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Extending educational boundaries

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Introduction

In this closing chapter, we have deviated from the norm by conducting a virtual round table discussion[1] by looking at the second aspect of the title of the book, which is 'extending educational boundaries'. Embedded within this phraseology for us is the factor of 'why' and 'how' we do this. Thus, each of the contributors to this chapter provides a perception to this aspect by contextualising what they say within their experiences as an education practitioner in the higher education sector.

Kumar: My interest with naming in higher education began when I started my Doctor of Philosophy on teaching and learning practices for international students in higher education and later began working as an advisor to them. It is then that the rubric of the question 'so what is your real name' gained a deeper significance for me. The clarity of this question foregrounded the complexity of meaning that became apparent as soon as a student attempted an answer. In the course of discussing this situation with them, it became evident that for the majority of international students, there was another historiography of names and the naming process. However, this was rendered invisible by the miscommunication that was resulting from ignorance about the significance of names.

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[1] The 'virtual round table discussion' came about as a result of a discussion between Dr Margaret Kumar and Professor Fazal Rizvi in a discussion on the diversity of authors and the perceptions each one had on an issue that was significant to all.

Depending on the extent to which one is influenced by cultural practice, most students indicate that their names have meaning. In many cases, there are several processes one goes through before a name is established as denoting the identity and individuality of a person. For example, in my professional experience with married students from India, Iran and Malaysia, the wife and husband are known to have individual names. There are several reasons for this as noted below:

- the culture that they belong to,
- how they are positioned within a caste system,
- the clan that they link with to provide a heritage, and,
- the importance of religion.

These factors also play a major role in how the female is positioned within her society. Coinciding with this is her development as an individual. In close correlation with these issues is the importance of patrilineal descent and heritage. This means that the female, as an individual, may be linked through marriage to her husband but there is no overt recognition of this through naming as in the western context of the title of *Mrs.* and of using the husband's surname.

Moreover, for many international students, the collocation of names articulates the many components of their 'being'. In many instances, this means 'living the name' so to speak. Their names may encompass race, religion and culture. Very often this is indicated through prefixes. For example, *abd,* meaning *servant of* is added to a linguistic item depicting *God,* thus resulting in the name *Abdullah,* (Behind the Name 2009). In Malay names, the use of the prefix *bin* and *binti* denote gender. For example, *bin* means 'son of' as in *Abdul Rahman bin Mohamad Sidek. Abdul Rahman* is the first name. *binti* means 'daughter of' as seen in the name *Puan Rafidah binti Aziz.* Here, the name *Aziz* denotes the male parent (University of South Australia Teaching and Learning Unit 2009).

Many international students show a naming system that blends cultural and western principles. For example, in relation to Singaporean names, Tan (2004, p. 373-4) points out that in the name *Tony Tan Keng Yam, Tan* is the surname, *Keng Yam* the Chinese-based given name and *Tony* the English-based given name. In this collocation, the surname is found in the middle. In another case, some students from Mauritius have their male parent's full name listed after their individual name e.g. *Pramila Devi Ramprasad,* where *Ramprasad* is the father's name. Apparent in these types of coding is a colonial and postcolonial influence of phonetic spelling, coinage and pronunciation of cultural names.

Interaction and observation with students indicate that in some cultures, individuals may just have one name e.g. *Gunawati.* They do not follow the western nomenclature of mainly three names like a Christian, middle name and surname. In such cases, students are confused and perplexed if asked for a surname. A few do not understand the western context related to surnames. However, if the same question is framed from the perspective of the student's cultural framework, they are able to explain the significance of their individual name which is then qualified by saying that they are the daughter or son of someone thus making an equally important connection to parental lineage and the use of surnames.

It becomes important to point out in this context why students sometimes take on a Western name while studying overseas. A reason given for this is that sometimes as a result of listeners and the target audience not knowing the correct pronunciation of a name, many international students are 'forced' to take on an English name. Burke (2001, p. 21) discusses the case of a learner, from Sweden studying English in Australia, having to adopt a Western name recommended to him by his teacher despite the fact that the name is considered 'girlish' in his own language. Further to this, Burke points out that for some learners, the adoption of a Western name appears to be largely motivated by the recommendations of language teachers for various reasons. In such instances, students have been unhappy and frequently express a strong dislike for what is interpreted as a 'foreign-sounding, unfamiliar and meaningless nominal imposition'.

Sometimes, unwittingly, some educators can cause a hindrance to the learning process of students. Of note is a study carried out by Johnson & Kumar (2010) on the preparedness of Indian students coming to universities in Australia. They have foregrounded the issue of naming where students have expressed concern over their names being mispronounced. They have also shown that some students express embarrassment for interlocutors who have not been able to understand the Indian script in learning how to say a name. The study points out that in certain cases, not knowing the correct pronunciation of the consonant or vowel has led to utterances that have been highly derogatory for the student. The introductory chapter has detailed a few instances of where these have occurred.

As can be seen from the examples, names denote significant characteristics. For many students of an international and/or postcolonial background, there are certain essentialisms that form the core of how a child is named. This core is made up of a background that encompasses a host of meanings. These include culture, race and religion, which details further into respect for heritage, lineage, self and the next person.

A question that results from this discussion is: How can we as educational practitioners help to alleviate the miscommunication that results from names and so enhance our understanding of our higher education international students? I borrow from Spivak (1993, p. 3) in suggesting that as higher education practitioners, we need to take the 'risk of essence' and learn to think differently in how we deliver knowledge. A useful pathway towards this is taking the first step of learning about students through their names.

Kumar and Tucker: Following our exploration of names and naming process in Australia, we provide for reflection again, the 'backstory' to naming in higher education. We do this through the avenue of experiential learning and documented studies. As educational practitioners in the higher education system, our professional roles entail providing guidance on academic and research matters to students at several levels. These can be face to face, on an interpersonal level, phone consultations or through online and email communication. We interact with both local and international students. The diversity of names we come across encompasses the world. They range from Anglo historical names, for example, *Robert James Smith*, to European ancestry as in, *Ingrid Carlson*, to what is referred to as South East Asia as seen in the names, *Suparnperkasa* (Indonesian), *Chue Yue* Wong (Chinese), *Rakesh* (Indian), to the African continent as noted in *Maggie Manyara*; the Middle East, for example, *Zahra Kazemi*, to North America, like *Greg Hunter*, South America as in *Carlos Mayorga* and the Pacific region, for example, *Taufa*[2].

Moreover, we note that the names of many Malaysian students begin with a surname. We illustrate what we mean by a documented example. In the name, '*Tan Me Ling*, (our italics in this example) *Tan* is the family name and the woman's name is *Mei Ling*. If she had taken a Western name or was a Christian, she may add that name before her family name as in *Emily Tan Mei Ling* (High Commission of Malaysia 2009). Also, according to Louie (2007, p. 21), 'the two character given name is considered the quintessential Chinese name'.

We find that in the names and the naming process of our students are stories of their individuality. These signify their ancestry, history, culture and family background. When one gets to know students on an individual level, we find that all names have conjoined stories of identity and purpose. Leading from this, all students share life's journeys. However, we notice that there are several anomalies in the way the individuals are addressed and the way names are used in our educational institutions.

For example, in an Australian context, in higher education, it is a common practice to use first names between individuals in a position of authority and students. However, the use of first names as a form of address system can be an uncomfortable experience, for students who follow a cultural way of life. We refer in this instance to students who are in many cases international where 'home' is another country and place and who follow a way of life that may not be typically western. Many of these students are taught in their home countries to treat anyone who is senior to them with respect.

One of the signs for doing this is to use the honorific title of *Sir*, *Madam*, *Professor*, *Doctor*, *Mr*, *Mrs*, and *Miss* without the use of the interlocutor's first or surname. If a situation demands the use of a name, then a surname must be used. Interaction with some students reveal that in a number of cases, students feel that they are being directed to go against their cultural upbringing and adopt a system which they believe is disrespectful. This has been confirmed by several documented studies (Hassam 2007; Doherty 2006; Choi 1997). Choi notes that 'unlike their Australian counterparts,

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[2] These names are representative samples only and do not identify any student.

Korean teachers are addressed only by honorific titles. In fact, in this particular study, many Korean students in Australia persisted in addressing their teachers with a title (1997, p. 270).

We notice through our experiences that in the diversity of names that are present there is confusion for both the student and the educational practitioner in the way an individual is to be addressed. This sense of confusion becomes overtly evident in the way student name lists are constructed. Much of this can be related to the way computer technology has been formatted (Doherty 2006). On this issue, Doherty (p. 262) discusses a study 'where the default settings in [an] online courseware did not suit the tripartite Chinese names and their conventions'. The Anglo formatting system of first names followed by a surname is incongruent with instances where the surname or family names comes first or where a student has one name only or where a student has a gender based name, which in no way is a family or surname. For example, Louie (2007) discusses that the two character [Chinese] given name is often taken as two names and used interchangeably as first and second when it is a first name. Louie points out that using the English language terminology to describe it as first and second is misleading and confusing – 'it is like comparing oranges and apples' (p. 21). Computers may not recognize a given name composed of two separate words as being one name, (Louie 2007, p. 23). Moreover, regionalising names can also be misleading. What one presumes to be an international student may turn out to be a domestic one and vice versa.

Document searches show that many international students have names that are interchangeable and contextual. On official documents their cultural names are stated while in spoken interaction, an Anglo name is adopted. Several issues are foregrounded here. One is that the Anglo name is used strategically to facilitate interpersonal demands (Doherty 2006). A further reason is that to avoid embarrassment for interlocutors who cannot pronounce a name correctly, many students use Anglicised names that are substituted for cultural names (Johnson & Kumar 2010). An equally significant factor is that students who have a postcolonial heritage as seen in students from the Pacific, Singapore and Malaysia, use both Anglo and cultural names (Kumar 2010; Tan 2004). In these cases, the names are registered as part of an official identification process of the individual.

An issue that is gaining increasing importance is the factor of negotiation between names for students that are multilingual and 'essentially hybrid' in culture and education (Kumar 2010). Also of significance is the way individuals interchange with names. Correlating with this is a study carried out by Thompson (2006) on the impact of personal names on three Korean women as they negotiate bilingual, bicultural, and binominal identities. Thomson notes that participants had several names that they used according to place and occasion. 'This affected their sense of themselves, (p. 203). In the same vein, (Kumar 2010) notes how time, place and location are salient features of how an international student positions themselves in relation to who they are.

Again, through experiential learning, we notice in our interaction with students that many of them will not let an interlocutor know the following: what name they wish to be called; what is their first or last name and whether a name is pronounced correctly. We attribute several reasons for this. They could range from shyness, to embarrassment, to respect for the interlocutor, to a loss of face (Johnson & Kumar 2010). In many instances, in their desire to survive the initial 'settling in' stage of their entry into higher education in a country where they are trying to maintain or create an identity, the students have had to relinquish many familiar frames of reference such as home, family, local customs, dress code, language, social interaction and networks (Kumar 2010; Koehne 2005). This may lead them to be compromising to the extent that their name is mispronounced, wrongly listed or misused.

In light of the above, we suggest that as practitioners of education, there needs to be avenues created whereby staff are made aware of the 'backstory' of their students and their names. This we believe begins with knowing that all students are individuals with a biography. Suggested improvements in identity are where students are treated as individuals and not just a generalized 'Other' in relation to names. It also means knowing our students have certain expectations of how they will be received. An important part of this welcoming is the initial knowing that their names will be pronounced correctly. Foregrounding a student's name before any learning interaction takes place, we believe, leads to a smoother transition to university for them, as well as, a more conducive learning environment. We borrow from Thompson (2006, p. 190) when we say that 'names like language carry a sense of social currency in that invested in a name is a "cultural and linguistic capital"' to negotiate multiple identities and social networks (Thompson p. 190).

Pattanayak: I have been an international student myself, lectured in an international context and continue to support international students in India. This is an experiential rendering of these trajectories. It does not matter what you say, it matters how you say it. Clearly, new meanings arise when there is an interaction between texts and contexts, within the larger context of culture. For example, where names are concerned, if the male name Jayaprakash is shortened to 'Jaya', it becomes a female name. Therefore, international students' often adopt western names not only to fit in, but also to ensure that the meanings of their names, as a consequence, are not distorted. This act for them, therefore, has a great emancipatory potential.

At the outset, irregular naming practices in different parts of India have proved problematic for international students at different levels (Britto 1986). For example, when applying for passports/ visas, students are perplexed as to the name they ought to give as a family/ last/ surname. When some rightly claim that they do not have a family name they are subject to probing questions and looked upon as persons from a 'backward' or 'illiterate' society. The importance attached to consistency of spellings and sequencing of names in the Western world is also considered problematic as in parts of India, there are no set rules but rather arbitrary and culture-specific rules tend to be adopted. This creates problems in referencing Indian names according to first names and surnames.

It becomes especially noticeable when academic papers are classified. As publications are a focus of a student's research output, especially in the Australian context, international students, find that their papers do not get the same recognition as those that have followed the western system of naming. Likewise in bibliographies of works in English, the alphabetization of names of foreigners is also done arbitrarily by some Indians since the sequencing of names is not significant in the South of India, especially Tamil names (Britto 1986).

Names and the naming process give an insight into language and identity at the very juncture – in time and space – at which learners' identities are being constructed, contested, negotiated and renegotiated. Often labels such as 'disadvantaged', 'underprepared', 'vulnerable', 'second language speakers of English' are how people identify themselves (Ross-Gordon 2003; Crosson et al. 2003). These labels may be the manner in which students are framed by the education system, but this may necessarily strengthen or weaken their relationship with peers. Further, such labels may incorporate elements of hostility to education, as well as a degree of denial of responsibility even on the part of enthusiastic learners.

While the issue of names in particular is important, the questions for Australia is also one of who owns the right to impose or adapt a name, what forces determine this process and what are the implications of the same for international students. In giving greater prominence to human agency in theorizing identity, especially the notion of 'voice', Bakhtin (1988) is extremely relevant, that is, it is the speaking consciousness – the individual speaking or writing, at the point of utterance, always laden with the language of others, from previous contexts, and oriented towards some future response. This is especially relevant to international students who bring their histories with them in terms of their names, their language, their cultures and their stories to the new context of education. Indian names, have great cultural and historical significance to the bearers of those names. International education must take into account such cultural complexities and nuances as greater exchanges are likely in the globalised world.

Johnson: We are prepared to welcome international students but often we seem to be unprepared to welcome them with their original names. I found that Indonesian students not only have names that are different but they have the added burden to have to explain why they have only the one name. They often have to repeat their one name in the forms that demand a family name and a given name (Indraswari 2006). In my own research (Johnson & Kumar 2010) I have found that international tertiary students from India are very keen to be accepted as part of Australian culture and have Australian friends. In fact, they are often disappointed when they are identified as 'the other' and sometimes not even being called by their Indian name.

An issue that was foregrounded in the data even though it was not the focus of our discussion was in the use of names. An interviewee introduced himself as 'Jack'. The interviewer asked the student if this was his name. The student replied that he had adopted this name as a result of interlocutors showing 'extreme pain' in pronouncing his real name which was similar in pronunciation to the name 'Jagerneshwar'[3]. In this dialogue was an element of embarrassment for the interviewer who felt he/she was being insensitive. However, the response from the interviewee showed deeper feelings of embarrassment. This related to two issues. The first was in having to relinquish his Indian name for a Western one for the purpose of being remembered. The second was that the student was sympathetic towards individuals who were not aware of the correct pronunciation of his name. Evident in this exchange was awareness by the interviewee of a reciprocal exchange of values, one of which denotes that both educators and students should understand and know how to pronounce the names of students (Johnson & Kumar 2010).

I recommend we develop what I refer to as 'pedagogy of respect' which:

- is respectful, particularly to the original owners of the land;
- is inclusive, allowing all students a welcoming gateway where they see evidence of multi, cross and trans cultural approaches to learning and teaching expressed through teaching methods and resources;
- promotes discussion and debate;
- values the skill of listening;
- is not ageist – valuing age and experience;
- promotes reflectivity – values serenity and contemplation;
- respects the whole person – body mind and spirit and caters for the health and wellbeing of all three domains;
- promotes a holistic appreciation of the environment; and
- is not culturally hierarchical.

(Johnson, 2006, p. 31)

Bishop: As a teacher in fine arts at tertiary level, I find difference speaks with each student. From name to appearance and cultural background to drawing and painting skills, the classroom is rich with otherness, something the students, particularly those majoring in Arts, are always keen to promote. They do not set out to 'other' themselves, but many are keen to differentiate themselves through the music they listen to, the company they keep or do not keep, the clothes they wear and the names they choose to be called. Considering this desire for difference, and by extension identity, it is always interesting to note students' responses to a colour mixing exercise I take them through early in the first year course I teach. At the end of the exercise I ask them to mix-up a basic skin tone in their journals. Out of the hundreds of students I have taught, only a few have ever mixed what

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[3] This name is similar to the real name of the subject. We cannot reveal his real name because of a confidentiality agreement.