

Issue 3 | April 2009

InForm

A journal for international foundation programme professionals

**Not waving but drowning . . . in the
sea of the internet**

**Critical Incidents? Raising cultural
awareness at foundation level**

**Attendance as a measure of student
motivation and engagement**

And more ...



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InForm

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From the Editorial Board ...

It is encouraging to see that the forum provided by *InForm* is becoming increasingly interactive as readers respond to issues raised in previous editions and colleagues share their experiences from the varied contexts of their own teaching.

The articles in this issue show that professionals working in this cross-curricular field are designing and delivering programmes which are motivating, relevant and culturally attuned.

Issue 3 starts with a response to Kinakh's article on web resources, which appeared in the October 2008 edition of *InForm*, and presents an approach to the critical evaluation of resources from the perspective of a foundation programme for business. Management and business is discussed again later through an article which shows how the media phenomenon of the Dragons' Den can be harnessed for practical pedagogical purposes.

Integration is a theme which is introduced in three articles. Firstly in the form of critical incidents, and how these can be used to help students deal with the transition to UK academic culture, secondly, through a project which involves IFP student acculturation through university clubs and societies and finally, through a project involving volunteering.

Readers may also be interested to note that an *InForm* conference is being planned for the 2010–11 academic year. It is hoped that this will extend our developing forum still further. More details will be released on our website www.reading.ac.uk/inform over the next few months and a formal call for papers will be issued in the October issue of *InForm*. As always, please let us know if you would like to join our circulation list or if you have an idea for an article for the next edition. You can email us on inform@reading.ac.uk



Anthony Manning

Chair of the *InForm* Editorial Board

'Dear InForm'

'Dear InForm,'

I enjoyed reading Cheryl Morris Di Boscio's article in the previous issue of *InForm* (Issue 2) on the need for a renegotiation of identity on the part of students on international foundation programmes (IFPs), and indeed for greater recognition of this on our part, as their teachers. Within the context of addressing the issues of plagiarism avoidance and critical analysis, I do question the possible assumption that through imparting the mechanics of paraphrase, summary and referencing skills, and encouraging our students to express their own opinion, students should consequently be fully aware of how to write according to the conventions of British academia, all within a few months of being on the IFP. There does then perhaps need to be further acknowledgement within our teaching, within the syllabus and possibly within our whole approach to preparing students for British university study of the extent to which "linguistic practices and beliefs [are] ... culturally embedded" (Di Boscio, 2008) – indeed both on our part, and on that of our students.

Reading Di Boscio's article, I was prompted to re-read an article in which a Chinese student recounts her own experience of having to 'renegotiate' both her 'ideological and logical identities' (Shen, 1989). Shen indeed seems to go beyond renegotiation in describing rather the establishment of a *second* 'Anglo-American' identity, built on an understanding of associated cultural values, whereby adopting the desired individuality in writing eventually becomes more feasible than it perhaps would through an attempted compromise of her own, original and arguably incompatible Oriental identity. As a possible addition to Di Boscio's very valid suggestions then, Shen advocates students being helped by having pointed out to them the 'different cultural/ideological connotations of the word "I", the connotations that exist in a group-centred culture and an individual-centred culture' (1989), as well as the realisation on the part of teachers that there is a need for these lessons – in that they can be extremely difficult for our international students to take in – to be slowly and gradually imparted.

Shen, F. (1989) The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as a key to Learning English Composition. *College Composition and Communication* Vol. 40/4.

Lindsay Turner

Pathway Programmes Co-ordinator
Kings College London

Response from Cheryl Morris Di Boscio:

I couldn't agree with you more. However, unfortunately many IFP Department Heads and Managers are keen to reduce the function and scope of Foundation Programmes, rather than to extend course content and length. In the light of the issues you highlighted in your letter, as well as those that I raised in my article, this seems rather short-sighted when more depth is what is required.

'Dear InForm,'

I'd like to congratulate the editor, the editorial board, and the design team, on producing a most innovative new professional journal. I have read the first two issues of *InForm* with great interest. The quality of the contributions reflects the excellence to be found across international foundation programmes in our universities. Inducting international students into the genres and practices of academic life, and preparing them for their academic subject requirements, are absolutely critical for their future success. Much of the research into English for Academic Purposes and the learning of academic literacies has taken place in UK HE institutions. It is therefore very welcome to have another way of sharing good practice across the sector.

This is especially important because we face new and pressing challenges. The success of our research and innovation has led to increases in the numbers of international students who apply to come on our programmes and go on to degree courses. The income that has been generated is so desired that the research and teaching innovations that give us the edge are often forgotten. Some decision makers assume that it is simply 'pre-degree teaching' that can be outsourced to generate even higher levels of income. This is a trend that we should try to stem, which is why I have written about the matter in the *Guardian* (see <http://education.guardian.co.uk/tefl/comment/story/0,,2055735,00.html>), and in a chapter in a new book edited by Charles Alderson entitled *The Politics of Language Education*, to be published later this year.

In order to ensure that foundation and other programmes for international students remain within universities we must make a strong claim that what we do is an academic enterprise. We must show that our teaching is research led, and that we are capable of being evaluated on the same criteria as other academics. Language related pedagogic research is not only valuable, it is essential. As English-medium education expands in European universities and beyond, those with an eye to long term growth are founding research and teaching units in EAP and academic literacies to support the students and the subject teachers. Unfortunately, some current practices in the UK look only toward instant financial gratification.

I am sure that *InForm* will play an important role in keeping professionals in touch with what their colleagues in universities around the UK are doing, encouraging good practice, and providing a forum for new ideas. In doing this it will help strengthen our programmes, and expand our arguments against university administrations following short term instinctive desires.

Dr Glenn Fulcher

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Response from Anthony Manning:

Many thanks to Glenn for these positive comments concerning InForm, it would certainly be interesting to receive observations from readers for the next edition concerning their experiences associated with the recent outsourcing of a number of IFP departments.

Not waving but drowning ... in the sea of the internet

About the author



Jacqueline Murphy
EAP tutor,
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'An important prerequisite for engaging in research and inquiry in any discipline is the ability to process information in a critical way.'

This article responds to Kinakh (2008) and argues that it is not possible to prevent students from relying on internet sources. The challenge is to help them to become critical readers of information, no matter what the source, and support them in developing paraphrasing skills. The article concludes by outlining the way this is tackled in the first term of an International Business Foundation course.

Introduction

Kinakh (2008 p.16) asks how students can be weaned off over-use of electronic sources, and whether they should later be 'encouraged to move back to careful use' of such resources once their 'negative aspects' have been addressed. This article presents the view that it is not possible to hold back the tide of the internet and that our efforts should focus instead on ensuring that students have the skills to survive in the sea of information available to them.

Developing critical reading skills.

Healey and Jenkins (2008) argue that research should be a key element in the undergraduate curriculum from the outset, possibly even before starting university. An important prerequisite for engaging in research and inquiry in any discipline is the ability to process information in a critical way. Henry (2006) suggests the use of a strategy with the acronym "SEARCH" to help students become critical readers of the internet. SEARCH involves:

- setting a purpose
- employing effective search strategies
- analyzing search engine results
- reading critically and synthesizing information
- citing sources
- asking 'How successful was the search?'

When this strategy is unpacked it is clear that the skills involved are already taught on most English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses but the question is, 'how well are they learned?' It is often assumed that students are more internet literate than their tutors and there is no shortage of easily available guidance on evaluating websites. Nevertheless, as Kinakh (2008) states, tutors continue to complain that students cut and paste without processing the information they read. To

address this problem, the EAP tutor needs to focus mainly on the stage of reading critically and synthesising information.

Stapleton (2005) describes how he uses a four-step approach to help students at high intermediate level and above, to develop the ability to critically evaluate internet sources. After practice in internet searches and assessing websites, students are encouraged to find examples of bias in websites on the same subject. A practical example relating to whale hunting is given in the article. Stapleton points out that using websites such as Google runs the risk of highlighting sites which contain ideological bias and considerable training is needed at this stage before students are finally given the freedom to choose their own subjects to research.

Paraphrasing in the second language.

Even students who are critical readers in their first language face the difficulty of expressing information fluently and accurately in a second language. Shin (2007) provides the following statement from an Advanced level student.

'I know that I should not copy sentences from reading materials verbatim but I do not know how not to. They are exactly what I want to say and I do not know how to paraphrase them.'

If this is the view of an advanced student, how much greater must be the frustration of students on Foundation courses who may only be at intermediate level?

Space precludes a full discussion of ways of practising paraphrasing and synthesising information, but, as with critical reading, this is also a long-term process. For this reason, our Business Foundation students are not expected to search for their own sources during term 1. Instead, they are gradually exposed to practice in paraphrasing; the first

step is the use of 'unfinished sentences', where students use information gleaned from reading a text to finish sentences provided by the tutor. Other activities, such as Grammar dictation (Wajnryb, 1990), are then used to encourage them to work together to produce short paragraphs. English levels typically vary from IELTS writing 4.5 to 6.0 so scaffolding is essential to provide peer support.

At the end of the first term the exam in the EAP module of our Business Foundation course gives students an essay title and a text chosen by the tutor. For example, the text used for the term 1 exam was a comparison of leadership styles in the US and Asia. (The topic was familiar to the students from their Management module). They make their own notes from the text and then the tutor collects the text so that they have to rely on their notes alone to write the essay. They are allowed the use of a dictionary; access to a dictionary is a double-edged sword as it can waste time, but it gives students confidence. Only the essay is awarded a grade but the notes are taken in at the end of the exam so that students can be given feedback on the appropriacy of their note-taking. There is a danger that students with poor notes will perform poorly in the assessed essay but it is felt that this integration of reading and writing provides an authentic task as the main aim is to prepare them for the critical reading and writing necessary for university assignments.

During term 2 students research for a coursework essay where three sources are provided by the tutor but extra credit is awarded for additional information from reliable sources. Students are given a draft essay deadline so, assuming they meet this, they have the opportunity to receive feedback on the suitability of their additional sources. 20% of the final mark is awarded for use of feedback; this is intended to motivate students by giving them a concrete reward for paying attention to the process of essay writing. A similar procedure is followed in the third and final term except the coursework essay forms part of their assessed work for the Management module. The opportunity to receive feedback on this from the EAP tutor motivates students because it can help them to gain a higher mark.

Conclusion

In a world where electronic sources of information continue to proliferate, the task facing tutors is two-fold. As this article has argued, the first objective is to help students become critical readers of all sources. The ability to process information effectively, is a prerequisite to successful paraphrasing. Then students need ongoing support to develop their ability to express themselves in the second language.

Healey, M. and Jenkins, A. (2008). *Developing students as researchers*. UC Magazine. 17–19. www.ucu.org.uk. October 2008

Henry, L.A. (2006). Searching for an Answer: The Critical Role of New Literacies While Reading on the Internet. *The Reading Teacher*. 59(7), 614–627. doi: 10.1598/RT.59.7.1

Kinakh, V. (2008). Web resources and the hazards for IFP students – can you help? *InForm*. Issue 2. October 2008. 15–16

Shin, S. (2007). 'Fire your proofreader!' Grammar correction in the writing classroom. *ELT Journal*. Advance Access published on December 6, 2007 *ELT Journal* 2008 62: 358–365; doi:10.1093/elt/ccm089. [accessed January 2009]

Stapleton, P. (2005). Evaluating web-sources: Internet literacy and L2 academic writing. *ELT Journal*. 2005 59: 135–143; doi:10.1093/eltj/ccj027. [accessed January 2009]

Wajnryb, R. (1990). *Grammar Dictation*. Oxford:Oxford University Press

Further Reading

The Unofficial Guide to OCR A-Level Critical Thinking. (2008)
Available from:
<http://www.criticalthinking.org.uk/>

This site is useful because it gives an overview of critical thinking, and a case-studies section giving examples from the real world. Although aimed at A-level students it may also be useful for IFP programmes

'The main aim is to prepare them for the critical reading and writing necessary for university assignments.'

Critical Incidents? Need for raising cultural awareness at foundation level

About the author



Clare Nukui
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University of Reading

'As an aside, it should be noted that while critical incidents emphasise cultures clashing, not all inter-cultural encounters are disharmonious.'

This paper recognises that IFP students embark upon their studies with a wide range of different cultural expectations which can be the cause of cultural clashes. An approach is put forward for the use of critical incidents embedded in the support structure provided to IFP students, with a view to minimising cross-cultural misunderstandings and assisting transitions into Higher Education.

Introduction

A student commences an International Foundation Programme and within the first week of living with a host family is asked to leave for behaviour considered to be inappropriate. In later discussions, he claims that he had been acting in a way that would be acceptable in his own culture. Could this situation have been avoided? Is it the role of foundation level tutors to aid students in their adjustment to the new culture(s) they are confronted with and if so, how best can this be done? At the IFP in Reading we have decided that this is indeed part of our role because we believe that issues relating to cultural adaptation may impact on an international student's success or failure. If something is not done at the foundation level when feelings are intensified and nerves are raw, a valuable opportunity may be lost forever. A series of workshops was therefore created, one of which is based on the use of *critical incidents* forming part of the 'Culture-General Assimilator' as described by Cushner and Brislin (1996) and it is this which will be described in this short article. Reasons include the fact that this approach allows for individualisation with institutions being able to write their own critical incidents based on real experience and these may be modified year on year, given that situations and cultures change. They are also highly motivating as will be described later.

The Critical Incident approach

The Culture-General Assimilator was designed originally as a form of training for individuals embarking on extended stays in unfamiliar cultures. Participants are given a series of short vignettes (critical incidents) in which people from different cultures in-

teract with the intent of pursuing a common goal. The resultant clash of cultures in these incidents means that the task cannot be accomplished; however, as Gumperz and Roberts (1991) explain, this failure is often not recognised as a communication breakdown. Instead judgements may be made by both parties on the mistaken assumption that intent has been understood. It is this notion that the approach attempts to strip bear. Critical incidents may be accompanied by a number of alternative solutions and participants are asked to select which one they feel best explains the breakdown. However, it is also possible to have a more open-ended approach and we have used this in the belief that it is less prescriptive. As an aside, it should be noted that while critical incidents emphasise cultures clashing, not all inter-cultural encounters are disharmonious.

According to Brislin (2000) it is beneficial to wait until sojourners have lived in the new culture for two to three months before introducing critical incidents by which time they will probably have had experiences for which they need solutions, thereby increasing motivation. We have thus situated our critical incident workshop in the autumn term, a decision endorsed by our students who felt that if the session was delayed it might already be too late. Critical incidents may also be used prior to departure in the belief that if trainees work through enough of these incidents, their knowledge of and sensitivity to intercultural encounters will be increased enabling them to function better on arrival in the field. Our more recent experience of the student mentioned in the introduction has caused us to make a series of critical incidents available online as part of our Get Prepared course, delivered elec-

tronically during the summer months preceding the start of the IFP year.

Critical incidents work by telling stories (Cushner and Brislin 1996:105). People tend to think in terms of images and scripts and therefore find these stories appealing and very motivating. How true this must be for the young people on our foundation programmes brought up among other things in the worlds of Hollywood and YouTube.

Critical incidents in practice on the IFP

Critical incidents are normally based around 3 key themes: Feelings, Knowledge (including work, roles and hierarchy) and Categorisation of Reality (for example what can and cannot be eaten). These themes were used when writing our critical incidents, based on anonymised real events.

Feelings

Our workshop warms up by raising awareness of the feelings that can be provoked when meeting potentially new and troubling situations in the host culture, that aspect of a cross-cultural encounter which “hits you in the stomach” (Triandis, 1993 Personal Communication). Students are presented with a number of short scenarios to which they have to give their response from a list of adjectives and then compare their responses with a partner of a different nationality. One of the situations which provoked the most response from our students was the following: *Milk and food are stolen from your fridge in your hall on a regular basis.*

Students of all nationalities/cultures agreed that this was unacceptable, going on to talk about plates, pots and pans also been stolen and a fight that had broken out in one hall kitchen. One student said that this experience made it ‘horrible’ for her to live in hall. The ensuing discussion touched on what does and does not constitute ‘stealing’ in different cultures, definitions of private and public space and in and out group membership. Importantly this discussion allowed for criticism of the host culture in a safe environment with the opportunity for a response from a member of that culture.

Knowledge

Our own critical incidents are then read and discussed. An example of a critical incident under the theme of ‘Knowledge’ looks at roles and expectations of students and teachers in the classroom:

Ting Ting had always done well in her high school in China. She had long dreamed of studying in the UK and was delighted to be accepted onto a foundation course leading to a degree in Business. One of the modules she studied was Management and at the beginning of the course the students were told that 5% of the coursework mark would come from class participation. Ting Ting was very disappointed to find that she had only received 1% for class participation at the end of the course. She had had 100%

attendance and had completed all the homework set. She had always listened attentively to the tutor too. She wondered what she could/should do differently and began to question her decision to study in the UK.

Discussion centred on what constitutes class participation. Some Chinese students sympathised with Ting Ting and expressed how uncomfortable they feel asking questions and commenting in the class. Strategies to help overcome this difficulty were examined and students were referred to the *Academic Culture* booklet (2007) from the TASK series to reflect on the difference in behaviour expected in a lecture versus a seminar/tutorial. The Aristotelian method of teaching which may be espoused by their tutors was explained to students with knowledge being created through a dialogue between teacher and student.

Conclusion

Whether or not the use of critical incidents has had an impact on the cultural adaptation of our students is very difficult to quantify, but the discussions that have emerged and the opportunity to engage in dialogue about the host and other cultures can only be seen as beneficial not only for the students but also for some of our Personal Tutors who attended these sessions. One commented that before joining the session she had had little appreciation of the different cultural backgrounds of her personal tutees and now felt better able to empathise with them, a feeling we hope was taken away by many of the participants. Empathy arises out of objectivity when operating cross-culturally. Critical incidents can help our students to arrive at that objectivity.

Brislin, R. (2000). *Understanding Culture's Influence on Behaviour*. Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publications

Cushner, K. and R. Brislin (1996). *Intercultural Interactions: a Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publications

Gumperz, J. and C. Roberts (1991). *Understanding: Discourse in Intercultural Encounters*. London: Longman

Nukui, C. (2007). *Academic Culture: TASK Module 2*. Reading: Garnet Education

‘One student said that this experience made it ‘horrible’ for her to live in hall..’

Attendance as a measure of student motivation and engagement

About the author



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Foundation Year Programme Leader
and Admissions Tutor,
Manchester Metropolitan University

'Many of these students bring the same patterns of behaviour with them to the Foundation Year meaning that attendance can often be an issue.'

Although many studies have attempted to identify factors allowing the prediction of success of students in higher education (admirably reviewed by Harvey, Drew and Smith, 2006), surprisingly little is written about the effect of attendance. As university academics, many of us would agree that there is a link between student attendance at classes and eventual success (e.g. Browitt and Walker, 2007). We would concur that in most instances attendance can be used as a measure of student engagement in the same way that we might use submission of the first assignment. With this in mind departments in universities across the country employ various methods of attendance monitoring implementing a wide range of interventions as a result (National Audit Office, 2007). What is less clear is what constitutes an acceptable level of attendance? How strong is the correlation between attendance and success? This paper provides some answers to these questions.

Introduction

The level zero Foundation Year at MMU attracts a large, mixed cohort (800+) of home (92%), European (4%) and non-EU (4%) students. It is not a standalone programme but instead forms an integral part of a named linked degree onto which successful students automatically progress. Students enrol onto a level zero Foundation Year because they do not meet the entry requirements to go directly onto year one despite having the intellectual potential. There are a multitude of reasons as to why this may have occurred. For many home students it is a result of low levels of motivation and lack of engagement during their previous educational experiences. Many of these students bring the same patterns of behaviour with them to the Foundation Year meaning that attendance can often be an issue. For this reason attendance management forms a key part of the Programme's 'Student Success Strategy'. We collect and keep attendance data at regular intervals during the academic year (See Figure 1) as well as investigating the reasons for non-attendance (Hughes, Hearn and Latham, 2007).

In **Figure 1** the modal attendance group is the 80–89% attendance with 74% of students attending at least 50% of their classes. The median attendance is 68%.

Figure 2 shows nearly two thirds of Foundation Year students are male. Although the

modal attendance group for both genders is 80–89%, the median differs significantly (See Figure 2). For females median attendance is 71% whilst for males it is only 62%. Males are far more likely to demonstrate low levels of attendance than females with 31% of male students attending less than half their classes compared to only 19% of female students. These differences in attendance undoubtedly influence the big difference in pass rates we observe between the genders. In 2007/2008 there was a 16 percentage point difference between the success rates of female and male students on the Foundation Year.

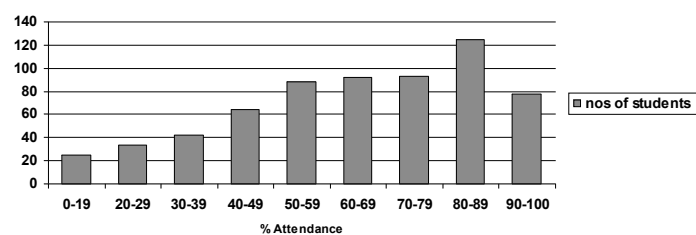
Different patterns of attendance are also observed in European and non-EU students. Although the modal attendance is similar to that of home students (for both European and non-EU students it is 80–100%), the median in both instances is much higher (78% for EU students, 87% for non-EU students). Again this is reflected in the much improved pass rates observed – 16 and 24 percentage point differences respectively.

Figure 3 indicates that a student needs to attend at least 70% of their classes to have a greater than 50% chance of passing the Foundation Year at the first sitting.

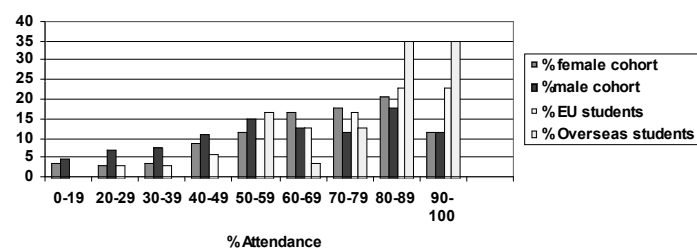
Figure 4 confirms earlier studies which showed that for a student to have more than a 50% chance of passing the Foundation Year they must attend at least 50% of their classes.

Figure 1: Patterns of attendance

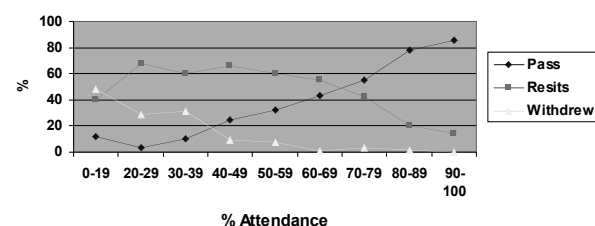
Numbers of students falling into each attendance group (whole cohort)

**Figure 2: Effect of gender and origin on patterns of attendance**

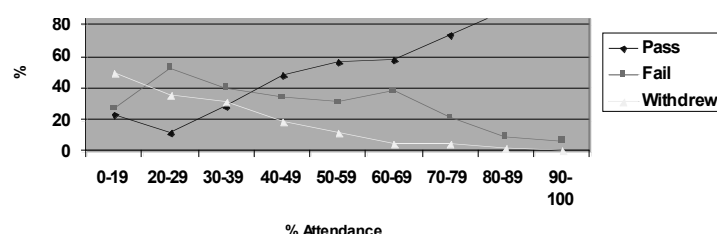
Number of students falling into each attendance category (by gender)

**Figure 3: Effect of attendance on success**

Proportion of students passing at first attempt, requiring reassessments or withdrawing before examination board

**Figure 4: Effect of attendance on success after reassessment**

Proportion of students passing, failing to progress or withdrawing following reassessment examination board (again excludes withdrawals prior to Spring 2008)



Conclusion

Whilst undoubtedly it remains in the best interest of a student to attend all of their classes this study does indicate those levels which need to be achieved for them to have a better than even chance of passing their programme of study. This means that it makes sense to direct our resources at targeting interventions to those most likely to benefit. By measuring outcomes in this manner we can then also evaluate the effectiveness of such interventions and redesign or redirect them should there be no measurable beneficial effect. We can also use such data in induction programmes and interventions to support the message about the importance of engagement, particularly attendance.

Browitt, A. and Walker, L. (2007). *Retention and widening participation in the Faculties of Science and Engineering*. University of Glasgow. Available at http://www.sutontrust.com/reports/glasgow_science_and_eng.pdf [accessed 4 April 2008]

Harvey, L. and Drew, S. with Smith, M. (2006). *The first-year experience: a review of literature for the Higher Education Academy*. York: The Higher Education Academy. Available at www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/york/documents/ourwork/research/literature_reviews/first_year_experience_full_report.pdf [accessed 9 March 2009]

Hughes, N.T., Hearn, P. and Latham, A. (2007). *Why do Foundation Year students fail to attend their classes? A model of the poor attendee*. *Learning and Teaching in Action (MMU)*, 6(3). 25-29

National Audit Office (2007). *Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education*. HC616 Session 2006-2007, London, The Stationary Office. Available at http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/06-07/0607616.pdf [accessed 4 April 2008]

An approach to teaching study skills based on peer assessment and self reflection

About the author



Keerthi Rajendran

Tutor, Study Skills & ICT,
INTO Newcastle University

'Adult learning is categorised into four styles, activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist, with most people developing tendencies towards each at varying levels.'

Recent studies show that misguided self perceptions of skill levels and a highly activist style of learning are critical reasons for failure at undergraduate levels. Peer assessment combined with self-paced learning and individualised objectives have shown benefits for students on entry to university. This paper describes an approach which provides a framework for self-reflection and improvement based on individualised study plans and objectives. These result in improving students' perception of their own skills and help promote progression towards other learning styles.

Introduction

Recent studies of first year undergraduates show a number of strong trends that should be addressed as part of foundation study skills. These include findings that suggest the main criteria for failure at university, besides a genuine lack of self management skills, is students' misplaced confidence in their own skills and a strong preference for the activist learning style (Goldfinch & Hughes, 2007). Adult learning is categorised into four styles, activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist, with most people developing tendencies towards each at varying levels.

Foundation students have varying backgrounds, start with different levels of ability and progress at different paces. This affects academic subjects but is often more noticeable with modules involving study methods which aim to impart transferable skills. International students, in particular, have a wide variation of backgrounds and prior exposure to study skills. Many have limited experience of varied teaching methods, self-reflection activities and peer assessment, all of which navigate away from an activist style and promote self understanding.

These factors create challenges for the teaching of study skills which may not be faced to the same extent in many knowledge-based subjects and suggest that approaches to teaching study skills should stress helping students gain a realistic understanding of their own levels of ability as well as allowing an individual learning experience. The requirement for self paced learning in foundation programmes has been presented previously (Macdonald, 2008) and shows proven benefits even for self-study courses designed for students

who have not responded well to traditional teaching. A richer feedback mechanism is also beneficial and several studies involving peer assessment combined with self assessment report that this is valuable approach to promote self analysis and is a learning tool in itself (Lindblom-Ylänne et. al., 2006).

Framework

The approach described here presents a framework for self-reflection and improvement resulting in individualised study plans. It is being used to teach presentation skills on a foundation programme for international students. All students on this programme take study skills and also take a variety of other modules depending on their interests e.g. Chemistry, Physics, Biology and/or Computing.

There are three specific aspects to the approach:

- Integrating academic subjects into the development of study skills is important for learning and allows students to gain some context for the use of these skills as acknowledged by other authors (Garlick, 2008). Students undertake a series of presentations over the duration of the programme. These are assessed as part of the study skills module but draw on practices and techniques used in the other modules from a student's portfolio. For example, a student studying biology will undertake a presentation concerning some relevant aspect of biological science and using a style appropriate for presenting bio-science findings. This provides various benefits (i) it allows students to place their skills development in the context of

‘Students benefit from being evaluated by different groups but they also benefit from performing evaluations themselves.’

their education in general (ii) it provides practical experience of using tools from relevant academic subjects (iii) since students present their work within the study skills module (to students engaged in a variety of academic areas) as well as within their individual subject groups they gain practical experience of targeting presentations for different audiences and being evaluated by audiences without their subject specialist knowledge. This third point is of importance; students with alternative academic disciplines evaluate presentations on different criteria than those involved in the same modules. For example, a history student evaluating a presentation about a biological process will typically be more concerned about the clarity of explanation of background, purpose and general findings rather than the fine grain analysis of specific data.

- A varied feedback system including peer evaluations from students studying different subject areas, evaluations by students who are at a previous stage of the course, tutor feedback and self-assessment. Students benefit from being evaluated by different groups but they also benefit from performing evaluations themselves – this has been particularly noted for developing study skills (Lindblom-Ylänne et. al., 2006).
- Students are helped with their self reflection and to develop a plan for improvement based on various objectives. From the start of the module, students are expected to keep records of each presentation. These records include students’ own comments as well as details of any feedback. Students are encouraged to identify their own plans for improvement but objectives and strategies are agreed with the tutor and subsequent assessment is partly based on this. This is then used to promote reflection for subsequent presentations and as part of a personal development planning activity.

Conclusions

This framework has been used successfully with undergraduate students and is now being evaluated at foundation level. Student feedback shows that by assessing others, they gain understanding of the process and they are better able to assess themselves. In particular, students highlight three observations:

- they feel that they benefit from performing peer assessment since it encourages them to consider the features of work which influence its quality
- they have greater confidence in the critique of their own work when it endorsed by their peers
- they believe they are less likely to repeat mistakes when they are required to reflect on them shortly after their work is assessed

Many students are unfamiliar with varied teaching styles and initial exposure to this approach requires fostering of motivation and encouragement. Several studies (for example those by Lindblom-Ylänne et. al in 2006) show similar positive results despite initial

barriers. Further advantages are gained by allowing objectives to be flexible so that students who start with advanced skills can progress above the boundaries that might have been set due to a more rigid approach. This ensures that all students benefit from their involvement in the module regardless of their initial skill-level and individual pace of development.

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Lindblom-Ylänne, S., Pihlajamäki, H. and Kotkas, T. (2006). Self-, peer- and teacher-assessment of student essays. *Active Learning in Higher Education*. 7 (1), 51–62.

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Management studies: into the Dragons' Den?

About the author



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'Management and business subjects very often disappoint students. And when you ask international foundation programme (IFP) students why they choose to study 'Management', the reason for their disappointment becomes obvious.'

This article acknowledges that Management is a new topic for most IFP students when they commence their studies in this field at University. Students' expectations of what they will study vary quite considerably, which in some cases can lead to misunderstanding and disappointment. A model is presented in this paper for teaching aspects of Management using the format of popular television programmes such as 'Dragons' Den', with a view to motivating students and harnessing their existing expectations.

Introduction

Management and business subjects very often disappoint students. And when you ask international foundation programme (IFP) students why they choose to study 'Management', the reason for their disappointment becomes obvious. Inevitably, many want to run their own business in the future or are expected to join their family's established business. Others take what they see as a 'soft option', being able to simultaneously avoid Mathematics and try a new subject. And I have never come across a student who is meeting Management topics for the first time who plans an academic career in the area. From my perspective, I have never run a business and have no desire to do so. I consider myself an educationalist with an interest in the way large, multi-national firms are managed. Clearly, the students and I are coming at 'Management' from two completely different angles.

Figure 1 below identifies the main activities in any field of study as 'research', 'education' and 'practice' (also characterised as 'thinking', 'disseminating' and 'doing'), together with the intersections of 'scholarship', 'consultancy' and 'training'. Management as a field of study may be considered vocational and therefore differs from, for example, English Literature or Medieval Studies, in its relationship to 'practice'. In that way, Management might be considered more akin to, for example, archaeology or medicine.

There are very many differences, however. Great advances in medical science generally come from academic endeavour, whereas many of the world's most successful businesses have been created without any obvious academic influence. A lecturer in Archaeology may quite correctly be described as an archaeologist when he spends a sabbatical unearthing Neolithic pottery in Jordan but a business school faculty member is less likely to gain

kudos from their peers by describing herself as a business executive after a summer at Topps Tiles, however impressive or useful the experience might appear to students planning a career in business.

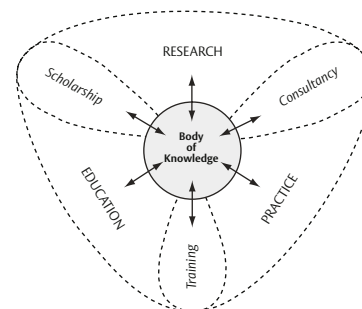


Figure 1: The relationship between education, research and practice (Cuthbertson, 2008)

Integrating research, education and practice in the classroom

Taking into account the characteristics of Management as a field of study and the desires of students to get something from their studies that can be directly applied in the real world, group work and presentations are a valuable part of any Management module. In this article, I outline my attempt to bring together research, education and practice in Management studies at international foundation level.

Based on popular television programmes such as *Dragons' Den* and *The Apprentice*, students work in groups to create and develop a business idea that they present to a panel. In the first part of the module, Management topics such as planning, organisation, decision-making, strategy and marketing provide the students with the tools to get started on their business idea in the second part of the module. Critical thinking is emphasised throughout.

The second part of the module begins with a screening of some BBC *Dragons' Den* episodes

'They can see entrepreneurs who have brought ideas from other cultures, such as halal ready-meals or sushi-in-a-box, and they see people who have made their passion their business – all good areas for generating business ideas in groups.'

during which the students see a wide variety of business ideas from sauces and sweets, to novel summer events, ingenious garden implements, a band of musicians, gadgets, time savers and time wasters. They can see entrepreneurs who have brought ideas from other cultures, such as halal ready-meals or sushi-in-a-box, and they see people who have made their passion their business – all good areas for generating business ideas in groups. In addition, the students see good and bad presentations, and there are valuable discussions to be had about such topics as confidence and arrogance, codes of dress and being prepared, contact with the audience and responding to questions.

The make-up of any student group is always difficult, and the tutor has to decide between dictating the groups based on known criteria and allowing the groups to form. I like to set the criteria and then let the groups form within the parameters given. In this case, the criteria are a minimum of four and a maximum of eight members, a mixture of male and female, and from at least two continents. This means that they must communicate in English even outside the classroom.

The first tasks, to think of a group name and design a logo, bond the team initially. The next task is to generate the business idea, and here the students have no restrictions. They are asked only to find a product or service that appears viable in the UK and to have a realistic idea as to how much it would cost to get the business off the ground. They might open a chain of restaurants in the south east, import high quality paper from Brazil or produce vegan cakes. They can translate the street food of their own capital city to London, develop a social networking site for students studying abroad or invent a board game.

Focusing in the lectures during the second part of the module on the Management topics of power and influence, motivation, communication and team work, the students are required to incorporate this learning into their project work. For example, they might be asked to consider each team member in terms of the big five personality traits (McCrae & John (1992) and use their analysis to reflect upon the success or failure of the project. Another example might be to critically reflect on expectancy theory of motivation in the light of their experiences. (Boddy, 2008.)

Assessment

In business, an employee's career might rise or fall on the basis of a presentation. In education, the goal is not a viable business idea and bottom-line improvements but the ability to reflect upon real world experiences through consideration of the models of Management. Setting and assessing group work presents problems but, especially at this foundation level, such projects should give an opportunity for the student to experiment in a risk-free environment and to learn from mistakes without consequences. To this end, I do not assess the business ideas presented or the presentation

itself. Instead, the groups get instant feedback from the 'dragons', and they can use that feedback, whether positive or negative, to answer questions in an individual class test.

Making the group work and the presentation formative means that the tutor can demand that students do not read from notes or avoid speaking at all - the safety nets that students often employ to ensure their marks don't suffer too much if it all goes wrong. The dragons, too, can be a little more probing than might be fair if the presentation were summative, giving a more realistic experience to the student without compromising their marks. Although we term the assessment 'formative', the students have a high motivation to complete the task because it is more aligned with their own motivations for studying Management. I stress that it is perfectly feasible for their business idea to be a success in the real world, and have many examples where students have gone on to develop multi-million dollar enterprises that began with an idea while studying. In addition and more immediately, it is easy for them to see that success in the following summative test is dependent upon taking part and reflecting upon the experience, rather than having done well in the group work and presentation.

In this environment, even a disaster of a business idea with a shambolic presentation and toe-curling responses to the dragons' questioning can lead to greater learning and insight, deeper reflection and a truly excellent individual discussion in the class test. It allows for greater differentiation between students because an adequate student can rely on the material from lectures and seminars, the good student can incorporate the learning into practice and the excellent student will have reached a level of reflection that allows a true integration of theory and practice. And all regardless of how their co-workers performed.

Conclusion

To return to the model in **Figure 1** above, any student who has performed well in the group throughout the project, applied the lecture material and done the background reading will be achieving something that may be infrequently managed in the domain of Management studies - combining research, education and practice.

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Sojourner adjustment and international students

About the author



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'The sojourner's aim is typically to return home at the end of the sojourn, but the sojourn itself often becomes indefinite.'

'Internationalisation' is a word that is often bandied about by University vice-chancellors as they embark on international student recruitment drives. Recent research seems to show, however, that 'international connectivity' remains nothing more than an ideal on most campuses (Harrison and Peacock, 2007). In fact, there seems to be little evidence of UK universities creating an environment where international students are positively required as part of their learning to acculturate and socialise. Drawing on sociological research into sojourner adjustment and its relevance to the international student experience, this paper will describe how the University of Kent International Foundation Programme requires international students to involve themselves purposefully in that most ubiquitous of university institutions - the Student Union - and will show how embedding this involvement into the assessment pattern of an academic skills module can create authentic acculturation and socialisation and result in better academic performance.

Introduction

Recent research on attitudes to international students among academics and home students by Harrison and Peacock (2007) points to a worrying lack of integration and interaction, with Chinese and other East Asian cohorts being singled out and, some would argue, 'pathologised'. The authors identify a marked perception among academics across subject areas that international students' academic performance is poorer, that there is a direct correlation between language skills and use, adjustment to academic and social norms and performance and that there is a clear and worrying lack of integration between different student groups, with home students being reluctant to work with some international students for fear of jeopardising their own marks. The verbs 'ghettoise' and 'isolate' seem often to be applied to certain student cohorts (Spurling, 2007).

International students themselves are not, however, blithely unaware of these issues. Research carried out by Coates (2006) among Chinese students at the University of Salford would seem to indicate that most are fully aware of the problems they face. Lamenting the fact that they fail to achieve the 'whole experience' during their time at university in the UK, they point to language proficiency, academic adjustment and social and cultural differences as being particularly difficult but, in contrast to the respondents in Harrison and Peacock (2007) and Spurling (2007) above, they see lack of empathy from academic staff and home students and the 'unfriendliness of the locals' as being the cause.

The sojourner

It is here, perhaps, that the literature on the phenomenon of the sojourner as a sociological type provides helpful insights into the situation of international students in the UK. Siu (1952) first identified 'the sojourner' as a variant of the 'marginal man' in a study of Chinese laundry workers in the United States. He identifies various types of sojourner, including contract workers, international managers and overseas students. What unifies sojourners, Siu argues, are phenomena like 'the job' and 'getting it done', the development of in-groups and enclaves, strategic friendships within the host community, the development of just enough social skills and cross-cultural accommodation to get by, and a confused identity. The sojourner's aim is typically to return home at the end of the sojourn, but the sojourn itself often becomes indefinite. Those who make an attempt to integrate fully into the host community, however, are often rejected by the sojourner community for having 'gone native', so the typical sojourner finds himself in an invidious position. Coates (2004) confirms many of Siu's findings in a study of student sojourners in the UK and finds that they see three parts to their 'job' - improving language skills, gaining cultural and work experience and getting a degree.

While universities have tried to address problems of sojourner adjustment, their efforts seem to have been piecemeal and *ad-hoc*. Some universities run programmes which allow participants to engage with local communities. HOST UK is an organisation which places international students with local fami-

lies near university campuses during vacation time and the Salford Pre-session project described by Coates (2006) gets students to contact academics on campus during the Summer vacation and perform academic and social tasks that they would be required to do during term time. The problem with all of these responses is that none of them actually replicates what international students need to do as students on UK campuses during the time that they are actively engaged with other residents of that campus.

Encouraging integration: the Kent model

Students on the Kent IFP are required as part of their assessed work to join a student union club or society, to participate actively in it and to successfully demonstrate that they have done this through a written report and an oral presentation, with awareness-raising and reflective activities in class. In the report and presentation students are required to reflect critically on their experience, to explain how it helped them to engage with campus culture and to demonstrate improvement in language. The report and presentation provide a significant enough percentage of the Academic Skills module mark to encourage students to take it seriously. Examiners grade students on the extent to which they display 'active, purposeful and ongoing' participation and whether there is an explicit link between participation and academic and linguistic performance. Last year, students joined societies ranging from the Model UN and the Philosophy Society through volunteer groups to sports teams and were dissuaded from presenting and reporting on societies which would reinforce their home language and culture. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The response from the Student Union has been enthusiastic, and students have reported maintaining involvement in their chosen clubs or moving on to others.

The reason for basing the assessment on the Student Union is that it is authentic. It is campus-based, is already there and requires minimal administrative input. It allows students to interact with social and cultural knowledge, adopts a 'learning as participation' approach, aims at intercultural competence and employs a social-constructivist framework through which students can detach and observe themselves as participants (De Vita, 2005, Etherington and Spurling, 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the results are yet to be fully analysed (a medium-term investigation into the extent to which there is a correlation between participation in clubs and societies and academic performance over the course of a degree programme is needed) the requirement has been positively received by the participants and preliminary findings would seem to indicate a correlation between active participation and improvement in language proficiency in all skills areas. It can be argued that formal embedding of culture learning into the assessment pattern of a foundation programme provides a straightforward, authentic and practical way

of socialising and acculturating international students. Active and ongoing participation in a student club or society leads to positive changes in attitude to the host environment, improves international students' language proficiency in all areas and leads to improved academic performance. This results in a successful student sojourn in that it leads to completion of all aspects of 'the job', permits students to reflect on their own sojourn, is functional and involves objective testing and informed third-party opinion.

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'The report and presentation provide a significant enough percentage of the Academic Skills module mark to encourage students to take it seriously.'

Breathing culture and community into the academic curriculum

About the author



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‘Students were willing to spend hours searching digitally, rather than use print resources, even though they may simply be floundering, and failing to retrieve adequate information.’

Providing opportunities for overseas students to engage in an out-of-class English-speaking community is one important way of enhancing the international learner’s experience in the UK. This paper looks at the response by tutors at the University of Wolverhampton who have introduced and validated a volunteering module as part of their international foundation award. The paper focuses on the module and its benefits in helping to enhance the academic syllabus whilst opening up possibilities for learners to reflect upon language exchange, cultural awareness and personal development.

Background & rationale

The need for overseas students to integrate closely with members of the host community has been well documented, and previous studies have reported a positive correlation between the frequency of international students’ interactions with their host nationals and their adjustment to the host society (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). Toyokawa and Toyokawa’s (2002) study exploring the relationship between Japanese students’ level of engagement in extracurricular activities and their adjustment to American campus life supports Astin’s (1984) notion that students derive benefit from out-of-class activities such as socialising with friends, engaging in cultural events and volunteering. (See also Kuh (1995) and Hayes and Lin (1994) who argue that international students’ interest in activities on and off campus may help them to develop social support networks and social competence).

However, in addition to the very clear advantages which the learner can gain in terms of social adjustment, it was also strongly felt by those working on the university’s year-long foundation award that such out-of-class experiences could also have a significant and positive impact upon a learner’s language development and cultural awareness – two areas strangely absent from the research. The creation of a volunteering module – an elective called ‘Language and Culture in the community’ – was therefore an attempt to renew and build upon this area of research by extracting new data, but it also provided an excellent opportunity to engage learners in a meaningful and motivating environment in which they could use and improve their English and

learn about the culture of the UK as well as gain other useful transferable skills. In addition, the module opened up possibilities for learners to reflect upon their experiences in written and spoken form using some of the academic conventions and strategies taught concurrently on other modules in the foundation award, namely Academic Reading and Writing, which encourages learners to write accurately, concisely and cohesively within an HE environment; Academic Listening and Speaking, which includes opportunities for students to give short academic presentations; and Study Skills, which helps students to cite and reference sources and to develop learning strategies and learner autonomy.

The volunteering module, which has operated over the last two academic years involving around 40 students in total, has seen learners engaging in the following local community projects:

- Delivery of cultural presentations and language teaching in local primary schools
- Serving of food and drinks in a coffee shop run by the Beacon Centre for the Blind
- Assistance with environmental projects at Groundwork and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- Help with sales and other tasks at Oxfam, Dr Barnardo’s and Age Concern
- Provision of assistance at the cinema complex within the city’s Light House Chubb Buildings
- Offer of translation and other support services to newly-arrived immigrants as Outreach/Support officers in Wolverhampton City Council

The placements are incorporated into the foundation module which is supported by a series of workshops to assist with assignments and ongoing tutorials. During the course of the module, students are expected to:

- contact the voluntary organisation and organise their placement
- write a 500-word article on their learning aims prior to the start of the placement
- submit a final report which includes (1) a background of their organisation, (2) a reflective account of their experiences during the placement, (3) a reflective learner journal highlighting the linguistic, cultural and personal development gains of each placement, and (4) an updated CV highlighting any skills gains made as a result of the volunteering experience
- deliver a final presentation based upon key findings in the report

Learner benefits

The introduction of community-based learning is significant as it provides advantages not only in terms of integration between the international and host communities but also offers significant benefits to the academic process. During the module, students have capitalised successfully upon the learning outcomes of other foundation modules (above) and demonstrated the ability to:

- research, evaluate and cite appropriate paper and online sources relating to information about the placement organisation
- summarise and synthesise paper and online sources about their organisation to produce a coherent background section
- organise and structure a logically sequenced piece of writing with a clear division between sections and sub-sections (reflective account and CV)
- adopt and show clear evidence of other academic conventions such as reference markers and cohesive binders both within and between paragraphs (reflective account and learning aims statement)
- present the main findings of the research through the form of a presentation delivered in front of peers
- work autonomously in setting up the placement and maintaining a learner journal

(adapted from Jordan, 2004 p.58–59; see also Bloor & St John, 1988).

In addition to curriculum gains, the learners themselves benefited from the volunteering experience by reflecting critically upon their own performance during the placements. Through their learner journals, in particular, they revealed developmental gains in the areas of (i) communication and cultural exchange, and (ii) personal development.

(i) Communication and cultural exchange

Though many students acknowledged the initial challenges faced when engaging with local dialects and

regional accents, a number of students spoke of the benefits of communicating with local people and from developing conversations outside of the classroom. For example, one female Japanese student, who worked at Groundwork before progressing to an MSc in Environmental Science, explained how she had been able to acquire gardening words (for example, fuchsia, peragonium and geranium) in her interactions with other members of staff, whilst another student, a male from Kurdistan, explained how he had used his dictionary as an Outreach/Support Officer to mediate between professional people who were using technical terms and newly-arrived refugees. Other learners identified a number of informal and colloquial expressions in their learner journals.

With relation to cultural differences, two female Cypriots volunteering at Age Concern and the Beacon Centre revealed their surprise at the level of structure of the UK workplace, including exact times for breaks, which they said differed from their own country. The Indian student at the Beacon Centre was shocked to find so many older people working in his organisation, contrasting this to his country where he claimed it was normal for people to retire aged 55–58. A female Taiwanese student volunteering at the Beacon Centre gained important insights into the National Health Service, social services and the rights of disabled people, whilst the Japanese student at Groundwork revealed her surprise at the flexible employment patterns in the UK.

(ii) Personal development

Finally, with regard to personal development, a number of students commented upon enhanced communication skills, time-management skills and relationship building as a result of the placements. One female Chinese student who worked at Dr Barnardo's explained how she was hoping to use the ideas in her store to help to make money for children and the elderly when she returned to her native country to improve the social welfare situation there. Other self development gains included one female Cypriot volunteer at Age Concern who explained how she had learned to deal with 'difficult situations and difficult people' whilst handling the pressures of time-management; another female Cypriot who, during her placement at Oxfam, had learnt the importance of teamwork and persuasion which she connected to future career goals; and the volunteer from Kurdistan who felt that he had greatly enhanced his future employment prospects by developing his coordination, management and communication skills and securing good references.

Conclusions

The volunteering module provides one way in which international students can integrate with their host community whilst offering a cost-effective means through which course designers can meet the needs of learners who wish to identify more closely with British

people and organisations. In addition, the provision of a community-based programme can help to complement and enhance the quality of the learner curriculum and provide the international student with a richer experience of life in the UK. The research conducted thus far may still be in its infancy but it is hoped that with more thorough investigation an even more revealing set of results can be drawn upon to justify the academic, cultural and skills-related benefits of the programme and its inclusion as part of a Higher Education foundation year for international students.

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Call for papers

The submission of papers is now invited for the fourth edition of *InForm*, from tutors who represent a variety of academic disciplines commonly found within International Foundation Programmes. The fourth edition will be published in October 2009.

Full instructions for writers can be downloaded from the *InForm* website at the following address:

www.reading.ac.uk/inform

Writers are reminded that *InForm* is not predominantly an English language teaching journal.

Articles and letters should be sent by email to inform@reading.ac.uk by 12 noon on 31 July 2009.

Writers whose articles are published in *InForm* will receive a fee of £100. £50 will be paid for any letter which is published.



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InForm Conference Summer 2010

An *InForm* conference is being planned for Summer 2010. The event will take place at the University of Reading and will include seminars and workshops on themes related to International Foundation Programmes.



Further details and a call for presentations will be included in the October 2009 edition of *InForm*

InForm

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