



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Faculty of Education

**Development of International Students' Thinking and Reasoning Skills in Their First Year in the UK
Research Findings: Highlights**

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The study was conducted among students enrolled at Bishopstrow College during the 2016/17 academic year, aged 10-16, who had recently arrived in the UK and for whom English is a foreign language. The study looked at whether alongside the development of their English language skills, they also developed their thinking skills over the course of 2 school terms (6-8 months). Thinking skills are linked to the ability to learn (acquire knowledge) and engage in problem-solving, and are highly valued in education and future employment.

Whilst individual data is confidential and cannot be disclosed for ethical reasons, and the full detailed report cannot be provided before publication of the findings of this study in an academic journal, I am able to report the following highlights:

- Bishopstrow College students showed significant improvements in their non-verbal reasoning score, which is widely considered to be relatively stable, and least affected by prior educational experiences and linguistic skills.
- Bishopstrow College students also showed significant improvement in verbal and mathematical reasoning scores.
- In fact, the extent of students' progress naturally occurring at Bishopstrow College on a group level was on par with progress following 'teaching thinking' interventions specifically aimed at improving students thinking skills.
- Three quarters of the Bishopstrow College students moved up at least one ability band over the short time of 6-8 months, which for some students meant progressing from 'average' to 'above average' level or from 'above average' to 'very high' ability level. Multiple individual level gains exceeded 20 points on an adaptive online UKiset cognitive ability test where the national average is set at 100.

A second aspect investigated by the study was related to students' experience in the classroom in comparison to their home countries. Students from many parts of the world, including Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, noted more of the following at Bishopstrow College, relative to their education at home:

- Teachers' questions inviting students' ideas and opinions;
- Collaborative interaction; and students feeling able to initiate talk and ask questions, all indicative of a more 'dialogic' educational environment.

By answering open-ended questions, students have noted increased focus on ensuring understanding, rather than test of recall, as well as being 'more open' to dialogue in a classroom environment, and a novel teaching environment overall. Particular differences between Bishopstrow College and their home countries were noted in the amount of teachers' questions linked to development of higher order thinking skills: analysis, evaluation, and creation.

Once again, many thanks to you and your students and many congratulations on their achievements!

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