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Enhancing academic learning advising in globally-engaged universities – A personal odyssey

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ABSTRACT

The global mobility of students is a key contributor to demographic diversity in higher education in the 21st century, particularly in the West. In recent times, its quantitative and qualitative impact has shifted somewhat from “market” to the “well-being” of international students. Effectively, the need to consider academic learning advising issues relating to supporting international students is not only a compelling idea, but also a high-stake accountability issue. By incorporating the author’s own experience in academic learning advising with underlying theoretical literature, this paper proposes a multi-level/phase and multiculturally-infused academic learning advising conceptual organiser which views student learning along a generic, prescriptive to developmental advising continuum. The proposed conceptual organiser is learner (advisee)-centred, holistic and flexible. It further suggests that in a globally-engaged university, high-impact academic learning advising is multicultural. Academic learning advising that engages student differences can potentially close the “troublesome space” as commonly exemplified in the East versus West divide.

INTRODUCTION

The international student density – the number of international students present in the campus in relation to domestic students – in many universities in the West has risen to an unprecedented level in recent years. This is part of a global phenomenon described by Rizvi and Lingard (2010) as: “Never before in history have there been more people moving across national boundaries” (p.161). Its expanding capacity to rise numerically has led many national agencies to forecast the growth trend of the cross-border movements of students as one of the fastest growing phenomena in higher education in the 21st century. While this is viewed as having mutual benefits for both sending and receiving countries, it has also generated a higher level of accountability in meeting the academic and related needs of international students.

This paper, a combination of academic literature and personal reflection on my own New Zealand experience, suggests that such expectation should include examining issues relating to academic learning advising, which has been described previously by a Harvard don as “Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristics of a successful college experience” (Light, 2001, p.81). Critical to this orientation, it will argue, is the need for an advising pedagogical culture to drive the practice of advising international students.

GLOBALLY-ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES

The impact of the global mobility of students is both quantitative and qualitative. In 2009, as shown in the Atlas of Student Mobility, an estimated 3.3 million students travelled to different destinations globally for higher education (Institute of International Education, n.d.). Although the majority of students still favour English-speaking countries like the United States (20%), the United Kingdom (13%), Australia (7%), Canada (4%) and New Zealand (3%) (Table 1), there is an increased inter-regional flow of students within East Asia, indicating “a shift towards a stronger Asian influence in global international education flows” (JWT Education, 2008, p.5). Even previous sending countries like Malaysia and Singapore, as they respectively push for an “educational hub” status in the Asian region, are becoming beneficiaries of this global movement of students.

The growing trend is unprecedented and long-term projections indicate a numerical growth of international students to reach 7.2 million in 2025 (Arthur, 2004, p.1). As a further recognition of the growing diversity in higher

Table 1. International students in selected host countries

United States	671,616	20%
United Kingdom	415,585	13%
France	266,448	8%
Germany	239,143	7%
China	238,184	7%
Australia	223,508	7%
Canada	123,901	4%
Japan	123,829	4%
New Zealand	95,500	3%

Source: Adapted from Institute of International Education (n.d.).

education, the “international mix” – staff and students – is now a key ranking category (worth 7.5% in the 2011-2012 overall ranking score) in the World University Rankings compiled annually by the Times Higher Education (n.d.). Significantly, the ratio of international to domestic students is deemed an indicator of an institution’s “global competitiveness and the commitment to globalisation” (Times Higher Education, n.d.). Collectively, the global mobility of students is “enormous – and consequential” (Wildavsky, 2010, p.15). Its new level of visibility and accountability underscores demographic diversity as an educational asset and a driver for transformation in globally-engaged universities (Anderson, 2008).

Given the importance of the growth trend, Montgomery (2010) has rightly observed that the new phenomenon has brought “the issue of the effects of [the international students’] presence on campus and in class to the forefront of discussions in educational research and policy” (p.xi). A key concern in this paper is that these students from non-English speaking countries, particularly those from Asia, are often touted as carriers of academic traditions and practices which are manifestly different from the West in terms of language, culture and traditions. As a practitioner of academic learning advising, enhancing their higher education experiences is a pedagogical issue. In the long term, the sustainability of the global flow of students to a particular destination or country will depend on how the international student’s presence on campuses is supported in policy and practice.

DEFINING THE ADVISING CHALLENGE

From my experience, among the numerous adjustments and adaptations international students have to make in New Zealand, perhaps in many other Western universities as well, developing skills in academic writing, research, critical thinking, academic assertiveness, and other related study skills, is pivotal to their degree completion. Acquiring a repertoire of such skills will help them make the connection with multiple academic tasks and integrate themselves into the academic community in the process. The notion of connectivity carries the fundamental idea of measuring learning success: the more connected they are with the academic community, the more successful they will be, and vice versa. Simply put, if higher education is to reflect the reality of campus diversity, it must take the idea of academic “connectivity” more seriously than it does at present. The idea of “connectivity” can be easily identified in the literature on advising. Below are selected ones:

“Academic advising is one of the most important services for helping students become aware of their intellectual and emotional growth, in particular, and for helping them monitor the progress in their development” (Gordon, 2002, p.240).

“Feelings of belonging help students connect with their peers and the institution, relationships that, in turn, are associated with persistence and satisfaction” (Kuh et al., 2005, p.119).

“When viewed as an educational process and done well, academic advising plays a critical role in connecting students with learning opportunities to foster and support their engagement, success, and the attainment of key learning outcomes” (Campbell & Nutt, 2008, p.4).

“While students are seen to be responsible for constructing their knowledge, learning is also seen to depend on institutions and staff generating conditions that stimulate and encourage involvement” (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2010, p.3).

In my experience, academic learning advising is strategically located in the campus to help international students to connect with the learning community. For many students, the advising sessions with an adviser may be the only face-to-face connection with the university. Such engagement with an adviser can give them a feel of being an integral part of the learning community. It can also convey to them that their academic well-being is being recognised. According to a New Zealand study, it was found that “Where international and domestic students do not differ is that their satisfaction appears to be closely linked to their feelings of support – students who report high levels of support also tend to report high levels of satisfaction” (Radloff, 2011, p.35). But the reality is that making academic connection with the learning community is not easy even for native speakers of English.

EDUCATING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS – A TROUBLESOME SPACE!

For many international students, studying in a foreign country can be an alienating experience. As a distinct cultural group not routinely structured into higher education in such a large number and from a wide range of countries until recently, as in the case of New Zealand and Australia, they

often find their sojourn experiences to be extremely stressful. Marginson et al. (2010) captured the voices of such students who narrated a litany of negative experiences relating to academic and social disengagement, personal safety concerns, racism, language issues, workplace problems, accommodation issues, and problems in dealing with bureaucracy. Unfortunately, according to the researchers, it is not easy to discuss such issues: “The \$16 billion international education in Australia is good at market research and image management but uncomfortable when critical research findings are discussed” (p.xi).

Compounding these challenges is the fact that international students from non-English speaking backgrounds are purported to be carriers of different learning cultures. The literature on the experiences of international education has remained remarkably consistent in saying that foreign learning cultures often “clash” with that of the host institutions. It is acknowledged universally that proficiency in English is a perennial problem. Other pressing concerns include deep and surface learning, rote learning behaviour, tendency to commit plagiarism, poor communication skills, lack of academic assertiveness, devoid of critical engagement skills, and overt intellectual obedience (see for example, Brown, 2008). Similarly in New Zealand, international students’ academic “problems” have been identified as proficiency in academic English and difficulties in understanding lectures and textbooks, lack of familiarity with the Socratic mode of teaching, issues about academic integrity, inability to participate in class discussions, and cultural distance to academic material or ideas (Butcher & McGrath, 2004, p.544). While some of the observations are contestable and deserve an in-depth treatment in another forum, they do stress the fact that international students need to make multiple adjustments and require support to make them successful. Although these issues will have immediate, medium and long term implications for the students as well as for the host institutions, the academic aspects of international students draw far less attention than their social or cultural concerns.

I have argued elsewhere (Pang, 2008) that teaching and advising international students, particularly those from Asia, has always been a difficult discussion. For example, the now dated refrain continues to dominate as academic staff grapple with the shift of their institutions from national to international: “When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do” or “If they can’t adapt and adjust linguistically, socially and academically, then they shouldn’t have come at all”. Effectively, the “international” and the “local” are constructed as a “troublesome space” (Montgomery, 2010, p.132). But such responses

tend to distance rather than engage students. Viewing them from a deficit or pathological perspective precludes serious discussion on what is critical to the success of international students. Student success expert George Kuh (2008) has suggested that “Efforts to enhance student success often falter because too little attention is given to understanding the properties of the institution’s culture that reinforce the status quo and perpetuate everyday actions – ‘the way we do things here’” (p.81).

From the academic learning advice perspective, the “more of the same” learning advising discourse is limited pedagogy and learning advising practitioners are at risk of being ineffective in practice. Advising which lacks rigour may result in students disengaging or dropping out altogether. A researcher on counselling international students warns: “Even with good intentions and an interest in students from other nations, lack of preparation to work effectively with international students can result in frustrating, unproductive and even harmful interactions” (Arthur, 2004, p.6). The implication is that certain methods and conditions need to be present to ensure significant teaching and learning outcomes. What follows is a conceptual organiser which attempts to provide a sense of coherence to the current approach to academic learning advising practice in the context of international education. The thrust of this pedagogical approach involves answering the question: “What academic learning advising knowledge and skills are of most worth?”, a parallel version of the curriculum question “What curriculum is of most worth?” made famous by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903).

MY NEW ZEALAND EXPERIENCE

New Zealand is now an international education destination more than at any other time in its nation’s history. The Ministry of Education has confirmed that fee-paying international students are now “an established part of the New Zealand education scene” (Ministry of Education, 2001, p.1). More recently, the New Zealand Government’s (2011) Leadership Statement for International Education reiterated its importance: “International education is an important enabler in strengthening New Zealand’s economic, cultural and social links with the world” (p.2). In particular, the proposed doubling of the intake of international postgraduate students from 10,000 to 20,000 in the next 15 years (p.7) is a reflection of the government’s vision and goals in international education. As a “net importer of tertiary students” (Scott & Gini, 2010, p.1), that is many more students come to New Zealand for tertiary study than leave the country for study overseas, the impact on the student

support services is increasing at a steady pace. The internationally known Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (Ministry of Education, 2010) is the flagship of New Zealand government's effort in responding to the well-being of international students.

As a former international student in New Zealand, I had experienced first-hand some major challenges in my journey from undergraduate studies to doctoral research in three universities in the country. And in my current role as an academic learning adviser, I have provided advising support for over a thousand international and migrant students from non-English speaking backgrounds studying at different stages and degree levels. This is not a group of advisees that is easy to categorise. For the purpose of this analysis, I use the umbrella term "English as an Additional Language" (EAL) students to refer to Asian students, including those from China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand, and those from Europe and the Middle Eastern countries. In many ways, I can truly empathise with the issues facing the international students today. My experience as a student and a learning adviser suggests that moving from a majority status in the country of origin to become a minority in the Western academic context is not an easy transition for the students to make. They do face a hierarchy of challenges and barriers to learning commonly described as social, cultural, language and academic shocks (Arthur, 2004; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Pope & Singaravelu, 2007). For many students, developing the necessary academic skills and scholarship is like "drinking from a fire-hose". For lecturers, the problem increases disproportionately when the students are from unfamiliar, non-traditional backgrounds. Frequently, both students and lecturers are unprepared for such academic mix in lecture halls or tutorial rooms, and their experiences are often constructed as mutually exclusive or "East" versus "West". A misunderstanding can easily arise based on overgeneralisations that are stereotyping (Montgomery, 2010). Very often, the "solution" for the lecturer and student is to retreat into their respective comfort zones. As a New Zealand academic puts it: "Of course academic staff should feel a fundamental obligation to treat all students with tolerance and politeness, but, in the university context, many staff are asking what happened to the old maxim 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do'" (Miller, 2006, p.51). The fact is that the potential problems or challenges are clearer than the solutions. Metaphorically speaking, the real challenges are actually below the waterline of an iceberg.

CONCEPTUAL ORGANISER

In the field of academic learning advising, one-to-one consultation is generally recognised as an “important part of the jigsaw of learning and teaching opportunities” (Wisker et al., 2008, p.1). It is a robust form of academic support that involves supporting, facilitating, and enabling students to develop appropriate academic skills. For the adviser, it provides a unique opportunity to get into the minds of the advisees and work with their needs and expectations. It is a significant teaching and learning moment which has the potential of forging a cultural bridge between the East-West academic divide. In my experience with EAL international students, there is a recurrent pattern of advising dynamics in one-to-one sessions which point to a scaffolding approach to learning advising. This is best expressed in the form of a conceptual organiser (Fig. 1) which depicts generic, prescriptive and developmental advising as a continuum that is flexible and allows advising intervention at any point, depending on the needs and the level of readiness of the advisees.

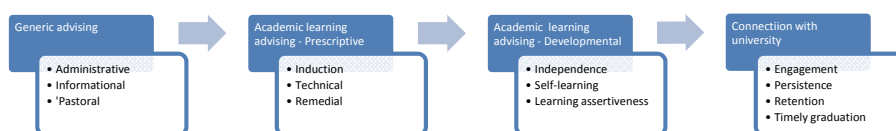


Fig. 1. Conceptual organiser for one-to-one academic learning advising.

As a sojourner in New Zealand, international students require generic advising. Upon arrival in the country, they need administrative information and pastoral support to overcome the initial “arrival shocks” and “fatigue” and deal with pressing issues like course selection, student visas, and accommodation. In general, this generic advising in my institution is provided by the international office, counselling unit and/or by the department or faculty in which the students are enrolled in. As an academic learning adviser, my involvement only begins when the students come for study skills advice. Usually, this is about their first written assignments. Generally speaking, the initial advising session is adviser-directed and the main task is to provide (prescribe) solutions to the advisees’ writing problems. Basically, it is a kind of “tell me what to do” situation. The advice I provide is content-oriented, remedial and technical. For example, the advisees may ask for guidance on how to order the in-text referencing elements, that is, the last name, year

of publication, and the page number. The learning dynamic here is on the acquisition of skill, not the comprehension of why and how knowledge in referencing can be developed and enhanced. They are less inclined to engage in deeper issues like the idea of attribution, projecting one's own academic voice, or establishing one's academic identity as a careful researcher by referencing correctly. As a novice in referencing, their immediate need is to focus on entry-level skills of how to acknowledge sources and accomplish those quickly but correctly. Students want affirmation that what they have written and referenced is "technically" correct. They tend to "postpone" learning other deep learning skills such as critical thinking and developing arguments because these skills, although important, cannot be acquired quickly or overnight. Hence, learning advising at the beginning stage is similar to a technical-fix and is very instrumental in orientation. Especially for those coming from Confucian backgrounds where teachers are revered, we are regarded as an authority that can always give the correct answers and provide the right directions for their assignments.

Of course, our long-term goal of academic learning advising is to help the advisees work towards self-directed or independent learning. In practice, there is no one "aha" moment where one can say categorically that the advisee is on the way to achieve this goal. But an experienced adviser can monitor the advisee's progression and notice the deepening of learning experiences along the prescriptive-developmental continuum. For example, the advisee's conception of knowledge might move from one of "conserving" (Asian) to one that is "constructing" (Western). In the earlier example of referencing, self-directed learners will shift their referencing worldview from one of a purely technical exercise to one of referencing as knowledge construction.

The progressive nature of the conceptual organiser as illustrated here suggests that learning advising is manifestly incremental and cumulative. The key focus is to encourage increasing student involvement and responsibility and to reduce the adviser's direct intervention over the course of the students' learning experience. Ideally, the student should gradually move along the continuum from a "knowledge-taker" to a "knowledge-maker". This is equivalent to what is described in some of the academic literature as "developmental advising". The dialogue normally involves advisees reflecting on their own perspectives and the adviser challenging them to examine contradictory perspectives concurrently. Contrary to prescriptive advising, the emphasis is to focus on the learning process rather than providing answers. The adviser now plays a more facilitating role in the teaching and learning partnership. Giving advisees increased ownership in

the learning process can positively affect their commitment to the advising relationship and enhance their academic assertiveness. Practising academic learning advising this way, that is, as a student-centred educational process, effectively “moves [advising] from a paradigm of teaching that focuses on information or inputs to a paradigm of learning that focuses on outcomes for student learning” (Campbell & Nutt, 2008, p.4). This aligns very well with Kuh’s expert opinion that “engaging students in active learning” is one of the principles of good practice in student affairs (Kuh, 2009). It encourages deep learning and thus enhancing connection with the learning community.

Generally, many Asian students we have taught favour teaching styles which are prescriptive. As their preferred learning approach is oriented to receiving knowledge, they expect learning advisers to be directive and authoritative in one-to-one consultation. Depending on their level of preparedness, they may not readily respond to developmental advising that focuses essentially on reflective thinking until much later in their journey to a degree. From my experience, prescriptive advising works particularly well with new international students from non-Western background, which means “learning skills first, developing critical thinking later”.

Thus far, by pulling together my own practical experience with the underpinning theoretical literature, the proposed conceptual organiser, as represented by the advising continuum, is intended to capture the dynamics of advising international students. Conceptualising advising this way is akin to the “novice-to-expert” model which regards “individuals progress from the early stages of their learning, or making meaning of new subject matter, through a stage of competence, and finally to the stage of expert” (Hunter et al., 2007, p.9). In short, teaching and learning can occur anywhere along the continuum. What the academic learning adviser needs to do is to carefully calibrate the prescriptive-developmental advising process to best match the student’s learning needs. When advising styles are consistent with a student’s level of academic readiness, the student will benefit more from the one-to-one advising session. On the part of the students, they must also know how to use the learning support services efficiently as “help seeking [is] among the most important activities that contribute to university student success” (Karabenick & Newman, 2006, p.2). For academic learning advisers, knowing the help-seeking behaviour and the cultural background of their advisees is critical to making advising decisions and ensuring the most relevant advice is given. If culture-specific learning needs do exist, what are the implications for those advising the students?

INTERNATIONALISING ADVISING SELF

Placing international students at the centre of academic learning advising provides opportunities for advising practitioners to self-evaluate their own advising self. As illustrated in the conceptual organiser, the advisers and advisees are co-creators of the advising outcome. To engage in meaningful advising sessions, they need to understand each other's roles. Without it, the quality and texture of advising and learning would be significantly reduced. Following from this premise and my own experience, the dynamics of advising international students are multicultural. This means that cross-cultural engagement is not the responsibility of the advisees alone as some academics and learning advisers tend to believe. I concur with Sanderson's view ⁽²⁰⁰⁸⁾ that the "internationalization of the academic Self should be seen as a fundamental building block in an institution's response to global forces affecting higher education" (p.276). Applied this to academic learning advising, this is about expanding one's advising self to embrace multicultural competencies, including developing an international outlook and professional characteristics. In practice, this means enhancing self-awareness, developing skills and acquiring knowledge to serve a unique student population.

On the basis of existing literature, it appears that advising practitioners could learn from different disciplines or sources such as academic advising (Gordon et al., 2008), counselling international students (Arthur, 2004), multicultural counselling (Sue & Sue, 2008), help-seeking in academic settings (Karabenick & Newman, 2006), multicultural competence in student affairs (Pope et al., 2004), teaching and learning in EAL context (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Reinders et al., 2006), and teaching international students (Caroll & Ryan, 2005), to inform their multicultural advising practice. The cited sources are examples and the list is not exhaustive. They provide very useful information on working with and teaching international students from multiple perspectives. Generally, they stress the importance of increasing practitioners' level of cultural consciousness and competence and avoid "cloning" advisees in their self image. We can derive some key qualities of multicultural academic learning advising from them:

Self-awareness

- Be aware of own cultural values, assumptions and biases
- Be aware of language and accent barriers

- Be aware of the inter and within group cultural variabilities

Skills

- Embrace diversity and accept cultural differences positively
- Become proficient in cross-cultural communication skills
- Be strong in advising integrity and disagree respectfully
- Be passionate in using advocacy skills to promote a more inclusive campus

Knowledge

- Know key student-centric concepts: engagement, retention and persistence
- Possess knowledge about international education and international students
- Possess a repertoire of cross-cultural advising and teaching skills
- Engage in evidence-based practice which is interdisciplinary

The transformation of self often comes with its own challenges. It is not uncommon that learning advisers take up their advising role with a qualification in a particular discipline totally unrelated to the practice of learning advising, let alone multicultural advising. Subsequently, they work through a range of possible pedagogical approaches that match the needs of their students and advising international students becomes a trial by error process. For many, the biggest adjustment is embracing a multicultural worldview in their advising role. Here, we can learn from the counselling profession. According to Sue and Sue (1990) "a culturally skilled counsellor is one who views cultural differences as something positive to be addressed" (as cited in Khoo et al., 2002, p.108). A word of caution is necessary in this regard. Although learning advisers should take cultural differences seriously in practice, "there is such a thing being too culturally sensitive. This is when counsellors attribute everything to cultural differences" (p.107). It is also pertinent to point out that being an Asian or member of an EAL group does not naturally mean that he or she can traverse the complexity of crossing cultural boundaries with ease. Evidently, when working towards "multicultural advising competency", practitioners, irrespective of backgrounds, must also pursue active engagement in scholarship-practice exchanges.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES – A NEGLECTED NECESSITY

Many academics have commented on international education literature for the lack of impact on practice. Typically, the current scholarly discourse is dominated by “recruitment and performativity agendas” (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011, p.611). We know a lot about the numerical trends of the global mobility of students but less so in terms of adjustment, retention and graduation rates. Given the fact that international students are now a “critical resource”, concerned academics have called for a new approach to improve the knowledge base about their academic well-being. I found Andrade’s (2006) comments on this neglected necessity illuminating: “Institutions cannot simply admit foreign students and expect them to adjust to life in a new country and educational system without appropriate support and programming” (p.133). To move out of the marginal situation, Hans de Wit (2007), an expert on international education, has suggested that:

The study of international education should move from its present, more descriptive phase, to a more analytical approach. In addition to description of activities, projects and programs of institutions, countries, and regions, studies on the concepts and process of internationalisation of education have to be developed. (p.251)

More recently, Waters and Brooks (2011) similarly point out that “The consolidation of a multi-billion dollar international education industry (globally) clearly necessitates a more sustained academic critique than has been attempted to date” (p.159). Such emerging and converging scholarly “advocacy” is becoming more common and aligns very well with the tenor of this paper that we need new perspectives on educating international students. The research agenda should be broad enough to include strengthening academic support services, such as learning advising, structurally, pedagogically, and culturally.

The need to move the research agenda to a new level of sophistication is an opportunity to inject empirical evidence into the field of international education. As a comparative study on student affairs suggests, “The increasing competition for students on the global stage can serve as a platform for students affairs personnel to come together around common topics for the benefit of students worldwide” (Perozzi & O’Brien, 2010, p.21). Indeed, some of the most critical challenges encountered by international students require cross-national perspectives. In particular, as most of the current research and writing are from the West, a global conversation of this nature

will allow inputs from non-Western countries where most of the international students are from. Generally, there is no consensus on how this can be done or achieved as each institution or country has its own priorities. Such an exercise is inevitably challenging, but in my view, imperative.

Focusing on the academic well-being of international students also makes commercial sense. The sentiments expressed by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada ⁽²⁰⁰⁷⁾ will resonate well with globally-engaged universities, particularly those in the West: “The support services available to international students comprise an important part of their overall study experience and can help attract and keep international students to Canadian universities. This is especially true as competition increases among a greater number of countries for a share of the international student market” (p.6). In this regard, both New Zealand and Australia have experienced that supporting the well-being of international students can improve a nation’s reputational capital. An enhanced image impresses sending countries and attracts their students.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Teaching in higher education is a very complicated and detailed subject. It takes many years of practice to learn how to do it well, and even then you will not have learned enough. Some lecturers do not know where to start improving it, at once overwhelmed by and unwilling to admit its complexity, they ask for a set of rules that will solve all their difficulties. Half the difficulty with doing better is knowing what the real problem is, of being aware of what we do not know. (Ramsden, 1992, p.12)

What Ramsden says about teaching is equally true about academic learning advising in higher education. Frequently, many learning advisers are quick to look for a “toolbox” of study skills or seek shelter behind a set of rules in an effort to find an instant “solution” to the student’s problem. In the process, they put themselves at risk of providing un-informed advice to the student.

In this paper, I have taken a reflective approach to offer a multi-level/phase and multi-culturally infused “model” to understand what constitutes academic learning when advising EAL international students. Contrary to the “toolbox” approach, I have proposed a conceptual organiser – an advising continuum encompassing the prescriptive and developmental advising

dynamics – which regards EAL international students as experiencing a transitional phase rather than operating in a “deficit” mode waiting to be “fixed”. The adviser-advisee relationship is one of increasing mutuality, which means advising international students is developmental and not a one-off appointment.

Ultimately, the presence of international students in campuses is about “timely graduation”. And there are rising expectations that their academic well-being deserves closer attention. Accordingly, academic learning advising worldviews and pedagogy must evolve with the demographic changes and student expectations. For the practitioners, in expanding their multicultural competence, academic learning advising will be respected more than previously because of their visible contribution to their students’ persistence to graduation.

It is hoped that this paper has gone some distance to answering the question “what academic learning advising knowledge and skills are of most worth?” Considerable dialogue – potentially a global one – is needed to transform what academics do in university into an agenda that is transformative: inclusive, engaging, and forward-looking. Until those collective narratives emerge or a coherent body of work appears, we can only regard academic learning advising in the context of international education as contested knowledge and practice in the making. As such, “The quest for excellent learning support services and a remarkable student experience is a continuing one – it is a journey, and not a destination” (Watson, 2008, p.15).

On a personal level, I am inclined towards “student centricity”, which was discussed in CDTLink (August 2010 issue), a publication by the Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning of the National University of Singapore. I find student-centric or advisee-focused conceptualisation of advising facilitative and enabling. As a practitioner, academic learning advising is not static but a developing experience in self-awareness, skills and knowledge.

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