

Additional Language Support for Foundation Students

Good Practice & Evaluation

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Foundation Centre at Durham:

- Over 100 home, 60 international students taught at two campuses
- 2 programmes: IFY and 4 Year direct progression
- Different backgrounds but similar needs

Academic writing and practice overtly taught on International Foundation Year; integrated into Key Skills and content modules on 4-year programme

- ❖ Recognised an increasing need for support outside the classroom

This session:

- Discussion of additional support options
- Trial and error – our experiences
- Student Responses
- Effective Feedback
- The **'Question Mark in the Margin'**
- Discussion



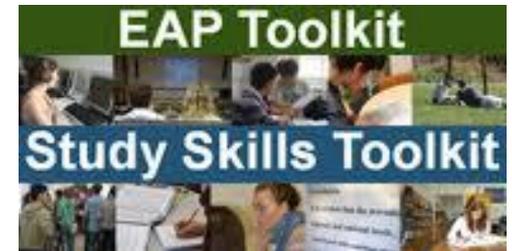
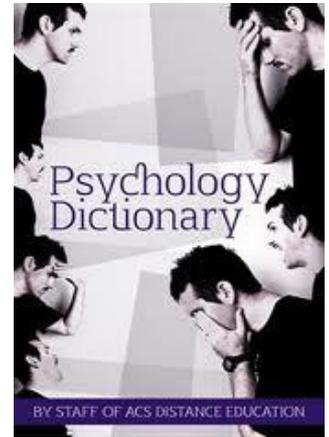
Support for Language: your ideas

What additional support mechanisms do you use?

- Share your ideas in small groups

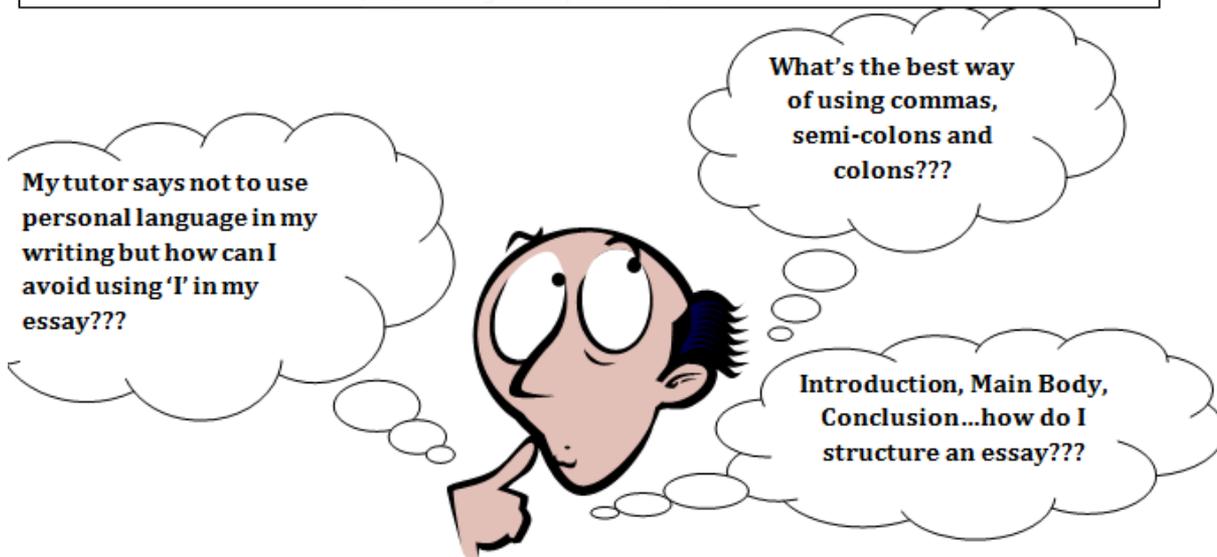
From your perspective as tutors...

- **Which 3 are the most useful?**
- **Which 3 are the least useful?**



Support for Language

Do you have language questions?



Bring them along to our...

Language Lunch

Bring a packed lunch and any questions you might have about writing your assignments and essays.

Support for Language

Have you received feedback from tutors like this?

You need to improve your grammar/punctuation/spelling.

You need to consider the structure of your essay.

The language you have used is not very academic.

The referencing in this essay is incorrectly formatted.

You need...

Language Lab

fc.languagehelp@durham.ac.uk

Email your questions or problems and our expert team will provide advice and help you to improve! The **Language Lab email** will be manned from **6-7pm every Sundays AND from 1-2pm on Fridays** during term time and you can normally get an immediate response. Alternatively, email outside this time slot and you should normally receive a reply within 48 hours. You can also post your questions in our question box or come along to one of our **Language Lunch** sessions on **Monday, 1-2pm (Queen's: Ebsworth D111, Durham City Room EDCA117) or Tuesday, 1-2pm (Queen's Room B101, Durham City Room EDCA117).**

DISCLAIMER: We are **not** going to do your work for you! We will be happy to provide language support and guidance that is appropriate to the task (we will not comment on content), but we can not be held responsible for assignments that do not pass in spite of our help. Likewise, please be sensible about the amount of time you will need to take on board any suggestions we may give you. Don't expect miracles the night before your assignment is due!



How is the Foundation Programme Like Climbing a Mountain?

'...a long climb, but when you get to the top, you can see the bigger picture.'

'...it seems impossible, but the sense of achievement is amazing!'

'...it was great to spend time with the other students. It really helped to make friends and made me feel welcome. The staff were so funny, and I loved getting to see a different side of my teachers.'







How is the Foundation Programme Like Modern Art or Shakespeare?

'...you look at it and you don't understand anything, but then you start to develop an understanding.'

'...at first I thought I couldn't understand anything of the play, but then I tried just watching to understand the context.'

'...Newcastle in general is a really nice place, and after the trip, I went back many times. I felt brave enough to explore other areas too, like York and Hadrian's Wall.'

What do the students think?

Gathered data from questionnaires and focus groups

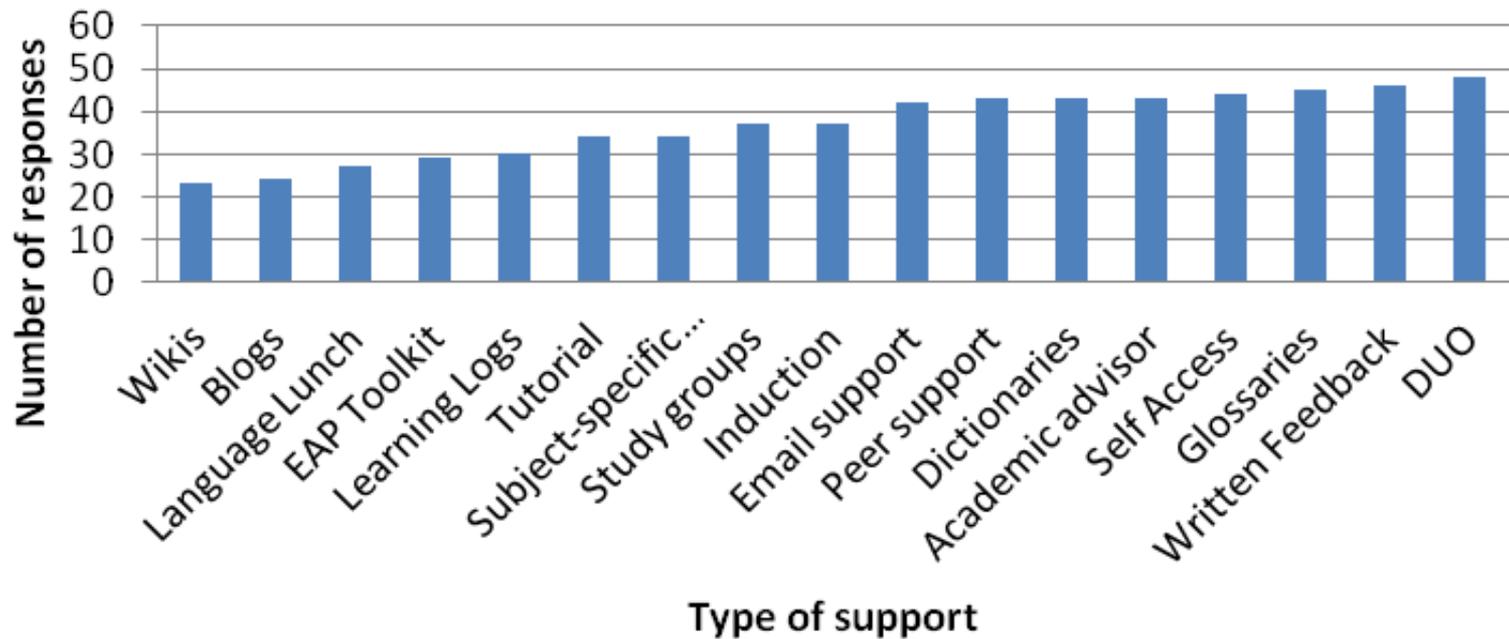
- 50 responses to questionnaires
- 2 focus groups - 8 students in each group

We wanted to find out:

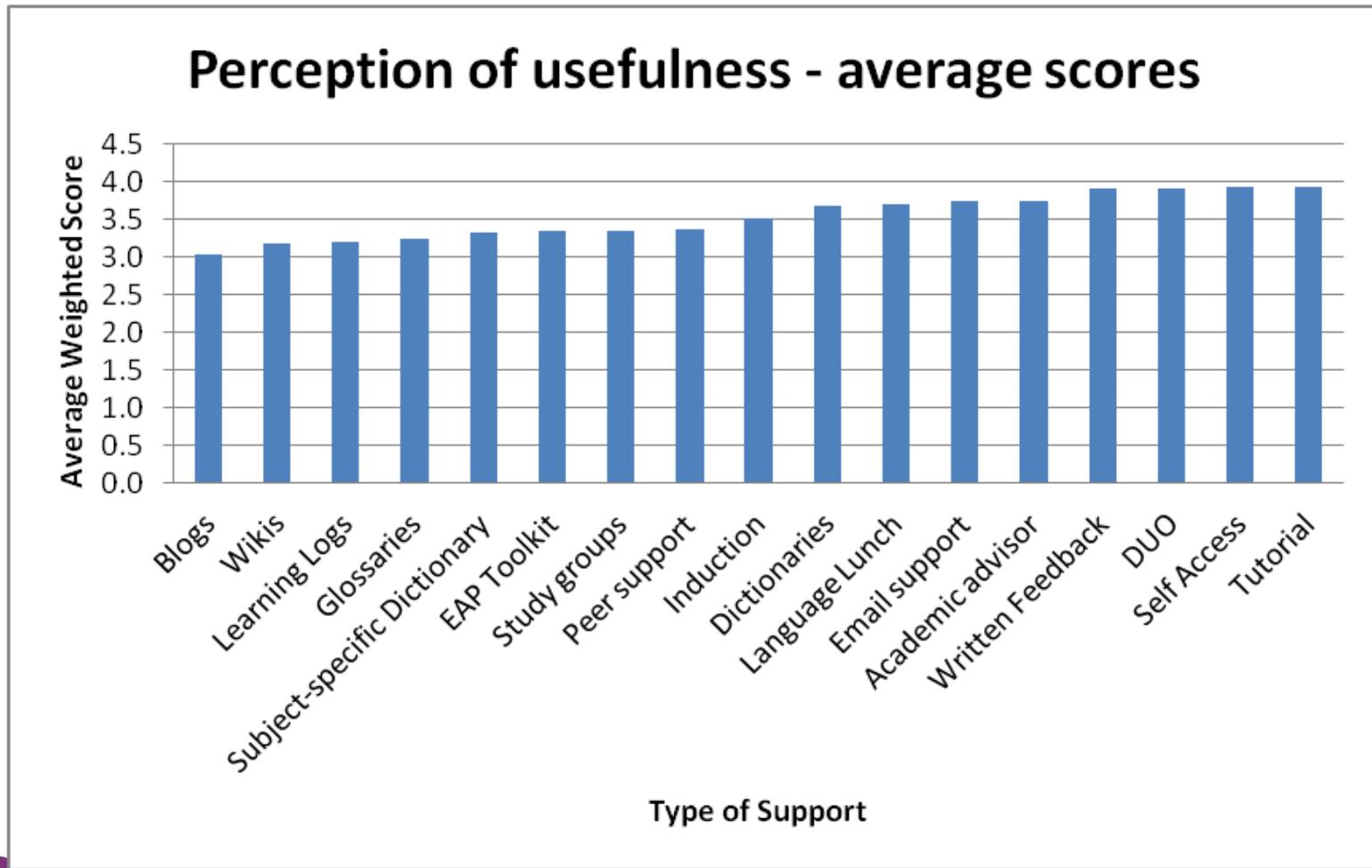
- What type of support students used most**
- What support they felt was most useful**

Questionnaire Results:

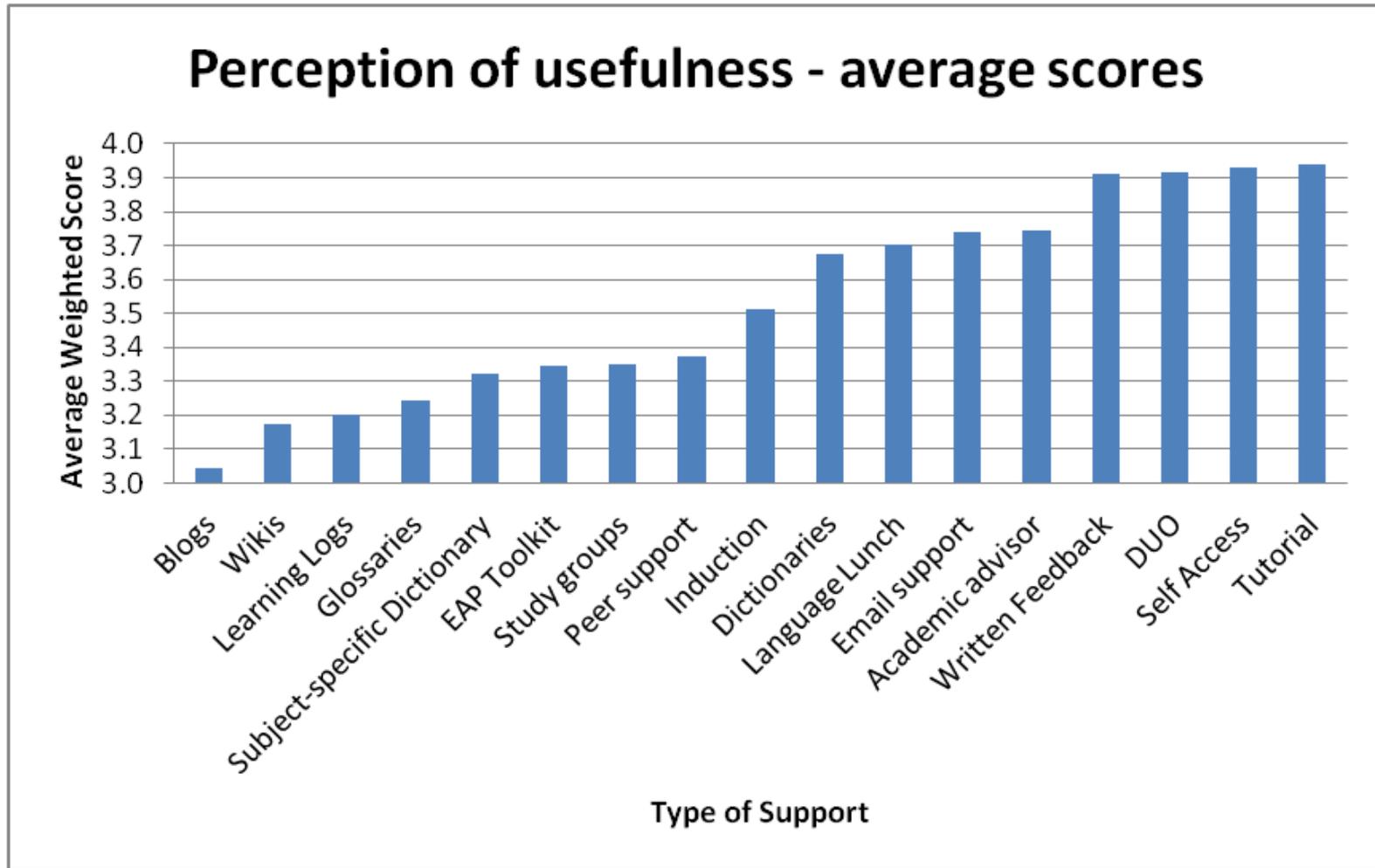
Additional Language Support - Most Used



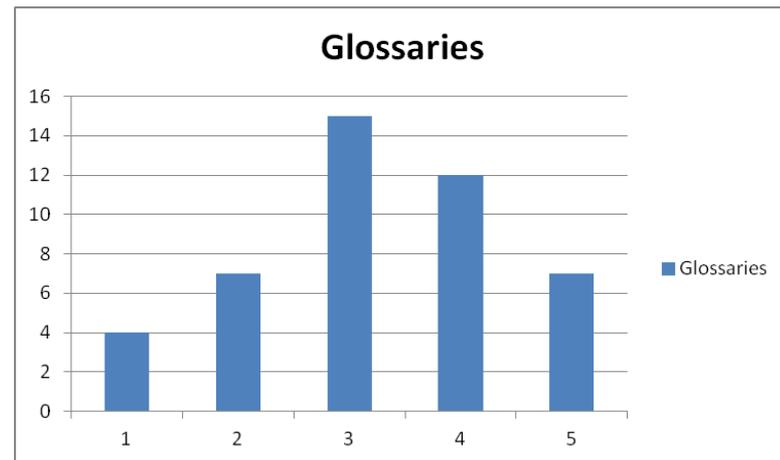
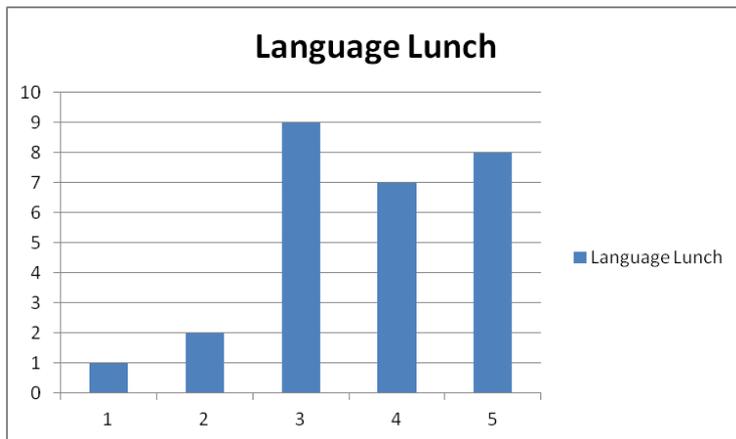
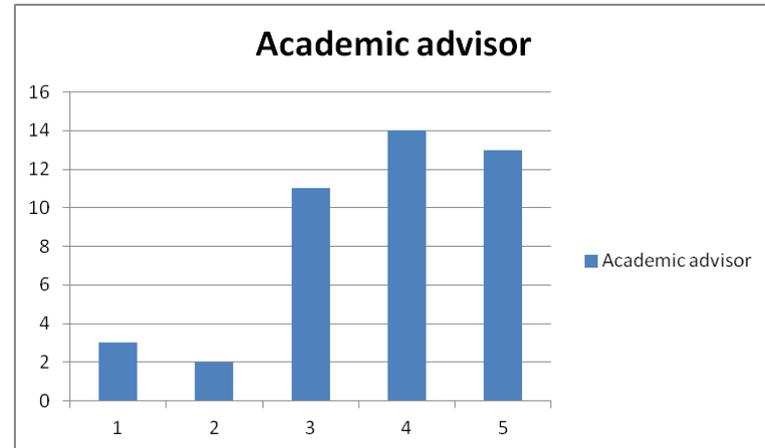
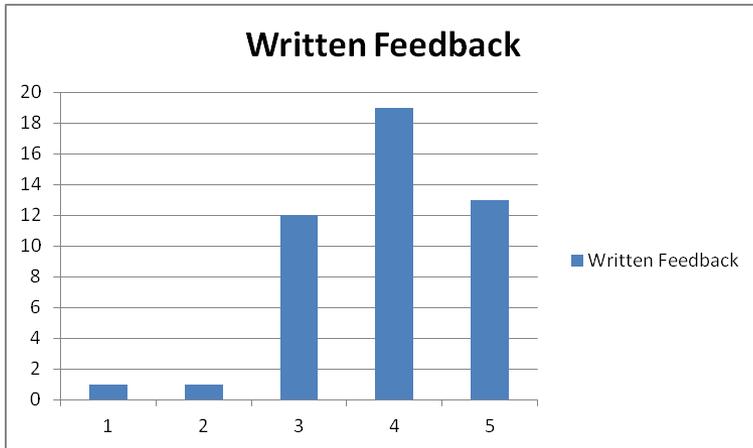
Questionnaire Results:



Questionnaire Results:



Questionnaire Results:



Focus Group Results:

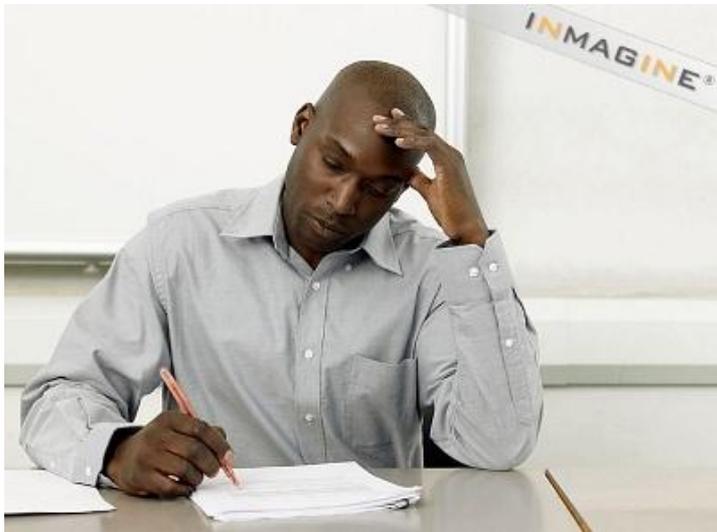
- International students expected to have opportunity to interact with home students
- Students wanted more opportunities for interaction outside of class that did not involve alcohol
- Some had tried societies but felt uncomfortable – suggested that pairing up would help.

Focus Group Results:

- Students wanted more opportunities to work in groups (formally and informally) on assessments
- Generally liked the idea of Language Lunches, but not missing their lunch hour
- Students liked themed sessions, but they wanted to also retain drop-in sessions where they could access more individual support

' We read a sentence and we feel it isn't right. We try to change it but we can't find the words.'

The Problem: The 'question mark in the margin'



- Language errors impede communication: content and/or understanding is present but barely intelligible
- Most significant issues are with word choice/form/order and sentence structure
- Complicated by the fact that this type of error is not rule-governed (Ferris, 2003)
- Fluency vs Accuracy

Example:

Case study:

'The results from graph third and fourth showed men have more interesting in electronic, this kind of luxury goods can increase the effectiveness, made their working easier than before. That means men focus on quality of the products, because they want use money to buy goods which is useful for their life.'

Background: views on the effectiveness of error correction

Process-writing prominent from mid-1980s – reduced emphasis on sentence-level accuracy (Ferris, 2003).

Error correction often seen as ineffective by ESL professionals as a way of improving student writing:

‘...grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned’ (Truscott, 1996, p328, in Ferris, 2003).

- ❑ Our international students indicated in focus groups that they often receive little more than ‘I can’t understand this’ as language feedback in content modules; yet tutors on content-based modules regularly tell us that accuracy is an issue.
- ❑ No clear strategy for dealing with this type of ‘resistant’ grammatical error that impedes understanding (Ferris, 2003).

Students' Perspectives:

Overview of findings from 4 studies* reviewed by Ferris (2003), suggesting that students think:

- ❖ Linguistic accuracy in writing is important to overall effectiveness as second language writers.
- ❖ Teacher feedback on errors is a vital ingredient for students to improve the accuracy of their writing.
- ❖ Comprehensive error correction is preferable to selective error feedback.
- ❖ Errors marked and labelled by error type is more valuable than tutors making the correction for students.

Good Practice: Feedback

- Formal/ informal tutorials/workshops outside of class to discuss feedback (e.g. 'Language Lunch'), both before, during and after assessment
- Emphasis on writing as a *process* = feedback at various points
- 'Quick and dirty' vs detailed feedback – timing and suitability of both
- Variety of methods of providing feedback (e.g. 'dialogic', peer correction, student-tutor workshops or writing conferences, reflective tasks, email/ track changes, etc...)
- Oral feedback
- Efficacy of written feedback? (Ferris, 2003)
- Avoid jargon (e.g. 'INC SEN') and 'indirect' feedback (ibid)
- Avoid overly positive, misleading, questioning or rhetorical statements in favour of feedback which is **strong, specific, clear** and **direct** (ibid)
- Content analysis (identify type and frequency of errors)

Moving Forward:

- Training/ awareness of L1 interference and translation issues

- Sentence diagramming

I really do not know that anything has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences. — Gertrude Stein

- Buddy system (with training and incentives?)
- Further research next year – reviewing student progression
- Your ideas??!!

Discussion Questions:

1. **What is more important for Foundation students – accuracy or fluency?**
2. **How do you develop students' accuracy in writing?**
3. **How do you deal with 'resistant' errors?**

Bibliography:

Catt, R. & Gregory, G. (2006) 'The Point of Writing: Is student writing in Higher Education developed or merely assessed?' *Teaching Academic Writing in UK Higher Education: Theories, practices and Models*

Ferris, D. (2003) *Response to Student Writing: Implications for Second Language Students* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: London