



UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

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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Outline

- Background
- Overview of workshop
- Feedback from participants
- What next

international
student
numbers

student &
lecturer
adjustment

enhancing the
student
experience

publications
& 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

A Changing World (Hyland et al, 2008)

- **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)

Linguistic

“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)

CEFR Working with text

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.”

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