Teach for success: supporting international students in the classroom

BALEAP. The Janus Moment in EAP: Revisiting the Past and Building the Future, University of Nottingham, 19-21 April 2013

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21 April 2013
Outline

• Background

• Overview of workshop

• Feedback from participants

• What next
international student numbers

student & lecturer adjustment

enhancing the student experience

customations & projects
Background

• International student numbers: 69% of full time taught postgraduates 2011-12 (UKCISA, 2013)

• Student & lecturer adjustment (e.g. Hyland et al, 2008)

• Enhancing the student experience: International Student Barometer, National Student Survey

• Publications/projects: HEA & UKCISA Teaching International Students Project; individual institutions offering guidance & training
Jill Doubleday, University of Southampton

- EAP expertise
- International student research

Alison Dickens, LLAS (Languages, Linguistics & Area Studies)

- Teacher development
- A Changing World project
Teach for Success: supporting international students in the classroom

Bath Spa University 15 February 2012
full day workshop
intended for academics (content tutors)
11 participants: 7 academic, 2 EAP, 1 both, 1 admin (ex-EFL)
Workshop overview (1): Aims

- To explore some of the learning and teaching issues which arise in the international classroom
- To consider some practical strategies to address them
Workshop overview (2): Content

- Consideration of what affects the learning experience of international students
- Exploration of cultural issues
- Teaching, learning and assessment practices
- Language matters
Workshop outline

1. Introductions & warm up
2. What affects the learning experience of international students?
3. Group activities: learning, teaching and assessment cultures
4. Language matters
5. Scenarios & strategies

- Small-scale study exploring internationalisation experiences of staff and students (home and international) in UK Higher Education

- Focus group interviews with 31 staff and 32 students: 19 international, 13 home (EU/UK)

- Range of disciplines: Business, Education, Engineering, Psychology, Economics
What affects the learning experience of international students?

- **Cultural** (customs, expectations, behaviours, values)
- **Social** (interpersonal relations, acceptance by others, inclusion)
- **Academic** (teaching, learning and assessment practices)
- **Linguistic** (the use and understanding of English, communication with others)
- **Epistemological** (what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired)
Academic

“We don’t want to see assignments with circles here and there, question marks here and there, double lines here and there, and then they expect us to know ourselves what’s wrong with our piece of paper. So we need guidance.”

(International Student, Hyland et al, 2008:18)
“I have known like one person I lived with actually ... it’s a sad story, because she was doing a music course, and she actually had to quit her course because she couldn't cope with the course. But I think that in a way, I was kind of like ‘Well why did the University let her in?’ - I, kind of, got a bit angry about ... they really shouldn't have let ... if she couldn't ... her English was so bad that she couldn't cope with the course.”

(Home Student, Hyland et al, 2008:13)
Group activities

- **Teaching: designing learning activities** *
- **Assessment** **
- **Cultures of learning** *

Sources

*‘Supporting international students in UK Higher Education: a staff development course’ (Dave Burnapp with Alison Dickens & Kate Borthwick, 2009)

** A Changing World data (Hyland et al, 2008)
Teaching: lectures, seminars, groupwork...

- Demands placed on students; specific needs of IS?; cultural competence

Assessment: student perspectives

- Difficulty outlined; could tutor help?; relate to own experience

Cultures of learning: approaches, theories, models

- Discuss the nature of ‘culture’ and its impact on learning
Language Matters: outline

• English proficiency levels of international students

• Causes of mis- or non-understanding

• Suggestions
Proficiency levels

- International students = ‘non-native English speakers’
- Variety of routes into university
- IELTS overview
- Competencies (‘can do’ statements) from Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR)
CEFR competencies: illustrative scales

- Working with Text
- Communicative activities
  - Reception (listening or reading)
  - Interaction (listening and speaking; reading and writing)
  - Production (speaking or writing)

(Council of Europe, undated: 3-4)
Note-taking (lectures, seminars, etc.)

B2: Can understand a clearly structured lecture on a familiar subject, and can take notes on points which strike him/her as important even though he/she tends to concentrate on the words themselves and therefore to miss some information.

B1: Can take notes as a list of key points during a straightforward lecture, provided the topic is familiar, and the talk is both formulated in simple language and delivered in clearly articulated speech.

(Council of Europe, undated:26, my emphasis)
“…. if the lecture content doesn’t follow the handouts or has little to do with the handouts, the lecturing and thinking are hard to follow.”

An undergraduate student from China

(Song-Turner & Willis, 2011: 543)
What causes non- or misunderstanding?

- For lectures: perceived lack of clear structure
- Speed (for listening)
- Grammar: complex sentences
- Vocabulary
- Quantity /Density (for reading)
I went a little bit Blue Peter there!
Language 1: spoken

- Signpost lectures: indicate the structure
- Make hand-outs available before the lecture
- Speak a little slower and use emphasis
- Avoid very long, complex sentences
- Choose everyday words: ‘illness’ not ‘ailment’
- Rephrase idioms/expressions/colloquialisms:
  It’s second nature = it’s automatic, you do it without thinking
- Avoid culture-specific references: scones; pizza toppings
Language 2: written

- Avoid very long, complex sentences
- Consider using bullet points and bold
- Be aware that small font may make reading difficult
- Be clear and direct in instructions:
  
  e.g rather than:

  ‘Use bullet points sparingly, if at all’

  write ‘Don’t use bullet points’
Scenarios & Strategies

• Assignment scenario:
Comment on assignment instructions; discuss why most students didn’t seek clarification from tutor (quotes from McMahon, 2011)

• Group work assessment scenario:
Tutor perspectives on managing intercultural group work (data from Hyland et al, 2008)
Evaluation

• Very positive feedback from participants overall
  ✓ Proficiency levels
  ✓ Cultural competence
  ✓ Assessment strategies
  ✓ Chance to share experiences

“This was a really stimulating day with a lot of food for thought”
What next

At the University of Southampton:

- Language Matters talk at Health Sciences internationalisation workshop (July 2012)
- Good practice guide for supporting international students: Faculty of Health Sciences (ongoing)
- Half-day workshop, March 2013 (13 participants, various disciplines)
- Next workshop at Winchester School of Art: May 2013
“I would recommend this course too because it brought together "EAP" and "departmental" staff, and it is really important for us to approach these issues together, rather than seeing language support as a quick-fix. Academic language is nobody's mother tongue (Bourdieu and Passeron) and we should all work together to help students communicate.”

(A participant at Bath Spa, 15/02/12)
References

• Burnapp, D 2009 *Supporting International Students: a course for staff* Higher Education Academy & LLAS available from: https://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/mb/2968 accessed 12/04/13


• Song-Turner, H & Willis, M (2011) ‘Re-engineering the course design and delivery of Australian tertiary education programmes: perspectives from Chinese students’ *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 33,5 p 537-552

Websites


- LLAS Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies https://www.llas.ac.uk/ accessed 12/04/13

- Teaching International Students Project http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/teaching-international-students accessed 12/04/13

- Transitions Project, University of Southampton: current projects http://www.southampton.ac.uk/studenttransition/about/under_development.page? accessed 12/04/13