:
  - Language
  - The whole new process of design / design methods / design thinking
  - Food
  - Difficulties in engaging with non-Chinese students in group work
  - How to break out of Chinese groups and mix with other countries

- Layout of slides
  - in China the slides have less information
- More tutorials / more studio time
- Cultural barrier – understanding what the tutor wants
- Would prefer theory and practice at the same time
- Not gaining high enough marks – marks are typically higher in China

### **Chinese specific issues**

*(Staff slide deck / final report)*

- Chinese students are encouraged to focus more on the design outcomes (specifically aesthetics) rather than the research behind it. This is a challenge for when they come to the UK; we tend to be more interested in the process than the final outcome. They expect not to make mistakes
- They initially don't realise that they will get marks even if they get it wrong. E.g. that we value understanding of the problem as much as the final solution.
- UCD specific issues:
  - There was wide agreement that students are not taught UX / UCD at Chinese universities instead they pay extra to attend a 4 -5 week course to learn personas / journey mapping techniques to enable them to create portfolios to send to universities requiring UX experience, find new jobs, apply to courses abroad. These are offered by recruitment agencies
  - UCD teaching in China is at a more superficial level than that taught in the UK
    - What they had done before (typically through the intensive course)
      - Interviews
      - Observations questionnaire
      - Service safari
      - Personas
      - Wireframes
      - Brainstorming
      - Diary
      - SWOT analysis
  - Within the LUL cohort of Chinese students, regularly they come up with an idea, often an application they have seen in China (that hasn't yet made it to the UK) and they stick with it. This means they don't have to do much research, so they go back tracking to fill in the gaps. Which is a completely bogus way of approaching it. They believe that it's enough to have a good idea and that they can get away with it.
- Chinese students are used to working on specific design problems "in a safe area, more specific problems". They struggle with broad problems and to set their own boundaries.
- Self-reflection:
  - Observations indicated that Chinese students are happy to reflect on their own work as they understand that it will improve their grade
  - Typically, Chinese students struggle to reflect on their design process and find it difficult to reflect on feedback from stakeholders
- Chinese students (as with many students) struggle to think systemically – complexity. This is not fully understood.
- A number of participants in the student workshop, reported that they don't know how to evaluate and would like criteria to help them with this.
- Workshop participants also reported that they find it difficult to change their mindset / ways of thinking in one year.
- Design practice in China:
  - UX Graduates reported that once back in China they are typically recruited for a specific role and it is very difficult to work across roles (as might be more normal in the UK)

### **Inclusive methods that encourage all students to engage**

*(Staff slide deck / final report)*

- Slow down your delivery - this will benefit everyone
- When explaining things do so in a number of different ways - this too will benefit everyone
  - using examples and case-studies that illustrate what the brief, task, activity, template requires helps them to understand what we are asking from them. It builds their confidence in 'getting it right'.
- Provide more opportunities for students to ask questions and question what they see. Potential ways of encouraging more questioning include:
  - demonstrate the power of asking why
  - scaffold in questioning so students are actively encouraged to questions what they see, what they find, what they think
  - Create more opportunities to spend/give one-to-one feedback on their work (e.g. understanding their brief). This allows them to feel more confident on 'what to do next'.
  - encourage them to map out known knowns and unknowns
  - encourage assumption testing (theirs and others)
    - provide examples of assumptions e.g. the assumptions you make when you travel to a different country and illustrate that what you see is not necessarily what is going on
- Rather than asking for verbal feedback in large groups consider using other methods such as post it notes to provide feedback - this is less intimidating and allows time for thought processing.
  - 2nd language speakers often have to actively understand what is being asked of them, work out the answer and then feedback - this takes time
- To encourage students to be more critical create a safe environment, and as a tutor show your own vulnerability – that there are things that you do not know. This helps to develop an environment which is more critical.
- Led by example, on expert explained that he shows them how to challenge papers – what he's expecting them to do. E.g. this is what the article says and get them to ask question and show them how to challenge authors who have been published.
- To encourage student feedback from students to students, start by telling them how to give feedback. Positive negative positive.
- LDS students reported that they prefer more workshops and studio time and less lectures
  - on reflection long lectures involving lots of input are likely to be tiring if English is your second language
  - favouring learning by doing also reflects the learning preferences of non-Chinese students that we have spoken to
- LDS Chinese students also reported that they really like examples / case studies that demonstrate process, this is slightly challenging as it can lead to them simply copying the process rather than developing their own
  - suggests opportunities for Flipped learning – worked well for the Wicked problems
- Providing reading lists with books that include examples of what we are asking the students to do (e.g. Manzini; Don Norman)
- Formative feedback and self-reflections enables students to feel more confident about their work. It prepares them to feel more confident before being marked.
- Create more opportunities to spend/give one-to-one feedback on how to use the UCD tools (questionnaires, templates, aims, etc). This allows them to feel more confident on 'what to do next'.
- Studio time could help with critical thinking
- Give examples of how to self-reflect

### Notes for students

- Just because 2nd language speakers might not say much to start with doesn't mean they don't have good ideas
- Chinese students come from a very different culture to your own - they are deferential to their elders and respect authority, this means they are less likely to challenge what is being asked of them

### Project outputs/deliverables

D1 = Literature review

D2 = Findings report for circulation with experts

D3 = A 'deck of slides' aimed at staff, which outline typical challenges faced by Chinese masters' students engaged in design related activities and illustrative examples as to how these challenges can be reduced or overcome.

D4 = A 'deck of slides' for use with students to help build empathy and understanding between different groups of students, including sample empathy building activities.

A further deliverable (D5) is planned for EAD '19

D5 = An academic paper

### **Impact on teaching and learning (for your students, your School and including links to University strategy)**

- A much better understanding of the culture and environment that our Chinese students come from.
- Greater emotional connection with our Chinese students as a result of visiting China, having some familiarity with their homeland and being able to talk about the visit.
- Valuable and wide-ranging insights to support the UX Masters programme in LDS, a core offering for the School.
- A better understanding of the types of students that we attract to our Masters' course and that they require additional support to those that we attract to our UG courses.
- Engaging in new dialogue with colleagues on the challenges associated with teaching mixed cohorts and how to go about improving the experience for all involved.
- The extensive project findings (listed above) support two key strategic aims:
  - Raising standards and expectations
  - Educating for success
- To some degree is also supports the other two aims:
  - Investing on our staff – through the provision of an output which will empower staff to better engage with Chinese students
  - Growing capacity and influence – by potentially creating a better educational experience for our Chinese students. The linked Santander funding provided the opportunity for promoting the University whilst visiting the different institutions in China.

### **Dissemination plans including location of developed resources for Loughborough colleagues to access** (resources can be attached to this document or linked to – in which case please provide an accessible location of resources)

- All resources will be forwarded to the Teaching Centre
- Dissemination plans:
  - D1 will be used to inform an academic paper
  - D3 will be used as training material for staff from the Design Institute, Design School and Glendonbrook Institutes (in Lboro and London) as well as wider staff training in the University. The 1<sup>st</sup> dissemination event in London is planned for June 18
  - D4 will be incorporated into lecture materials & induction programmes to increase empathy & understanding between different groups of students (to be rolled out in Oct 18)
  - The process and the findings from the project will be written up into an academic paper for publication.
  - Key findings will be dissemination of findings via social media
  - A 30-minute workshop entitled – 'Building empathy and understanding to support the teaching of Chinese masters' students' will be run at the CAP conference in June 2018

### Use of award money (outline breakdown)

- Literature review (£1700)
- RA to undertake additional interviews with experts (£650)
- Transcription of interviews with current student cohort and experienced staff (£450)
- Creation of visualisations to be used for the slide deck (£100)
- Student experience workshop (£100)

Please submit the completed documentation by **30 April 2018** to:

Deena Ingham, *Teaching Innovation Awards Panel*  
Centre for Academic Practice

[cap@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:cap@lboro.ac.uk)