This issue:
Transition into university: providing the tools for success

Inside issue 18

InForm

InForm

Conference 2019

University of Reading

EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION PROGRAMMES - RECOGNISING A NEW ENVIRONMENT AND ADAPTING TO CHANGE

We are pleased to announce that the tenth annual InForm conference will take place at the University of Reading.

The event will include presentations and posters on themes related to international foundation and pathway programmes (IFP) and provide an opportunity for interaction and sharing of practice with colleagues from the IFP community.

Saturday 29 June 2019

Whiteknights Campus, University of Reading.

Conference fee: £70

Registration:
Please check our website for details: **www.reading.ac.uk/inform** or email: **inform@reading.ac.uk**

Speaker Proposals:
Speaker proposals are invited from professionals involved in the delivery of international foundation and pathway programmes. As usual, the focus should be on issues associated with teaching, learning and programme management in this sector and address the conference theme. Sessions need to appeal to tutors and course managers across the curriculum.

The deadline for speaker proposals is **30 April 2019**.

From the Editorial Board...

Mark Peace

Chair of the InForm Editorial Board

WELCOME

Issue 18 of InForm takes on the title of the 2018 InForm Conference "Transition into university: providing the tools for success, which was hosted by the Birmingham International Academy at the University of Birmingham. The event was on the 30th June and included 18 talks in parallel sessions and keynote addresses by Dr Victoria Burns and Mike Groves of the University of Birmingham. Slides from the presentations can be accessed from **www.reading.ac.uk/inform**

In this issue Dr Victoria Burns begins by exploring the cultural transition of international students into university and the benefits of supporting a student's cultural identity while promoting intercultural integration. This is followed by Rebecca Hooker and Felicia Heard who report on teaching activities which enable students to engage with their local community. Andrew Drummond and Adam Croxford then present findings of an investigation into the relationship between IELTs scores and vocabulary size. The study identifies a general correlation as well as significant variance between individual students with the same IELTs score. Accessing information effectively is the focus of Hannah Gurr and Sarah Brain's article on developing library skills. Sandra Leigh then provides an interesting insight into the lasting impact international foundation programmes have on students through their first year of undergraduate study. A successful transition into university can of course depend on many factors and Dr Elisabeth Wilding and HuiQi Yeo look at the effect of food. Our second article analysing students' writing is by Matthew Lemon who considers lexical density and teaching students to increase this to enhance their academic writing style. The teaching of critical thinking is then considered by Dave Watton and Jake Groves, whose use of an acronym to keep the attention on critical thinking in the classroom proves useful for both students and staff. This is followed by Dr Shirley Ashforth-Frost giving a detailed account of the use of flipped learning in a Mechanics module, which enables more group work in class. The development of a peer mentoring scheme, is then shared by Jinhua Mathias and this is found to be beneficial to students' transition into university, particularly in terms of self-efficacy and motivation to study. Finally the issue of challenging higher level students in an English for Academic Purposes class is addressed by Elizabeth Allen and Ruth Taylor who use problem-based learning with significant success.

We now look forward to the 10th InForm Conference hosted at the University of Reading on 29 June 2019, the title of which is "Evolution of international foundation programme – recognising a new environment and adapting to change". We encourage you to send in speaker proposals and to register.

To submit an article for the next issue of InForm or with any query **inform@reading. ac.uk** Further details on p31

Not a problem to be fixed

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Our international foundation year programmes are designed to prepare students from around the world for study at a UK university. In this article, based on my keynote address at the Inform Conference 2018, I argue that we also have an important role to play in internationalising the university as a whole, and ensuring that all students are equipped to live, study, and thrive in a multicultural environment.

Introduction

Universities are home to staff and students from a diverse range of ethnicities and nationalities, creating a unique environment to develop intercultural knowledge and skills, as well as a global mindset and friendship networks. However, there is considerable evidence that integration doesn't happen automatically, with students from different backgrounds tending to "inhabit semi-distinct social spaces" on campus (Harrison & Peacock, 2010, p. 12) and many avoiding working in groups with people from different cultures (Volet & Ang, 1998). The opportunity for a truly integrated intercultural experience is often missed therefore and, at worst, existing prejudices can be reinforced by having superficial negative interactions between cultural groups.

Promoting integration

When universities implement strategies or activities to promote intercultural integration, they are often aimed at helping international students to "adapt", "fit in", or "transition". While well-intentioned, such activities can promote a power differential where home (and often more specifically white, middle class home students) are the "norm" whose behaviour and attitudes other students must attempt to emulate. This is despite the "global institution" narrative that most universities espouse, and the evidence that home students with limited experience of other cultures are often LESS able to navigate intercultural environments than international students (Burns, Cumming, Cooley & Holland, 2014).

An alternative approach to integration

The Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986) provides a useful framework to help consider an alternative approach to integration. It suggests that, as people experience and manage cross-cultural situations, they progress along a six-stage continuum from more ethnocentric beliefs, in which one's own culture is "just the way things are", towards a more ethnorelative perspective in which one's beliefs and behaviours are recognized as only one version of reality among several potential options. In doing so, they develop greater potential to interact effectively in a variety of cultural contexts. An ethnorelative approach to integration, therefore, would focus on encouraging ALL students to develop the intercultural competences that would enable them to interact effectively across cultures (e.g. Leask and Carroll, 2011).

The efficacy of this approach has been demonstrated in a variety of settings including intercultural understanding workshops (Briguglio, 2006), curricular groupwork activities (Arkoudis et al, 2013), and outdoor groupwork courses (Burns, Cumming, Cooley, & Holland, 2014). Allport's contact hypothesis (1954) is another useful model which can help guide the design of such activities. It proposes that intergroup interactions and learning are more likely to occur when people are brought together on an equal basis in collaborative purposeful activities, which are endorsed by their organisation. It is clear, for example, that many mentor or buddy programmes often don't meet these criteria,

as they place the home student in a position of sharer-of-knowledge rather than equal partner. In contrast, participation in university extracurricular clubs and societies could be an important source of this type of interaction, yet there is evidence that international students are less likely to participate and there are few structured interventions to encourage home students to engage with them when they do.

The role of international foundation year programmes

- In my keynote speech, I proposed that international foundation year programmes are uniquely placed to enhance intercultural integration. The often-overlooked diversity of our international student populations means that foundation staff are already highly adept at bringing together groups of students from different backgrounds and have considerable experience of the challenges and opportunities that this presents. In addition, although often somewhat isolated from the rest of university provision, the high priority given to international student recruitment means that foundation programmes, and particularly their directors, are usually quite high profile within the university.

- I propose, therefore, that international foundation programmes should be advisors in every aspect of intercultural integration across campus. This starts with helping shape the narrative around intercultural integration, reminding staff and students alike of the strengths that international students bring and the need for home students to also develop their intercultural skills. This is likely to include changing the narrative with their own students, as international students have often internalised the pressure to be the ones that "adapt".

- It can also take the form of specific, institution-wide interventions, in which we create situations where the international student provides the expertise to mentor home students or staff, instead of the reverse. For example, international students could mentor home students or staff who are going overseas for field courses or international exchanges. Given the ethnic diversity of most university towns and cities, it may also be possible for such activities to occur at "home"; opportunities could be arranged for international students to "introduce" home students to parts of the city that they may not otherwise experience.

- Staff from foundation year programmes could also advise more widely to ensure that any proposed integration activities promote equitable, open engagement and avoid a deficit or tokenistic approach. These events are proposed and delivered by a wide variety of different teams, from inductions and welcome weeks to careers support, student unions, sports teams, and academic units. While well-intentioned, this means that many interventions are designed by staff with limited direct experience of such matters. As such, the scope, and value, of foundation programme influence is vast. In short, by acting as advisors and leaders in this field, the staff and students of foundation year programmes across the UK can not only prepare international students for study at university, but also help prepare our universities to be truly integrated multicultural environments.

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Developing 'soft' transferable skills to achieve 'hard' targets through cultural and community engagement: a case study

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A new Academic English (AE) module has been developed with a focus on community and cultural engagement. It has helped students to acquire 'softer' skills, such as reflective and communication skills, building their confidence and helping them to 'fit in'. It also allows students to develop the general skills and attributes needed for future academic challenges and ultimately the workplace. The value of soft skills in preparing students for university is strongly debated and this paper evaluates this issue from the perspectives of both students and pathway programme teachers.

Introduction

International students can benefit enormously by having 'softer' academic skills as well as measurable 'hard' skills. Presentation skills, for example, can be framed in a less-threatening and more engaging learning environment, thereby reducing performance and language anxiety (Aydin, 2008). In this way transferable skills can be developed to increase students' readiness for some of the more demanding academic tasks faced at university. A new module, Engagement in Community and Language Skills (ECLS, formerly CLS), was developed in 2017 at INTO, the University of Exeter (UoE). This module prepares international students on an Academic English (AE) programme for transition to pathway/degree programmes at the UoE. It is non-accredited, although it is informally assessed.

This paper will report on some of the activities in this module and outline some of the identifiable benefits for students' personal and academic development. Findings are drawn from student and staff feedback taken both during and after completion of the module. Associated benefits include the opportunity to interact with native English speakers in authentic communicative situations and developing awareness of both British and their own cultures.

Defining Soft Skills

There has been much attention paid to soft skills in education. These skills are also known as 'transferable skills; non-cognitive skills; non-technical skills and interpersonal proficiency' (Janusch, 2016). The 4 C's of soft skills are generally regarded as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity (ibid.). Soft skills also feature as 'employability skills', with such skills being highly sought-after by employers. Demonstrating them right from the outset is crucial for all students and graduates. The US Department of Labor has even developed a curriculum for young people called Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success. This highlights further soft skills such as enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem-solving and professionalism. However, the name 'soft skills' can subtly undermine the true importance of these skills in either an educational or workplace context. Robles, (2017) explains that soft skills can be more helpfully viewed as 'character traits, attitudes and behaviors – rather than technical aptitudes'.

Cultural awareness and engagement

Cultural awareness and engagement are important elements of international student inclusion in the community. According to Glass, et al (2015), it is vital that international educators respond to the need for every international student to receive a 'rich educational experience in and out of the classroom' and that interaction with the surrounding community should be commonplace. International students often indicate their desire to interact more with the local community or with home students from the UK. However, it is not always easy for them to engage with these groups due to factors such as a lack of confidence or perceived insufficient knowledge about British culture. As such, international students can be reluctant to engage with people outside their educational institution, fearing offending local people or not being able to understand the locals' responses. Little, if any engagement with regular British people outside academe can result in international students returning home with little idea of the issues and true nature of British life. By actively engaging with the local community, students can learn to develop more intangible and beneficial soft skills.

Activities on the module

The module is divided into weekly Community Engagement Tasks (CET) and the Community Engagement Project (CEP). The weekly CETs require students to visit various places around Exeter with their class teacher. This may involve visiting individual charity shops, surveying different types of eateries, restaurants and cafés in a designated city area, or researching a local tourist attraction at the tourist office. To complete these mini-research tasks the students must talk face-to-face with staff, customers or passers-by in each location. They do this by asking questions prepared during lessons such as 'What is your most popular dish?' or 'What is the easiest way to get to XXX?' Consequently these scaffolded conversations help students gain confidence during interaction with native English speakers. Afterwards the students present their findings in small groups and additionally or instead of, write a short reflection (approximately 100 words) on their experience via a Padlet, thereby developing their IT skills. During the follow-up presentations students are explicitly taught the appropriate language for listening, questioning and responding courteously to their class peers. The level of task engagement and intelligibility are all judged as being more important than perfect English.

The CEP is carried out towards the end of the course and builds on the reflective and communicative skills developed in the CET. Students are required to research a specific item, such as an artefact in the city's museum. This requires research online and through community engagement and in the case of the museum artefact this involves interaction with museum staff. The outcomes of this project are a short classroom presentation and a 300-word piece of reflective writing.

Issues of non-accreditation

This module is unaccredited and therefore it is natural to assume that there may be issues with lack of engagement by some students. This was the case and during the first two terms of implementing the module there were instances of absence, lack of punctuality and incompletion of tasks. Moreover, the students seemed to question the value of the reflective writing tasks. Therefore, the AE teaching team decided to embed questions about both CET and CEP in the programme's assessed formative (CET) and summative (CEP) seminars. Consequently, this enhanced the perceived value of the two components, with students eager to gain good marks for their seminars. In addition, the introduction of Padlet as a tool to write their short weekly reflections made the CET more engaging; helping students to develop and practise both their reflective and academic writing skills, as well as their IT skills.

Response to the programme

Students were given a module feedback survey in the second term and despite initial concerns of a lack of appreciation of the module, the feedback was largely favourable:

- **Student A:** *"The new thing I learnt this week is we need to say, 'Sorry, I am not certain about this, maybe I can recommend you to search it'…"*
- **Student B:** *"It's my presentation. I felt very excited during my presentation. I shared my precious memory to our class. It was fantastic. I would like to do it again"*
- **Student C:** *"I went with my classmates to Cancer Research UK. The manager was very kind, she responded to our questions with pleasure."*

One student, upon asking a waitress how much she earned and receiving no reply, reflected that asking about someone's wages in Britain might be culturally inappropriate.

In addition, student exit surveys at the end of each term highlight evidence of the module providing added-value to the students' learning, with students showing a high level of satisfaction with the module. The average weighting in September, 2018 out of 5.0 was 4.4, an increase from the first exit survey conducted in March, 2018 at 3.8. The overall average for the module across three terms in 2018 was 4.0 out of 5.0, responding to the statement "ECLS helped me communicate in English".

We also found that the rehearsal of presentation-giving in a communicative and collaborative atmosphere can pay dividends in a students' subsequent programmes. A short interview conducted with one pathway programme teacher led to their observation that, "the students from D. [the AE programme location] definitely showed a level of professionalism in their presentations". They also commented that with one quieter student from China, they were able to use the student's "advanced presentation skills….as a 'crowbar' to get him to do some work!"

Final thoughts

The findings in this paper were gleaned from informal interviews and surveys and are part of only a small-scale 'action-research' project. However, the benefits to students in acquiring soft skills are clear to both authors delivering the module and are evident in the responses of teachers on pathway programmes and students on the module. It is worth mentioning that the University of Exeter is now encouraging students on all degree courses to do audits of all their skills as part of reflective and employability activities. The subject of how educational institutions should foster and develop students' soft skills therefore lends itself to further investigation. Areas for consideration include whether to use accreditation and the prudent use of both extra and intra curricular activities.

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Investigating IELTS scores and vocabulary size for streaming and curriculum design purposes on International Foundation Programmes

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This research investigates the relationship between IELTS scores and vocabulary size, using Nation's Vocabulary Size Test (2007). Scores for each were recorded from 205 IFP students and data on how effective IELTS scores are at estimating passive vocabulary size was generated. The analysis shows that vocabulary size correlates strongly with IELTS overall score but significant dispersion at each band remains; IELTS overall score is a somewhat unreliable predictor of vocabulary size. The data may be useful for aspects of structuring IFP programmes and suggests that authentic texts may not be the most suitable for an important segment of Foundation students

Introduction and background

Great significance is attributed to IELTS scores at entry to IFPs, undergraduate and foundation programmes. They are treated as a useful proxy for the students' readiness to participate in HE at various level. Students are streamed according to their IELTS scores on the assumption that cohorts of approximately similar ability will emerge. Since IELTS scores are used for streaming purposes, investigating how closely they correlate with vocabulary size may help practitioners to make principled decisions on what types of texts suit learners with different IELTS scores on entry.

The importance of passive and productive knowledge of vocabulary is widely acknowledged by researchers (Milton, 2010; Nation, 1993) as a key to reading and writing performance. IFPs consist of many types of discipline-specific modules in which professionally published academic articles are used as core reading material for students. If this is not done in a principled way which allows all levels of the programme to access the required knowledge, this practice may represent a programme biased towards those who are already equipped with the requisite language skills. Nation (2006) shows that understanding texts written for educated native-speakers requires a large vocabulary: around 9,000 word families are required known before 98% of the text is comprehensible to the reader. This study provides data on which IELTS bands tend to represent that Nation's (2007) Vocabulary Size Test (VST) has been used for this research; a multiple-choice test which assesses passive knowledge of vocabulary. Target items appear in short

sentences and students choose the correct synonym from four options divided into 14 levels of difficulty (Nation & Beglar, 2007). Items are categorised into groups of 10, with each group representing the most common 1000 word families at that level. These levels are referred to as 1k to 14k allowing for an approximate estimate of the students, overall vocabulary size, up to 14000 word families. This is calculated by multiplying the test score by 100 to give an estimate of word families known. An 'I don't know option' has been included by the researchers as this has been shown to mitigate the effect of guessing, to an extent (Zhang, 2013).

Methods and Results

The VST was sent to all students on the 2017/8 King's College London IFP at the beginning of term 2. Figure 1, below, provides details of the collected demographic data of valid respondents:

Total Number of students	205 with ages ranging from 17 to 22 (mean 18.7)
Breakdown by self-identified first language	
First Language	**No. of students**
Mandarin	75
Arabic	35 (including 14 bilinguals)
Turkish	26

Fig. 1 *Demographic data of valid respondents*

The first ten levels of the test (1k to 10k words) were mandatory. After that, students could choose to skip questions. The assumption here is that having the option to skip questions would decrease the prevalence of guessing and all data was included in the results. The first aim of the analysis was to establish whether an individual skills' score (reading, writing, speaking and listening) or the overall IELTS score gave the strongest correlation with vocabulary size for the whole sample.

Overall N=205	Listen+ Write	Read+ Write	Speak	Listen+ Read	Write	Listen	Read
.678	.645	.637	.602	.596	.582	.556	.537
p <0.01	p <0.01	p <0.01	p <0.01	p <0.01	p <0.01	p <0.01	p <0.01

Fig. 3 *Pearson Correlations for VST scores and IELTS scores; individual components and combinations*

The data underlines the significance of the OIS as the key indicator of passive orthographic vocabulary knowledge. Having established OIS as the strongest correlator, the VST scores were then processed by OIS band to generate the descriptive statistical data shown in figure 4, below:

Overall IELTS score	5.5	6.0	6.5	7.0	7.5	8	8.5
a) Sample size	21	34	51	44	28	25	5
b) Mean VST of sample population	59	66	69	82	95	105	111
c) Standard deviation (SD)	13.5	16.2	13.6	20.1	18	12.9	8.3
d) Probable vocabulary size for middle 66% of OIS band	4550-7250	4980-8220	5540-8260	6190-10210	7700-11300	9210-11790	10270-11930

Fig. 4 *Descriptive statistics for VST scores for each OIS band*

Fig. 2 *Plot for Pearson correlation between OIS and VST*

Accordingly, Pearson correlations to determine the relationship between VST scores and IELTS scores were calculated in SPSS (statistical analysis software). A Pearson correlation score is stated between 0 and 1, with 1 indicating a perfect correlation between two variables and 0 no relationship. Given the reported centrality of passive vocabulary size to reading ability (Nation, 2006), it was expected that the IELTS reading score would be among the strongest correlations. In fact, it was not; the overall IELTS score (OIS) had the strongest correlation with VST scores (0.678). This correlation was stronger than any of the individual IELTS skills' scores and the average of two related skills as figure 3 shows:

Table row (b) shows that the mean VST scores are progressively higher for each successive OIS band. Row (c) gives the standard deviation (SD) for each OIS band. For pedagogical purposes, a lower SD for a particular OIS band would represent a cohort with more homogenous passive vocabulary. The larger the SD, the more likely that diverse vocabulary knowledge is present in that cohort. SD is also useful because it allows us to predict what the range of vocabulary scores would be for the middle 66% of a cohort organised by OIS assuming normal distribution and that this sample (our IFP students) represented the population (all IFP students). If so, the middle 66% ability range of OIS band 5.5 would have passive vocabulary knowledge ranging from 4550 words to 7250 words. For OIS 6.0, the range would be 4980 to 8220, and so on (table row (c)). It is an assumption that this sample represents the overall population but further samples could be taken to validate these initial results. Interestingly, OIS band 7.0 has the widest dispersion of scores (SD 20.1). This throws doubt on the British Council's assertion (2014) that OIS 7.0 'probably' represents university readiness, given that in our sample many students with this IELTS skill possess a passive orthographic vocabulary knowledge considerably lower than the 9,000 word family threshold suggested by Nation (2006) as necessary for adequate comprehension of texts.

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Investigating IELTS scores and vocabulary size for streaming and curriculum design purposes on International Foundation Programmes

Discussion

The results of this study suggest certain adjustments should be considered when developing materials and curricula for students of international foundation programmes. The assumption that lower level IFP students ought to digest professional written academic texts, no matter how difficult, may be restricting their progress. Better practice would be to provide a vocabulary diagnostic process, knowledge from which could be used by students to self-select graded (capped at, for example, the 7k level) or original versions of texts, with tutor-led guidance. Software such as Antwordprofiler makes principled grading of lexis accessible with minimal training, allowing users to gloss or provide synonyms for all words above a certain level, as suggested in Nation and Anthony's mid-frequency reader pedagogy (2012).

The first OIS band to have a mean above Nation's (2006) 9000 word family benchmark is 7.5 (table row (b)). In our sample of 205 students, 36% had a vocabulary size of 7k or less. Assuming some inflation of scores due to guessing remains, these students are likely to encounter unknown content words regularly in 'authentic' texts. This is not simply a concern for EAP tutors but for tutors of any modules responsible for setting core readings.

With relatively large SDs at each OIS band, practitioners should not assume that classes constituted by homogeneity of OIS, or any other IELTS-related measure, will have homogeneity of passive vocabulary knowledge. If the practice of streaming according to IELTS scores is used, practitioners should take into account that diverse ranges of passive vocabulary knowledge will be present in such cohorts. Without effective differentiation, authentic academic texts will represent very different challenges for students in the same group.

Conclusion

If IELTS scores stood as reliable proxies for linguistic ability, IFPs could be streamed by simply grouping students with similar IELTS scores together. In the same way, difficult authentic texts could be allocated as appropriate to students with particular IELTS scores without fear that they would be too lexically complex to access. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case based on the results of this study. On the contrary, students placed in classes together on the basis of their IELTS score are likely to differ widely from one another in terms of their ability to read and understand texts. The use of diagnostic vocabulary tests and alternatives to giving 'authentic' ungraded academic texts ought to be considered to correct this.

The English Language Centre at King's College London has begun to respond to this research. English teachers have been trained in the use of Antwordprofiler to identify levels of lexis within texts that are likely to be too difficult for students with smaller vocabularies. As a result of this training, some differentiated forms of texts are being created and used in class. The results of the study have been shared with all (non-EAP) module leaders, many of whom have endorsed the practice of grading language and are considering what a level 3 text for international students should look like. Ultimately, a foundation year which aims to facilitate transition to undergraduate studies in the UK for international students at differing levels of linguistic ability ought to be able to tailor its course content to meet the educational needs of all. It is hoped that this research may provide some stimulus to that end.

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Effectively developing IFP students' library skills

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It is essential for students to develop Information Literacy (a.k.a. library skills) while at university. However, many students arrive unaware of the various libraries available at the University of Bristol, or how subject librarians can help them search for and evaluate as well as cite and reference sources in their academic writing. This article details the collaboration between EAP tutors and subject librarians in our attempt to address this issue with IFP students during 2017-18, followed by the changes we made for 2018-19.

Hannah

There were several motivations for incorporating library skills into an already crowded IFP curriculum:

1. writing my own master's-level assignments brought home to me that the library skills I had acquired as an undergraduate in the late 1990s were out of date;

2. hitherto, we had been leaving our IFP students (from diverse educational backgrounds) to acquire these library skills without systematic support;

3. we believe that all university students can benefit from visiting libraries, locating resources on the shelves or online, and meeting subject librarians;

4. librarians are keen to work with students and have expertise to support them which EAP tutors may lack.

I was less confident, however, that subject librarians would have the pedagogical skills to design activities which would truly engage our students. Having worked closely with Sarah over the past year, I now realise these fears were groundless.

Sarah

While collection development is a key part of a subject librarian's role, it is by no means the whole story. Equally important is ensuring that students and staff are supported in accessing these collections, as well as the plethora of freely available digital information. This is where the importance of Information Literacy comes in, defined by the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals as 'the ability to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use. It empowers us as citizens to reach and express informed views and to engage fully with society' (CILIP, 2018, p. 3). In practice, this means enabling all users to think independently about their own information needs. It is crucial that information seekers actively and critically evaluate all sources

they find, and carefully assess how they will incorporate them into their own academic work in an ethical manner. Thus, it is essential that librarians can design and lead highly interactive sessions, which address students' needs and embed Information Literacy into the existing curriculum.

Initial Trial 2017-2018

In November 2017, our IFP cohort was divided into two groups, and an hour-long face-to-face session was given by Hannah and Sarah to students on the Arts and Humanities (AH), Social Sciences and Law (SSL) pathways. STEM students had a similar session with Hannah and Lucy (the Subject Librarian for Physics and Engineering). The groups were large (n≈50-70), and English levels ranged from IELTS 5 to near-native proficiency. Thus, we needed class tutors on hand to help keep students on task, to alert us to difficulties/ questions and to encourage comments. Students were gathered in an open-plan teaching space with access to university computers or their own devices.

Activities followed a test-teach-test format, beginning with questions which prompted the activation of prior learning, and revealed any gaps in students' knowledge/abilities. Following this, we modelled the process of finding information on one of the University's nine subject libraries and fourteen subject librarians, then had students transfer this learning by finding the library/librarian that was most relevant to their own current or future course. Next, students learned how to find the shelf mark of textbooks from their course reading lists, as well as how to find journals and articles using Library Search, applying appropriate filters to help narrow down results. There were sticky notes on every table and students were encouraged to write questions during the session and reflective comments at the end, which were either addressed immediately or used to inform the next steps. Tutors who had attended also provided feedback. Sarah led a second hour-long session in February 2018, in

which students compared books with journals to help them make the connection between the physical journal and the process of finding online journal articles via library databases.

Developments for 2018-2019

By encouraging questions and student feedback throughout the sessions, we were able to identify problematic areas and areas of interest. We decided that a blended approach (i.e. a combination of online and face-to-face learning activities) would be more effective going forward. The information-transmission component was therefore 'flipped'. In order to help students learn the foundational content (lower-order thinking), we produced a series of five short weekly videos, in which the slow-paced audio was backed up by text on slides, and the process of finding information on the University webpages could be modelled. The videos ensure a uniformity of input across the cohort while permitting a higher level of autonomy and differentiation of learner-pacing: lower level learners can pause and re-view the content if necessary; higher level learners only need the patience to sit through a few minutes of input or can even skip straight to the quiz. Videos were made using Camtasia (screen recording and video editing software).

As Abeysekera and Dawson (2015, p. 1) caution, there is 'very little evidence of effectiveness or consistency in understanding' of what actually constitutes flipped input. Although care was taken to make the videos as comprehensible as possible (since students need to understand them unaided), the danger is that students are doing too little cognitive work, meaning that they will experience illusions of competence, i.e. an overgenerous judgement of their own learning (Koriat and Bjork, 2005). To address this, each video contains a task for the students to complete (similar to the one modelled, such as finding the location of their subject library), or there are built-in recall stages where students must mentally retrieve the given information – a more 'powerful way to promote meaningful learning' than merely going over the material again (Karpicke and Blunt, 2011, p. 3). To enable tutors to monitor their students' learning, the videos are used

in conjunction with edpuzzle, which allows the insertion of open-ended or multiple-choice questions into the video (forming the recall stages), as well as tracking if/how many times students have watched.

The blended approach maximises the effectiveness of the sessions with the subject librarian in Week 6, coming after students have acquired the knowledge base to be able to tackle the inquiry-based problem-solving activities (higher-order critical thinking). As the IFP has grown, we have been able to split the cohort into more groups, which allows a more targeted matching of student to subject librarian. Students learn who their subject librarians are early on in the academic year and are thus empowered to approach them as a source of support on their content units, perhaps as part of a peer assisted study session (PASS).

Librarians lead sessions based on a template (thus ensuring parity of input across the cohort) which are then tailored to specific pathways on the IFP. For example, a STEM-pathway student taking the Foundations of Chemistry unit (having already visited the Chemistry Library and located a book on its shelves) would attend a face-to-face group session with the Subject Librarian for Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Earth Sciences and Geographical Sciences. These face-to-face sessions include interactive and group activities aimed at deepening students' understanding of varied information sources and their respective uses. For example, there is a small group activity where students are given print copies of journals and asked to identify key ways in which they are different to books. As well as encouraging students to think critically about different source types, interacting with them in this way provides a bridge between the physical and the digital. EAP tutors can further develop the skills that students acquire via this blended approach and should see an improvement in the critical engagement with sources which students select for their formative and summative assignments.

Conclusion

IFP courses should lay the groundwork for students to develop a range of skills enabling them to succeed academically and become engaged citizens. The ability to locate, evaluate and synthesise information sources underpins both academic and employability skills. The library videos and sessions that are now embedded within the IFP provide students with an opportunity to develop their skills more systematically and at an earlier stage than before. It has also created an opportunity for cross-university collaboration, with IFP co-ordinators, EAP tutors and subject librarians working together and sharing good practice. We would highly recommend adopting this approach on any IFP course.

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International Foundation Programmes as Socialisation Structures: understanding the first-year experiences of post-EAP students

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This paper presents part of the findings of a doctoral investigation into how former Foundation students at a Russell Group University in the UK navigated their first year. Data collected via interviews with students were analysed using socialisation theories. Despite areas for development, the findings reveal that Foundation Programmes are part of the socialisation structures that support student transition into university.

Introduction

Despite the heterogeneity of the international student population, these students face common problems transitioning into British universities. They often lack relevant linguistic and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1991) to ensure smooth transition. The linguistic and cultural capitals referred to here are the language skills and cultural knowledge needed to participate in their new environment; lack of such capitals complexifies transitional experiences, making academic socialisation necessary. One common strategy for facilitating transitional experiences is the provision of International Foundation Programmes (IFPs) as pathways to degree programmes. This paper argues that IFPs provide not only linguistic and content input to support students, but also opportunities for cultural and academic socialisation, maximising successful adaptation.

Teaching and research contexts

Characteristically, IFPs cater for pre-undergraduate international students. As there is some overlap in terms of the problems faced by international students and those faced by first years, the potential and challenges for IFPs to shape the retention rates of these students are significant. Gu, Schweisfurth & Day (2010) emphasise that "personal, pedagogical and psychological factors are as important as organisational and social cultures in influencing students' adaptation" (p. 20). This has implications for Foundation programmes as effective socialisation structures within the higher education (HE) context.

My professional context, a Russell Group University in the UK, involves working on Foundation programmes. One of these programmes, an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) one-year Foundation programme, was aimed at preparing students for undergraduate degrees in Social Sciences as well as Arts and Humanities by providing language and academic support. Many students were school leavers making the transition into university. Whilst some had the required English language skills, all were challenged by the demands of tertiary education. As part of my doctoral studies, I investigated the experiences of a group of thirteen post-Foundation students to ascertain the impact of our programme on their transition and provide insights for professional practice. Unfortunately, this programme was dissolved in June 2017 after my investigation had commenced.

Socialisation Theories

Socialisation theories, the theoretical framework used in this investigation, can be understood as "the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and disposition that make them more or less able members of their society" (Brim, 1966:3). Socialisation theories focus on how novices become participating members of a community through ongoing and bidirectional interactive processes with knowledgeable others (socialising agents). The process can also include linguistic socialisation especially where the language of the community can be exclusive (e.g. law). Adults need socialising when they enter a new phase in life due to social or geographical mobility and role discontinuity (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978).

In HE, the need for socialisation is simple. HEIs are distinguished by unique pedagogical practices and implicit rules. Golde (2000) describes the graduate student role as an organisational one, but this can be extended to all university students because entry into university requires institutional awareness and adjustment to succeed. Furthermore, socialisation theories can explicate student retention (Turner & Thompson, 1993) and facilitate understanding of students' experiences of success and failure (Gardner, 2008).

Whilst studying abroad, international students undergo necessary adjustment to new roles especially where previous learning and teaching practices are dissimilar to those in the new context (Li & Collins, 2014). There is some discontinuity and uncertainty as students are unclear about the norms resulting in temporary anxiety and loss of confidence (Ryan & Viete, 2009).

IFPs can be identified as the anticipatory stage of socialisation where students become aware of behavioural, attitudinal and cognitive expectations (Weidman, 1987), preparing them for future roles. Being yearlong courses, IFPs are transitional structures for tertiary education offering relevant opportunities for knowledge acquisition and impacting students' behaviours. My investigation focused on how one IFP influenced the socialisation experiences of a group of first-year students. It included 62 individual interviews with thirteen students over their first year. My research questions included:

1. *What are the socialisation experiences of post-Foundation students?*

2. *What has been the programme's contribution to these experiences?*

The Findings

The findings showed that students' socialisation unfolded in stages and our IFP facilitated this process. Its positive effects can be categorised into academic and non-academic impacts. Academically, students identified developing knowledge of the HE context and having better expectations as positive aspects of our IFP with our academic writing module unanimously considered its most useful feature. Learning how to plan, finding appropriate sources and using citations were the benefits of the programme. One

participant described how non-Foundation students were concerned about plagiarism but that they (Foundation students) already knew how to avoid it. Some further explained that they still referred to our materials when writing up assignments. Law students also considered our critical thinking module useful and identified transferrable skills. Interestingly only the less proficient students identified language improvement as an advantage of their IFP year. This IFP was also relevant to students' academic experiences as they learnt to use Moodle (the University's virtual learning environment), the library and their university email. Non-academic influences included forming supportive networks. Students emphasised the value of relationships developed with former Foundation peers which directly reduced isolation. Generally, students also believed they were more familiar with the University's online and physical spaces. They felt they had fewer challenges in this respect compared to other first-years. Ten of the thirteen students believed the Foundation year had served them very well.

- **Victoria:** *It {Foundation} has helped me integrate into university life*

Yet, there were some discrepancies in the expectations set and the experiences later encountered. Primarily, students faced much higher workloads and felt they were 'blindsided' by this. The course demands on the Foundation year starkly contrasted with the amount of reading and written assignments students had to do on their degree programmes. This was exacerbated by the fact that deadlines were strategically staggered across our modules which was not so on their degree programmes. This unexpected volume of work tested students' abilities to manage their time, and students were overwhelmed by how much autonomy was expected of them. Another aspect which needed improving was the specificity of content; students thought tasks and modules could be better tailored to future courses as they were challenged by technical terms, the syntactic style and cultural assumptions in written texts. This was particularly the case among the law students who had not had any content input on our IFP unlike their Business-pathway classmates.

- **Naomi:** *the workload (on Foundation) was a lot lighter. . . so it kinda projected a false image*

A final discrepancy was students' inability to develop significant relationships with local students and lecturers which affected their academic experiences. Our Foundation programme had been a safe haven where, as international students, they faced similar problems, were comfortable with their 'foreign' identities and consequently formed important friendships; however, on their degree courses, students felt there was some discrimination from home students. It must be noted though that participants actively sought to socialise within their national groups and with other international students. Moreover, class size seemed to have affected students' relationships with lecturers. Large lectures of approximately 150 prevented close relationships with staff. This directly contrasted with our small class groups of 17 where closer relationships with tutors were possible. In larger classes, students were responsible for their own academic adjustments unlike on Foundation courses where there is more direct and individual support.

The implications of the findings are that this IFP served as a pedagogical transitional infrastructure introducing students to certain expectations of tertiary education and moulded their behaviours positively. However, this was dependent on students' ability to recognise and link previous learning experiences. For example, the academic writing process and plagiarism were seen to be directly relevant as was being exposed to the campus and IT systems. Linguistically weaker students, unlike the more proficient students, appreciated our English language modules. Compared to the Business students, law students, who had no legal input on our IFP, expressed more dissatisfaction with course content, but did find the critical thinking module more valuable. This suggests that students may interpret the benefits of IFPs differently based on course demands and personal needs. Students also benefitted from the networks formed on our programme indicating that the advantages of IFPs extend beyond scholarly development. Moreover, considering students' problems with workload, content and autonomy, IFPs need to be tailored more closely to future degree programmes to better provide foundational knowledge and establish more authentic expectations.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the role of IFPs as socialisation structures for international students. An investigation into one IFP's contribution to first-year students' experiences at a UK institution shows such programmes facilitate transition. Students developed an awareness of university life and were better prepared for the demands of tertiary education, particularly academic writing. However, the investigation also revealed discrepancies in workload, course content and expected level of autonomy indicating alignment with future courses is necessary. Nonetheless, there is considerable potential for Foundation programmes to act as socialisation mechanisms especially if there are ongoing discussions with former students and lecturers.

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The University food transition: what tools can we provide?

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Following on from a presentation at the 2018 InForm conference, this article describes a project to support international students in their food transition at university in the UK. It focuses primarily on aspects of the project that engaged students in extra-curricular activities centred on food, and reflects on how student input from these informal activities can be fed back into pre-existing foundation and pre-sessional student support mechanisms.

Introduction

Universities play an important role in providing a positive experience to international students (see Lillyman and Bennett, 2014). However, as previous research has indicated, ensuring effective student transitions to UK HE is complex and demanding (Andrade, 2006). This will be unsurprising to international foundation practitioners, who will already be well aware that their international students may face a wide range of adjustment challenges when undertaking their studies. These will include academic challenges, but as Briggs, Clark & Hall (2012) highlight, it is also essential to recognise the importance of the practical and the social aspects of the adaptation process, and to understand how these interact with the academic experience.

Why a food project?

The International Student Food Project arose from the recognition that food is central to the adjustment journey of international students (Brown, 2009). It is clear that many international students are likely to experience changes to their diet in the UK (O'Sullivan & Amirabdollahian, 2016), and that for some this is an additional source of stress. However, the fact that the process of food acculturation can have an impact on their academic life is less widely acknowledged. Food can in fact play an important role in students' cultural assimilation and in building social relationships, both of which are key factors affecting academic learning (see Taylor and Ali, 2017).

The project ran at the University of Reading during the 2017/18 academic year as a one-year, UKCISA-funded pilot. Its overall aims were to: engage international students to share their food experiences and opinions; to raise awareness of food-related issues and concerns; to better support their food transition through the development of new induction resources; and finally, to celebrate cultural diversity by bringing students together around food. Underlying these aims was the wider goal of better supporting the overall academic and social experience of international students.

Student engagement

The project launched with an online questionnaire distributed via the Bristol Online Survey tool to the University of Reading and six other universities offering international pathways programmes. The response rate – with only 170 responses – was somewhat disappointing, and therefore can only be viewed as a preliminary snapshot of student views. Nevertheless, the responses received did confirm the centrality of food in those students' transition experience. Over 60% of respondents reported that their diet and/or eating patterns had changed since arrival in the UK, and 95% agreed that food is important to the transition period. In the open text comments the respondents reiterated how much food mattered to them and that they would appreciate further support. One went so far as to thank us for leading the project.

How important is food to the transition experience of international students?
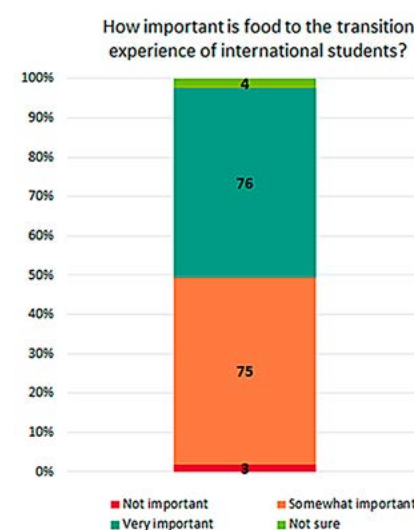
Fig. 1.

Following on from the survey, the project lead and project assistant initiated a number of activities to engage students and actively

promoted them using social media, printed flyers, and email campaigns. Two initiatives in particular are discussed here as examples of how activities that foundation programmes may already be offering can be given a particular focus – in this case food – in order to elicit student concerns and to contribute to the development of additional support. Busy students have competing priorities limiting the extent to which many feel they can give their time, so any undertaking serving a dual purpose is particularly effective. These same two activities also provided the key benefit of involving students as partners and co-producers of materials for re-use with new students. Furthermore, they brought staff and students together; evidence suggests that personal contact with tutors is highly valued by students as part of a supportive learning environment (Briggs et al 2012). This seems to be especially true in the international pathway context.

Student activities

Student competitions

The project ran two online competitions to raise awareness of students' culinary diversity and cooking skills, and to encourage informal discussion around food choices. My Reading Student Meal asked students to share their everyday eating habits by posting a photo of one of their meals along with their comment about it. My Reading Student Recipe allowed students to showcase their cooking skills with their recipe from anywhere in the world. In both cases, there were small prizes in different categories to encourage a variety of students to enter. Competitions such as these give students a platform to share their experiences and expertise, as well as an opportunity to come together at the prize-giving celebration. For our project, they had the added benefit of providing materials to re-use on the project website, an online resource for all international students at the University, as well as in printed materials to distribute at induction sessions. The winning recipes, for example, have now been edited and reproduced as recipe cards.

Conversation sessions

A series of weekly drop-in Food Chat sessions were held in the self-access centre at lunchtime and proved to be a useful format for an exchange of views and information. These sessions were open to all comers, though were actively promoted as an opportunity for informal conversational practice to Pre-sessional students. Particular food topics were chosen by the organisers as a useful starting point, and targeted questions allowed us to elicit feedback on the students' food views and experiences before opening up the discussion. The students who attended were

eager for speaking practice and seemed to appreciate the opportunity to ask questions or raise matters of concern in an informal setting. They were therefore very willing to share their thoughts about food. Feedback gathered through these sessions provided a rich addition to the quantitative data from the questionnaire. To pick one example, the questionnaire responses had highlighted the importance of convenience and time for food shopping. The food chats elicited more detail about related concerns, such as questions about bus routes to local supermarkets, and how to do online shopping to save time. This issue of time was viewed as key to freeing up opportunities to study more effectively. The answers to these common questions were compiled as electronic and printed shopping guides that have been well received by subsequent cohorts.

Concerns raised during conversation sessions
High food prices
A lack of information (eg. About where to find Halal food or on the meanings of food labels)
Too much cold food
A lack of variety in foods and ingredients available
Uncertainty about where to shop and how to do internet shopping

Limitations

As a short-term pilot, there were limits to what the project could achieve. For example, some student concerns about food prices, quality and variety on campus were beyond the scope of the project leads. We were able to provide some support and information to help students navigate challenges, but could not offer immediate solutions. Instead, such issues were referred on to University and Students' Union colleagues for them to follow up. It is worth noting that having evidence from the project gave support to these concerns and progress has been made at an institutional level. The final limitation was that a number of useful ideas were generated that the pilot did not have the time or budget to implement. It is hoped that a second phase will be able to take forward some of these practical interventions proposed by student partners: a recipe book, cooking classes, and a food-labelling guide.

Conclusion

As our students often recognised, food is important during a time of transition; it can be a source of stress but it can also connect people. Representative comments from our respondents include:

"It can make you less happy around school if you don't get the type of food you like."

"Food is culture!"

"I always believe that food draws people together. By being able to appreciate food, we can easily create a community."

One of the project's key goals was to build a community around food and engage this community to create additional support for future students during their food transition. This in turn could be one (small) part of the efforts to ensure a successful academic and social experience for international students. The project further demonstrates a way in which IFPs can take pre-existing activities, such as conversation clubs or competitions, and give them a targeted focus that will involve students as co-producers and then feed useful ideas and information back into on-going induction and support programmes. Food is particularly appropriate for this sort of project; foundation colleagues may be aware of other areas that lend themselves to such an undertaking as well.

The project blog is available here: **http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/international-student-food-project/**

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Highlighting the gap between IELTS and academic writing for students on foundation programmes

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This paper is the result of an analysis of argumentative essays produced by students in the first week of a foundation course, conducted as part of a master's in linguistics. It discusses the use of genre and systemic functional linguistics-led transitivity analyses to understand the gap between this early-stage writing (which is inevitably influenced by the IELTS test) and the expectations of academic written discourse. It finishes with recommendations for practical ways to encourage students to increase the lexical density of their writing.

Introduction

Because almost all students entering into a Foundation programme have done so through studying for and completing at least one IELTS test (and in some cases many more), it is inevitable that it forms the grounding for their understanding of what academic writing is. In some ways, genre analysis reveals that IELTS does seem to provide a good grounding for academic writing, at least in so far as in structuring a four-paragraph essay. Unfortunately though, no doubt due to the constraints inherent in the nature of the test and the fact that the writing test is not linked to reading (at least in its current incarnation), it seems to fossilise some stylistic devices that generally are not considered desirable in academic writing.

This paper is the result of an analysis of argumentative essays produced by students in the first week of a foundation course. It discusses the use of genre, systemic functional linguistics-led transitivity and lexical density analyses to understand the gap between this early-stage writing (which is inevitably influenced by the IELTS test) and the expectations of academic written discourse. It finishes with recommendations for practical ways to encourage students to increase the lexical density of their writing.

Methodology and findings

Genre Analysis

This was a small cohort of students (12), all of whom were Chinese Mandarin speakers, with IELTS writing scores of between 5 and 6, and who were asked to write an argumentative essay in the first week of a ten-week course. Their essays were analysed to see if they conformed to a genre analysis-devised template for argumentative essays based on a framework by Hyland (1990). The framework breaks down an argumentative essay into three phases, namely thesis, argument, and conclusion, and provides expected and possible elements in each section.

The number of paragraphs written by the majority of students was four. All wrote a recognisable thesis statement, but not all thesis statements were placed where they might have been expected. Five of the cohort also produced counter-arguments and rebuttals, as was explicitly requested in the essay title. Overall, from an argumentative-genre perspective, their essays seemed relatively successful, as is illustrated in figure 1.

Systemic functional linguistic transitivity analysis

The essays were then subjected to transitivity analysis. In systemic functional linguistic terms, this type of analysis is concerned with identifying the role of the subject of written texts and the types of (inter)actions taking place. In their analysis of the differences between IELTS and academic writing, Moore and Morton (2005) highlight the fact that IELTS task 2 writing encourages the use of anecdote and personal experience to support the thesis of the essay in a way that would be deemed inappropriate in most genres of academic writing.

Not surprisingly, perhaps due to the anecdotal nature of IELTS writing, a transitivity analysis of the students' writing revealed that most of the verbs used were material process (i.e. an act of 'doing' something as opposed to say, 'sensing' or 'experiencing' something), and that the participants were usually 'actors', mostly 'I' or 'we'. As Moore (2011) would no doubt point out, it may be dangerous to assume that all academic genres expect depersonalisation, but it is certainly a feature of the objectivity expected.

Fig. 1 *Genre analysis of the essays according to the framework of Hyland (1990)*

	Thesis					Argument							Conclusion			
	(Gambit)	(Information)	Thesis statement/ (evaluation)	(Marker)	Length (sentences)	No. of paragraphs	Counter-argument?	Rebuttal to counter-argument?	Marker	Restatement	Claim	Support	Marker	Consolidation	Affirmation	Close
PS102 -1		✓ c	✓ (end)	✓ ('Some')	5	2	✓	✓	b/b	✓/✓	c/a	a/a	x	✓	✓	✓
PS102 -2		✓ a	(in argument stage)		1	2	x	x	_/a-b	✓/✓	a/a	a/a	✓	x	✓	x
PS102 -3		✓ c	✓ (end)		3	2	x	x	_/_	✓/✓	a/a	a/a	✓	✓	✓	x
PS102 -4		✓ c	✓ (end)		3	2	x	x	a/a	_/_	a/a	a/a	x	✓	✓	x
PS102 -5		✓ c	✓ (end)		2	3	✓	✓	a/a/a/	_/_/✓	a/a/a/	a/a/a/	x	x	x	x
PS102 -6	✓		✓ (end)		3	2	✓	✓	a/a-b	✓/✓	a/a	a/a	✓	✓	✓	x
PS102 -7		✓ c	✓ (end)		1	2	✓	x	a/b	✓/✓	a/a	a/a	✓	x	✓	x
PS102 -8		✓	✓ (end)		3	2	✓	✓	a/b	_/✓	a/a	a/a	✓	x	✓	x
PS102 -9		(in argument stage)	✓	(in argument stage)	1	3	x	x	a/a/b	_/✓/✓	a/a/a	a/a/_	✓	x	✓	x
PS102 -10			✓	(in argument stage)	1	2	x	x	a/a	_/✓	a-c/a	a/a	✓	✓	✓	x
PS102 -11		✓ a/c	✓ (2nd sentence)	'some'	5	3	x	x	a/a/a	_/_/_	a-c/a-c/a-c	a/a/a	✓	✓	✓	x
PS102 -12			✓ (1st sentence)	✓ ('three')	2	3	x	x	a/a/a	_/_/_	a-c/a/a	a/a/a	✓	x	✓	x

Information: a Definition   b Classification   c Description   d Critique

Marker: a listing   b transition

Claim: a States strength of perceived shared assumptions   b States a generalization based on evidence or data   c States force of conviction

Support: a States assumptions used to make a claim   b Provides data or cites referencing source

Furthermore, in academic writing, verbs are often nominalised, which allows for more abstraction and complexity (Gillett, 2018). The analysis further revealed that although there were occasional instances of nominalisation, this tended to be 'ing' forms of verbs. In fact, this is in line with Liardet's finding that this is the first form of nominalised abstraction to emerge in Chinese academic writing in British universities (Liardet, 2016).

Lexical density

Finally, the essays were analysed to establish their lexical density. Nominalisation has the effect of making writing more lexically dense in that more of the words used carry content or meaning (e.g. nouns, adjectives, adverbs and lexical verbs). The use of personal pronouns as participants results in lower lexical density. The equation for measuring lexical density can be defined as Lexical items/Clauses=Lexical density (Halliday and Matthieson, 2014)

An analysis of a variety of different body paragraphs from the diagnostic essays revealed a lexical density of between 3 and 4, which is considered low. For comparison, in one aspect of Liardet's (2016) study of nominalisation use in Chinese students' writing, their lexical density was 9.4. This lack of nominalisation signifies an absence of the kind of abstraction required to deal with ideas outside of those experienced in the personal realm.

Bridging the gap

Although Liardet's (2016) research suggests that foreign language students (or at least Chinese ones) tend to develop their use of nominalisation naturally as they progress in their academic careers, it was felt that it would be a good idea to assist students to at least acknowledge the gap between the work they were producing and the accepted norms of academic writing in an effort to encourage or speed up the process. Moore (2011) shows how useful it is to use the writers' own texts and help them to compare their writing to that expected in the target genre. Following this suggestion, the students' essays from week one were scanned and used as a basis for this. Students had already been provided with feedback showing some of the differences between their academic writing and genre expectations, such as citation and hedging conventions, during the opening weeks of their course. In the fifth week of term two typical paragraphs from the original essays were chosen to work on. Before class, they were analysed for lexical density and then rewritten, removing personal pronouns and increasing nominalisation, whilst trying to keep as close as possible to the spirit of the original. The first paragraph originally had a density of 3.29, and rewritten it became 5. It can be seen in figure 2, below.

Fig. 2

Original paragraph rewritten to be more lexically dense

> **Original paragraph**
>
> The first reason why I hold this opinion is that//TESOL class create a perfect environment for us to speaking the same language. //We should grasp the chance to practicing our speaking. //Though it is hard to talk in the non-mother tongue at the beginning, //you have to hang (on) and struggle through the tough times. //If you always do* what you can do*, //you will never be the one you can be.
> - **(Lexical items) 23 / (Clauses) 7**   *(I chose not to count these as lexical verbs)
> - **Lexical density=3.29**
>
> **Rewritten paragraph**
>
> The first reason for this is that//TESOL classes create the perfect environment for speaking the same language. //It is important to practise speaking for a number of reasons. //Beginning to learn a language requires hard work and patience. //Doing only what has been done before limits potential.
>
> - **(Lexical items) 25 / (Clauses) 5**
> - **Lexical density=5**

Students were shown the original paragraph and asked to compare it to the rewritten model, in order to identify what they thought the difference was. Having identified the removal of the pronouns and the fact that it was shorter, they were then encouraged to consider the language differences. They were then asked to complete a series of exercises where they were asked to convert lexically 'undense' sentences by nominalising the verbs.

The students were then shown a second paragraph from their original essays with a lexical density of 4.45, and asked to rewrite it collaboratively in the same manner as the first paragraph, removing pronouns and seeking to nominalise verbs. They were allowed access to dictionaries for this process and had live feedback from the teacher on their language via shared Google Docs. The results were encouraging, with rewritten paragraphs ranging from a lexical density of 5.33 to an impressive 7.5. Two examples of these rewritten paragraphs can be seen in figure 3, below.

Recommendations for helping students bridge the gap IELTS and academic writing.

- *Make students explicitly aware of the genre differences between IELTS and academic writing.*

- *Nominalisation is essential for expression of abstract ideas, so it needs to be explicitly taught.*

- *Show students the gap by allowing them to compare their own writing to model answers that are adapted from it (this has the benefit of highlighting the gap, but also makes the gap more bridgeable than using academic texts would). Students should use these insights to improve their own writing.*

- *The formula for calculating lexical density could be taught to enable judging each other's work for peer review.*

- *Students need to be able to change word forms in order to nominalise, thus it is essential to work on transforming verbs and adjectives into nouns throughout any course.*

Conclusion

To a large extent, the format of the IELTS writing test has shaped foundation students' idea of what academic writing is. However, the exam format encourages students to use anecdote and personal pronouns, which limits the amount of abstraction in their writing. Nominalisation is key to expressing abstract ideas and students should be encouraged to recognise this and introduce more of it into their writing. Using their own writing in this process helps to make the gap seem less daunting than it otherwise might.

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To begin with, keeping speaking Chinese in the TESOL classroom will be impolite. // Being in multinational classroom and remaining speaking the native tongue will lead to ignoring other people's feelings. // Creating an effective English learning environment requires the first language being banned. // Making more foreign friends will be successful //if everybody maintains this rule.
(Lexical items) 30 / (Clauses) 5
Lexical density=6

To begin with, it is impolite for Chinese to speak mother tongue in TESOL classroom. //This ignorance of tutors and classmates' feelings could lead to the misunderstanding of the speaking content. //Also, creating an English environment is helpful to practise English listening and speaking skills //*because the lack of English learning environment in China. //What's more, speaking English could help students to make foreign friends.
*(I have considered this to be a clause despite the fact that it lacks a verb)
(Lexical items) 36 / (Clauses) 5
Lexical density=7.2

Fig. 3
Paragraphs rewritten collaboratively in class with aid of dictionaries and feedback

'The Discerning Student': A framework for developing critical thinking skills with international foundation students

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Can EAP tutors help their learners to become better judges of quality in their academic work and develop a more critical approach to their studies by teaching a 'language' of critical thinking? To address this question, we identified, taught and practised seven cognitive skills forming the acronym 'DISCERN'. We outline an action research project conducted with a class of international foundation students in order to evaluate how meaningful this process was through the eyes of both tutors and learners themselves. We also identify some interesting implications of the project for future course design and classroom pedagogy.

The rationale for a 'discerning' student

"They don't think for themselves; they should give their own opinions more...They never question what they read; they should be more critical...They just regurgitate; they should be more original." These typical remarks from university lecturers on the shortcomings of students' work, quoted in Alexander, Argent & Spencer (2008, p.252), will doubtless resonate with many foundation tutors, frustrated at their students' inability to take a more critical approach.

More broadly, as EAP tutors on the Birmingham Foundation Pathways programme, we have found that international students who face the transition from secondary education to undergraduate programmes need considerable support in becoming better judges of quality. That is, they need to become more 'discerning' in terms of effective argumentation, communication and language use.

It was our ongoing struggle with these pedagogical issues that motivated us to create and experiment with a skills framework that could address our students' needs. This article will share insights on our action research, exploring the extent to which both learners and tutors found the framework meaningful in fostering a more critical approach.

A language of thinking

Although the term 'critical thinking' is commonly used by academic tutors and curriculum designers, its precise meaning can be vague and little understood by learners. If critical thinking can be difficult to pin down, could there be merit in framing the problem in terms of a "language of thinking" (Ellerton, 2014), which specifies the cognitive skills involved such as evaluation, inference and categorisation? Ellerton (ibid.) asserts that students who can develop an understanding of these terms can then learn to think critically in much the same way as they would master a physical process such as playing a musical instrument, whereby different elements of the activity can be honed and practised. In other words, a meta-cognitive awareness of thinking skills can be used as a starting point for designing useful practice activities.

Of the many cognitive skills classified in Bloom's original taxonomy and its subsequent revisions (Anderson & Krathwohl et al, 2001), we narrowed these down to a manageable seven which formed the acronym 'DISCERN'. The skills we chose were Differentiating; Interpreting; selecting Strategies; being Critical; Evaluating; Reflecting; and Noticing. Each was selected to reflect our over-arching objective of teaching students to be more discerning judges of quality. It was hoped that by integrating these terms into our teaching, students would begin to think about and apply these skills to their study.
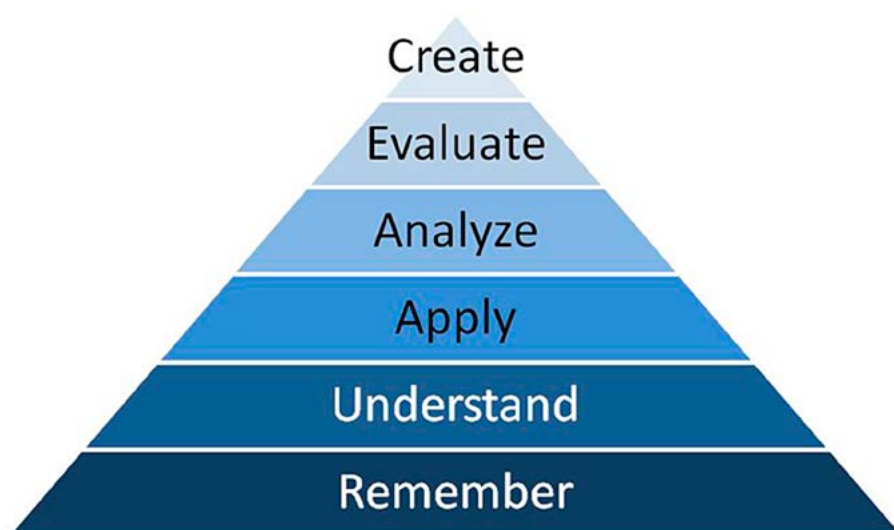
Fig. 1

The DISCERN skills

It is perhaps worth elaborating briefly on how some of these skills may be relevant to foundation study. Learners must differentiate, for example, between a suitable and inappropriate register for academic writing. They need to interpret an author's stance and demonstrate a critical approach by analysing the evidence put forward. Selecting suitable listening strategies can help learners make sense of a lecture. If learners can notice particular features of language use or communicative technique, they can then begin to apply them to their own communication. It is interesting to note the balance of lower and higher order skills in the DISCERN framework, as classified by Anderson & Krathwohl (ibid.) (see Figure 1). It can be seen that differentiating and noticing, which involve 'understanding' are of a lower order than interpreting and selecting strategies ('applying'). Being critical and evaluating are higher order skills ('analysing' and 'evaluating'), while reflecting is a composite skill involving a combination of both lower and higher order thinking skills.

An action research project

Embarking on an action research project conducted over two foundation semesters, our goal was to teach the 'DISCERN' terms to our shared monolingual class of Chinese learners and to integrate them into lesson planning, study materials and classroom discourse in a consistent way. An important caveat to the project was that the DISCERN framework was superimposed onto a pre-existing course. In other words, while the wider module learning objectives, course elements and core materials were already in place, we were at liberty to prioritise the learning outcomes of individual lessons and tailor task design accordingly. As students gradually gained familiarity with the DISCERN terms, we began to include them in our stated learning outcomes (Figure 2). We referred back to the skills when discussing the rationale for tasks and activities in lessons, trying to ensure that we gave learners opportunities to practise the full range of skills across the activities we planned. After the completion of an activity, we encouraged learners to reflect on the skills practised and developed. As visual reminders, we decorated the classroom with DISCERN wall posters and even designed our own DISCERN coffee mugs.

Fig. 2

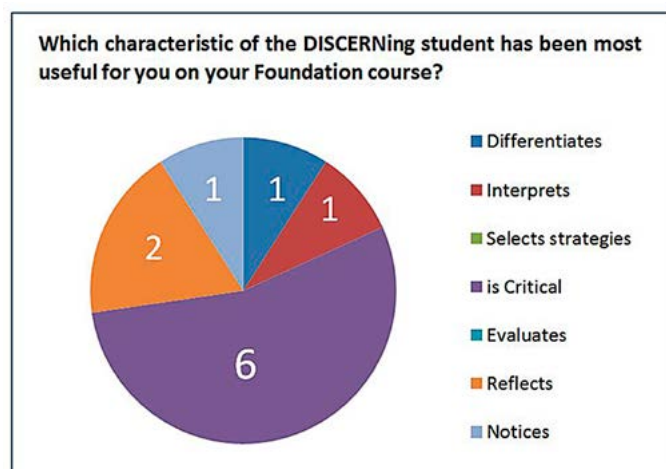**Which characteristic of the DISCERNing student has been most useful for you on your Foundation course?**

Fig. 3

Project evaluation

To evaluate how meaningful the DISCERN skills were to learners, we set regular reflective online discussion tasks and conducted an end-of-course survey. In the survey, six out of eleven students chose 'being critical' as the characteristic that had been most useful to them on their foundation course (see Figure 3).

When prompted to explain their choice, one student wrote perceptively that "critical thinking allows us to see things with a sceptical eye", demonstrating an understanding of the meta-language and an awareness of the need to "question what they read" identified earlier, albeit without providing a specific example. Other students commented that our frequent emphasis on the need to be critical had helped them to "give evidence to support ideas", "consider both positives and negatives of an issue", "judge opinions" and "doubt" what they read, although they were less able to provide tangible examples.

In a separate online discussion task which asked students to identify the DISCERN skill that had been most useful to them during that particular week, one student chose 'selects strategies'. He justified his choice in the following words:

In the reading exam, I chose skim reading to get the main idea of the paragraphs. Then I looked at the question and went back to the paragraph to find what I needed to focus on. I underlined the key words I found and compared with the ideas in the choices to choose the best answer.

This student is clearly able to articulate specific strategies that he felt were useful to him in a particular context. However, there were also several occasions where students demonstrated only a partial understanding of the relevant metalanguage, as in the following comment by a different student on the same task.

[Reflecting] helped me to study effectively this week. I usually memorise the content which teachers mentioned in the class.

Although the student does not appear to fully understand the meaning of 'reflect' in its normal sense, it is clear that she has interpreted the term in an intelligent way that is relevant to her learning processes.

We acknowledge that the DISCERN acronym could be regarded as somewhat contrived and "woolly". The use of abstract terms places a metacognitive load on L2 learners in particular, leading as we have seen to misunderstandings in some cases. Furthermore, introducing even as few as seven broad skills might constitute too many for learners to keep abreast of. In order to truly assess the value of the project for students we would need a follow-up study at some point during their degree courses to measure the extent to which they are still applying the DISCERN skills. However, from a teaching perspective, we found the acronym to be both grounding and memorable, keeping our learning objectives more tightly focused. The message glaring down from the wall poster above the whiteboard - and peering up from the DISCERN mug on the desk - was a constant reminder to integrate opportunities for developing higher order thinking into lesson activities. We also felt that DISCERN helped us to clarify our rationale for activities, better communicating their potential benefits and relevance to students.

Implications

The action research process has highlighted the importance of continually contextualising, exemplifying and consolidating thinking skills in our teaching. We feel that with DISCERN we have unearthed a useful course design component that could be integrated into future programmes of study. Above all, we believe that, much as a competent tradesman must learn the right tools to use for the job in hand, becoming a discerning student involves identifying, practising and reflecting on the right strategies to apply to academic work. If we can begin to convince students that default strategies such as "just Google it" or "just translate it" may not always be the best option, that is no little accomplishment.

An aphorism attributed to the statistician George Box states that all models are wrong but some are useful. We hope that the DISCERN model of thinking skills is a useful, if not comprehensive, contribution to the field.

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Using flipped learning to engage and integrate international students

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Having delivered a combined HEU/International foundation programme for several years, it is evident that during induction, many students congregate into groups based on domicile/first language which can be detrimental to their learning and achievement; international students that regularly interact with English speaking students tend to achieve a more effective transition into first year. A flipped learning approach has been successfully employed to improve interaction of international students, build relationships in the classroom and provide an inclusive learning environment. Student attendance and engagement improved and, evidenced by positive feedback in a student survey, the approach led to an improved student experience.

Introduction

The British Council (2014) recognised that, "International students who connect with home students at an early stage are more likely to feel a sense of belonging, which can translate to academic advancement and personal growth". During induction, students congregate into groups based on their domicile or first language. Whilst this provides some security in the early stages of their Higher Education (HE) experience, in the longer term, it can be detrimental to their learning and academic achievement; international students that regularly interact with English speaking students will be better able to manage the transition into HE in a foreign country and, in particular, manage social, cultural, academic and language challenges. Despite organised events to encourage student interaction, poor student attendance reflects that many students are reticent to participate. However, the classroom provides a venue for pedagogical intervention and in recent years, a number of approaches have been explored to promote collaboration, including flipped learning. Whether flipped learning has any advantages over a conventional approach has received much debate; Kerr (2015) surveyed the available literature in engineering education and reported that, in general, practitioners reported high student satisfaction and increased performance. The approach has steadily gained popularity amongst engineering educators; Karabulut-ILgu, Jaramillo Cherrez & Jahren, (2017) reported a ten-fold increase over three years in the number of studies that reached the public domain.

This article describes the successful practice of a flipped learning approach which has provided an inclusive learning environment, improved engagement and integration of international students. It also promotes active learning, develops problem-solving skills and conceptual understanding, and therefore improves student retention.In addition it facilitates the inclusion of other pedagogical approaches such as blended learning and cooperative learning structures. By continuous reflective practice, the technique has evolved over the last few years; the benefits are described and the methods to ensure effective and successful practice shared.

What is 'flipped learning'?

In a conventional classroom, new material is introduced in class – the session is teacher led and for many students learning is passive; this has been the norm for hundreds of years. Students may begin to understand new concepts and apply them but they consolidate learning, and undertake deeper learning activities, after class. The term 'flipped learning' is widely used to describe any class structure that involves students preparing in advance; the conventional lecture followed by homework scenario is reversed. New material is introduced outside of class (student led). During class, students undertake further enquiry, apply knowledge to problems, and participate in small group activities and discussions to consolidate learning which encourages students to engage with material at a deeper level (teacher led). Flipped learning can also facilitate blended learning where students undertake online activity. This could be directed learning material, participating in a MOOC or an online group discussion – leading to a balance between online and face-to-face components. There are many variations of the model.

How was 'flipped learning' facilitated?

On the University of Nottingham Engineering and Physical Sciences Foundation Programme, international students presently comprise 50% of a typical 120 cohort and are taught alongside home/EU students with additional English as a foreign language. Flipped learning was introduced to a Mechanics module which is similar to an A level Maths (Mechanics 1) module but taught in an engineering context. Approximately 10% of the cohort were mature, 10% under the age of 18 and 20% female. Initially, the process was explained to the students: what flipped learning involves, what is expected of them, why it is beneficial. Students were directed to learning material in a variety of formats (notes, websites, videos, and podcasts) to suit their learning style; students acquired knowledge prior to class and were allowed at least one week to prepare. If such material is not readily available, some other existing repository could be used, for example, YouTube, TedTeach. To incentivise prior learning, each subsequent class began with a short quiz that carried a small credit towards the final grade; this was essential to ensure engagement and attendance. Failure to award credit resulted in either poor attendance or students arriving late, to avoid the test.

Online testing or audience response systems offer an efficient method of assessment, but multiple choice questionnaires would suffice. In class, students worked in groups of four discussing concepts and problem solving and this worked particularly well when students were in groups of mixed ability. Guided by the teacher, students rotated responsibilities such that every student made a fair contribution to the group activities, and could not be 'carried' by other group members. Example responsibilities include note-taker, spokesperson, data collector, time keeper. Initially students were allowed to select their own peer groups which generally resulted in students congregating based on their domicile or first language. When familiar with the process, students were set into groups that necessitated them interacting in English. It is recommended that not all classes are 'flipped' as students enjoyed the variety. Also, students reported that they prepared more for flipped sessions, and the tutor should be mindful of how much independent learning the student dedicates to flipped classes. Tutors are advised to target topics that involve more difficult concepts. Finally, accommodation is also important; whilst any type of teaching space can be adapted to flipped learning, the tutor must be able to access and easily interact with every student group.

Why flip the classroom?

Flipped learning facilitates inclusive teaching and promotes active learning. Since students are in control of their own learning, they can access material in different formats, translate it into a familiar language, reflect on learning material at their own pace and supplement it with their own research. Having prepared in advance, in class students work in small groups, discussions are structured to engage all group members, responsibilities are rotated and so every student receives a similar experience.

A flipped environment fosters interaction across demographics. International students are forced to practise English in an engineering context leading to better progress and attainment. Students formulate friendships outside their first language/domicile groups. They become better able to manage the challenges of entering HE in a foreign country.

Flipping allows more time in class to focus on consolidating students, understanding of the topic and problem solving and promotes higher order thinking and deeper learning, with lower level thinking skills achieved in prior learning before class. In Bloom's (1956) modified taxonomy shown in figure 1(in Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), thinking skills are categorised in a hierarchy ranging from simply recalling information, followed by understanding and
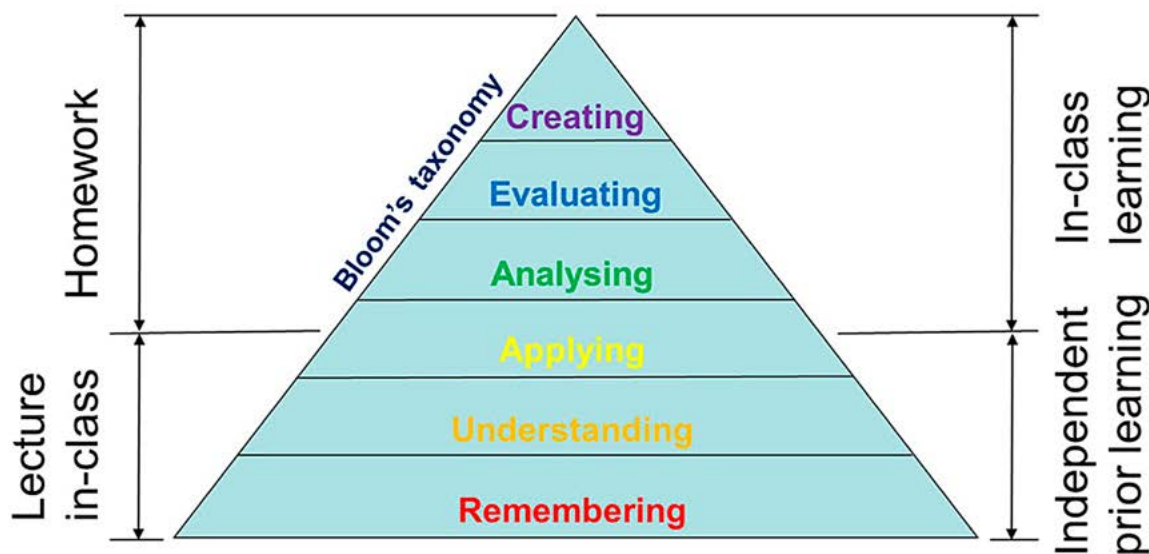
Fig. 1. *Comparing the conventional and flipped classroom in terms of Bloom's taxonomy (model based on Bloom's taxonomy)*

application of concepts, to being able to critically analyse/evaluate concepts and be creative. In a flipped learning environment students undertake basic lower levels of learning independently (such as remembering and beginning to understand) but engage in higher order thinking (applying knowledge then analysing and evaluating) with the support of teacher and peers, thus achieving deeper learning at higher learning levels.

This approach promotes active learning that is student led, as opposed to the teacher led potentially passive learning environment of the conventional classroom (where students tend to look, listen and take notes). This can also result in increased student confidence.

It improves student engagement. Credit bearing (in class) assessments encourage prior learning and attendance and so students prepared more for flipped sessions. This is reflected in the fact that more students logged onto the VLE more frequently to access course materials compared to previous presentations of the same module. Rotation of responsibilities within small group work ensures that students have equal input. Students have immediate access to peer and tutor feedback whilst undertaking more complex problem solving and deeper learning.

Overall, despite initial apprehension and reticence, students enjoyed the flipped learning environment. It resulted in a positive student experience and achievement was, in general, improved.

When invited to comment at the end of the module via an anonymous student survey (40% return) more positive than negative comments were received and when asked if flipped learning should be used for the next cohort, the majority of students recommended the approach. The only criticism of note related to taking students out of their 'comfort zone' and on reflection, the flipped approach may have been better received by students if it had been introduced soon after arrival when students did not yet know what to expect.

Example student comments included:

"I hated it at first. Wanted to be with me homies. But in the end, I quite enjoyed it"

"Thought she was just mean but then another student told me I was wasting my money by not taking the opportunity to meet other students and learn in English …."

"Surprisingly, I actually enjoyed it."

Conclusions

A successful approach of applying flipped learning to a large mixed demographic engineering cohort has been described. There are many advantages such as better engagement and attainment but in particular, the technique benefits international students by developing English language skills in an engineering context, improving their confidence amongst peers and making them more able to manage social, cultural, academic and language challenges during their transition into HE.

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Peer mentoring of international Foundation students

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Peer mentoring is the provision of one to one support, information, assistance and encouragement, typically at a time of transition and usually over a sustained period of time. This paper summarizes the findings from a Peer Mentoring project carried out at a university Foundation programme where the students are a mix of home and international, and undertake Year 0 studies in preparation for undergraduate work. Both quantitative and qualitative data found that, similar to the home students, the international students (including EU students) who applied for peer mentoring, and were allocated a mentor, showed a greater improvement in self-efficacy than those who did not apply or who were not allocated a mentor.

Introduction

All students making the transition to a university face challenges and they are even more acute when the students in question are from outside the UK, learning cultural norms alongside their degree. For example, Chinese international students often experience difficulty in adjustment to new academic conventions in the UK (Mathias, Bruce & Newton, 2013). Studies show that students' resilience and self-efficacy are particularly important when individuals face adversity (Cassidy, 2015).

Successful support for student transition can take many forms, such as online transition activities, support from academic advisors and university services. However, these interventions were all predicated on the basis of staff providing information or support to students. One powerful source of support could be from students themselves. A peer mentoring scheme, using an experienced student to support a new student can improve mentees' overall academic performance or social adjustment (Colvin & Ashman. 2010; Clark & Andrews, 2012). Chester Burton, Xenos & Elgar. (2013) studied the effectiveness of a mentoring programme supporting the transition of first year psychology students in an Australian University. The study used five aspects associated with success (capability, connectedness, resourcefulness, purpose, and culture) to measure the effectiveness of the mentoring scheme and reported that there were significant increases in the sense of connectedness, culture, and resourcefulness over the mentoring period. This could increase students' resilience and general self-efficacy. The benefits are well known, but, most studies focus on home students.

This article demonstrates that international student mentees (including EU students) on a Foundation programme can gain significantly in self-efficacy.

The context and development of the scheme

The Peer Mentoring project was applied in a university Foundation programme where the students are a mix of home and international, and undertake studies in preparation for undergraduate work. For the purpose of this study, the EU students were considered to be international students because they tend to make similar adjustment.

To develop a successful scheme, we visited schemes at other Universities and attended conferences focusing on this area of study. We planned every stage of mentoring including selecting suitable former Foundation students as mentors, creating a mentoring website and providing compulsory mentoring training. A comprehensive package of training resources was also developed.

The scheme was launched formally during Induction week. Students who apply for the scheme are matched to the mentors based on their preference. It is important to allow the mentees to choose their own mentor. Firstly, the student encounters a variety of issues that they feel can be supported through the scheme, hence, the result of choosing a mentor is personal. Secondly, this encourages them to take ownership of the scheme and lastly, mentees are more likely to make a commitment to the scheme if they have opted in themselves.

All the mentees attended Mentee Induction where the students were told their

responsibilities and the formal process of the mentoring scheme. The nature of the relationship, mentor and mentee, tends to flow in one direction, where mentors provide help and resources. This could lead mentors to misuse such power, and experience challenges and resistance from mentees (Colvin & Ashman. 2010). Both mentors and mentees were strongly advised to avoid this risk.

Mentors and mentees usually meet twice per month for the first few months, and then some of them turn to mentoring by email. The whole mentoring scheme runs between October and March annually. The mentors are well supported through regular mentor meetings with the coordinators.

Evaluation of the scheme and the findings

The evaluation of the scheme was carried out using a ten-item General Self-Efficacy (GSE) questionnaire, scaled 1 to 6 from totally disagree to totally agree, before and after the mentoring. The questionnaire measures the level of confidence of a person's belief in their competence to cope with a range of stressful or challenging demands (Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña & Schwarzer, 2005). A focus group was also conducted using questions such as: (1) Why did you apply for mentor? (2) Was the mentoring successful for you? (3) What wasn't successful? (4) Would you like to be a mentor if an opportunity is up? Furthermore, mentee's email responses to the two questions: (1) What have you got out of peer mentoring, (2) How would you improve mentoring scheme? , were collected.

The students who answered the GSE questionnaire were in four groups: the international students who applied for the scheme and were allocated a mentor (group 1); home students who applied for the scheme and were allocated a mentor (group 2); students who applied but were not allocated a mentor (group 3); and students who did not apply for the scheme (group 4). The means of the GSE scores for the groups are shown in Table 1.

All students' self-efficacy improved, but the score for improvement was higher for the students, both home and international, who had applied for Peer Mentoring and been allocated a mentor, followed by the students who applied but were not allocated a mentor. The students who did not apply for the scheme showed the least improvement. This suggests that the additional support via the peer mentoring scheme added usefully to the support provided more generally in the university. In addition, the home and international student ratio in the programme was about 3:2, but it was 1:1 for the mentees, suggesting the scheme is more popular among the international students.

The findings collected by other methods suggested that mentoring increases students' confidence, socially and academically, by answering their immediate concerns, it gives them additional support with their academic study, and inspires them to succeed. Many international student mentees became mentors in the following year.

"My mentor was a mature student and, like me, international. The fact that we are both from the same country was a major plus for me, as it's difficult to come across many Brazilians.... This gave me an opportunity to talk about my academic life with someone who knew about the gap between the two countries' education systems."

"Seeing him succeeding motivated me to work hard during this year."

"I felt a sense of reassurance from the (mentoring) program, more in daily life than in academic study. I felt that I have someone to talk to who had the same experience as me and thus can better understand me than my fresher friends."

Conclusion

We believe that the Peer Mentoring Scheme was successful. In particular, it increased students' self-efficacy and motivation to study. Overall, it added a new and important dimension to the support for students and has had a positive impact on transition and success. The scheme also highlighted some risks. For example, on one occasion, a mentee from the same country as the mentor showed too much dependence on the mentor. Thus far in the project, there have always been more students who applied to the scheme than can be offered mentors. As a consequence, a mentee may not have the mentor they wish to have.

"I didn't really use it, since I do Chemistry and there was no one doing Chemistry out of the mentors so I had to pick someone random. It was nice talking about the experience and how they found it difficult but other than that I only chatted with my mentor once since I didn't really feel the need to."

Currently the mentors are not paid; the number may increase if there were a financial incentive, however, this may adversely affect the relatively altruistic motivation for being a mentor.

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Groups	Number of students	The mean GSE score before the Peer Mentoring (out of 60)	The mean GSE score after the Peer Mentoring (out of 60)
1	24	44.6	48.7
2	24	43.6	48.6
3	28	43.9	46.8
4	15	45.2	46.1

Table 1 *The mean scores for self-efficacy*

Problem-Based Learning: solving the problem of preparing high-level EAP foundation students for undergraduate study

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To overcome the challenge of engaging students with a high level of English on a foundation EAP unit, a staged problem-based learning (PBL) approach was trialled in 2017-18. As well as developing academic language and literacy skills, student feedback showed that it also developed their ability to work collaboratively with peers and study independently of the tutor, key skills needed for undergraduate study. A new PBL-based unit has been implemented for 2018-19 based on a scheme of work co-constructed with the students which will enable further evaluation to be undertaken of this use of PBL

The Context: Why introduce PBL?

There is an increasing number of students on the University of Bristol International Foundation Programme (IFP) with a very high level of English (minimum IELTS score of 7.0 on entry). Initially these students were enrolled on accelerated EAP units covering the same scheme of work and assessments as the standard programme, but in fewer contact hours for fewer credits. Since the content was mainly the same as the standard units, although it was covered more quickly, some students became disengaged in class as they did not feel challenged and wanted more relevant, discipline-specific texts. This was further supported by student feedback, with quantitative feedback showing that only 31% of them felt satisfied with the course (agreed or strongly agreed on a Likert scale of 1 to 5), and comments such as, 'I expected more an intellectual challenge [sic] of more reading related to our course'. In addition, teacher feedback noted the challenge of stretching students sufficiently within the constraints of the unit. Therefore, a new approach, problem-based learning (PBL), was suggested by the Centre Director, Maxine Gillway, who had successfully used PBL before on foundation programmes in the UK (Gillway, 2009) and the UAE (Gillway & Bielenberg, 2006). This was trialled in 2017-18 before the implementation of a completely new course in 2018-19, Accelerated Academic Language and Literacy, based on a PBL approach.

Implementing PBL, Stage 1: What is PBL?

The first challenge was introducing PBL to the course tutors and students, most of whom had not used PBL before, and convincing them of its benefits. To solve this, a PBL approach was taken whereby students were split into small groups and given the task of investigating PBL in order to give a short group presentation to their peers outlining PBL, its stages, and benefits. To support the students in this, they were provided with a short reference list, containing sources of varying difficulty, ranging from a website to a dense journal article. Students then had to solve the mini problem of how to identify the most useful texts, how to identify which texts might be challenging, and how to approach them collectively as a group. A further mini problem was the presentations: if each group was presenting the same information, how could they maintain audience interest? To overcome this, the groups had to refer to preceding presentations and build on them, which became increasingly challenging as the presentations progressed, while the groups that had already presented had to assess each presentation and provide feedback.

This raising of mini problems meant that throughout the process the tutor was not only the 'Guide-on-the-Side' as the students investigated and presented the information (instead of 'Sage-on-the-Stage'), but the tutor was also a 'Meddler-in-the-Middle' (McWilliam, 2009 p.287), questioning and raising further problems for the students to solve.

This stage was completed in just a few lessons and by the end of the week, all of the students and tutors were much more aware of what PBL was and its advantages, using a differentiated approach for both students and tutors. For the students, there was a range of challenges, both conceptually and linguistically, while for the tutors, those who had previous knowledge of PBL could focus less on the content, while those who were less aware, were informed through the students' presentations in class. For example, the following points taken from one group's slides (IFP students, 2018) summarize PBL as follows:

Main Aspects of PBL:

- Student-led knowledge attaining method
- Measured by (Schmidt, 1983):
  1. Activation of prior knowledge
  2. Encoding specificity
  3. Elaboration of knowledge

Stages of PBL:

- The problem is analysed.
- Responsibilities are allocated among the group.
- The members of the group share their findings.
- The problem is re-conceptualised and potential solutions are generated.
- The solutions are presented in front of an audience.

Benefits of PBL:

- Improves retention of knowledge.
- Improves social skills.
- Learning issues are identified.
- Builds familiarity with research process.
- Increases responsibility.

Implementing PBL, Stage 2: What problems can students work on?

The next challenge was finding suitable problems for students to work on that would be appropriate for Level 3, yet challenging and discipline specific. However, the publicly available problems seemed to be either discipline specific, but designed to convey post-Level 3 concepts, or they were level appropriate but very generic. This challenge had also been faced by Wood and Head (2004) at the University Brunei Darussalam when they needed to create PBL materials for a new EAP

unit for premedical students. They resolved it asking the students to create the problems. Taking this approach, groups of students on the IFP were tasked with creating problems for other groups to work on that had to be 'good' PBL problems, discipline specific, but also related to Bristol Futures (2018): three broad themes that place studying in a wider context. To support the students with this task, they were again given a short reference list which would help them to research what a 'good' PBL problem is and what Bristol Futures are, and they also had to find out what degrees the other groups of students hoped to progress to and what they were interested in e.g. specific aspects of mechanical engineering, or law.

Both this task and the task in stage 1 acted as models for the students so they could see that they needed to write a short task supported by a reference list, and this added the mini problem of identifying appropriate academic sources, which they addressed by applying the CRAAP test (currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, purpose). A further mini problem was how to share the problems amongst the groups so they could choose one, and the classes solved this in different ways: some chose to share their problems by giving presentations to the class and other classes shared their problems by using online sharing tools.

Implementing PBL, Stage 3: What are the possible solutions to the problems?

After selecting a problem, groups researched them and wrote a report addressed to the audience specified in the task. The proposed solutions were also presented to the class and the other groups evaluated how well they thought each group had addressed the problem. They also gave feedback on the reports using a format of their choice to address the mini problem of how to share and give feedback on each group's report. As with the problem selection, each class resolved this in a different way; some chose to edit hard copies, while others shared their reports online. With all of the approaches, the tutor also gave feedback after the students had done so.

PBL Evaluation: What did the students think?

In 2017-18, student feedback in the end-of-course survey was much more positive with 86% of the students stating they were satisfied with the course. In addition, a separate survey on PBL showed the majority (60% or over either agreed or strongly agreed on a Likert scale of 1 to 5) felt PBL had increased the academic language and literacy skills they will need for undergraduate study, in particular, their ability to:

1. *select suitable academic texts using the CRAAP test: 67%*
2. *gain a deeper understanding of academic texts: 67%*
3. *critically evaluate the ideas in a text: 66%*
4. *develop and use appropriate reading and note-taking skills: 67%*
5. *synthesize information from a range of texts: 82%*
6. *write a thesis-led report: 70%*
7. *discuss ideas in a group (seminar skills): 76%*
8. *present opinions verbally (presentation skills): 75%*

The majority also believed that PBL had helped develop their ability to work autonomously and collaboratively, key skills necessary for HE. Specific aspects included:

9. *work collaboratively with peers: 79%*
10. *manage difficult situations in group work: 79%*
11. *critically evaluate the work of peers: 78%*
12. *critically evaluate their own work: 67%*
13. *work independently of the tutor: 72%*
14. *work independently of other students: 71%*
15. *manage their time effectively: 63%*

As well as the course feedback in Term 2, students were asked to volunteer to co-construct the scheme of work for the new 2018-19 unit. These students not only gave very positive feedback about the PBL activities they had experienced, but they were also able to improve the draft scheme

of work for 2018-19 to make the use of PBL more effective. The students' main suggestion was the continuation of a pre-PBL stage to practise selecting, understanding, and evaluating academic texts before using sources as part of PBL. This preliminary stage had been part of the old scheme of work, but was initially removed from the new, purely PBL 2018-19 unit. This pre-PBL stage was then placed back in the new scheme of work because the volunteer student feedback was also supported by the survey results (points 1-4) and tutor feedback, which indicated that students needed more support with the skills required for text selection, analysis and synthesis before starting the PBL tasks.

Student and tutor feedback will, once again, be gathered for the 2019-20 provision and volunteer students will also review the unit to further improve it, thus providing an opportunity for student input as well as a chance to solve a relevant, real-life problem.

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