From IFY to FY with Home Students: Challenges & Strategies - An EAP Tutor’s Experience

Deirdre McKenna
Email: d.mckenna@sussex.ac.uk
Talk Overview:

- Role at University of Sussex
- The Academic Development FY module
- Transition NNS → NS teaching - research
- My research at UoS
- Questions
Teaching Fellow in ELT (2016- present):
- MSc Business Communication Skills
- Pre-sessional course; EAP workshops
- General ELT
- Academic Development for FY with Home Sts (NS)*

*For this presentation: International ststs = NNS
Home ststs = NS
Key EAP/IFY Teaching Experience

2013-15: University of Nottingham (UNNC) (Ningbo, China)
- FY programme: Semester 1 (EGAP) & Semester 2 (ESAP)

2015-16: Arts University, Bournemouth
- IFY for Art & Design + English
- Tutorials with ‘international’ sts including NS e.g. Irish, American
AD= Academic Skills module for FY (since 2015)
Core module (30 credits) across 2 terms
- Year 1: Personal & Academic Development Skills (PADS)
- Year 2: AD (mixed discipline)
- Year 3: AD (subject specific groups)

Cohort of approx. 700 sts (mostly NS)
- 4 strands: Arts & Humanities, Business, Social Sciences, Psy
- Diverse student profile e.g. range of levels; personal & learning needs; motivation & attendance issues
Topics include:
- effective literature searching
- the process of academic writing
- presentation skills

Assessment: 2500 word essay + self-study tasks, 10-15 min presentation, 2x reflective writing tasks

Content similar to other EAP/IFY modules, but cohort are ‘home’ sts
Transition in Teaching Experience

Initial feelings towards AD teaching vs other teaching experiences

- Lack of confidence
- Previous NS experience
- Language input?

Reflections on my own teaching (teacher identity)

- EAP/ ELT
- Language & Culture
- Loss/ gain value?
Mick Kavanagh (Uni. of Essex) BALEAP 2017
- “Teaching Home Students: Teachers’ Attitudes to a New Challenge”
- Difficulties & worries for tutors- confirmed the challenges
- e.g. attendance, motivation, academic literacy

Michelle Munn (Uni. of Brighton I.C.) (2017-ongoing)
- (Ed.D) paper- Cultural Practices within EAP and Study Skills/Academic Development
- Diversification in the EAP role- teaching culture may be changing
Tutor questionnaires - 7 participants (June 2018)

All tutors:
- minimum of 5 years teaching experience
- majority of experience in ELT + EAP with NNS

Identified as:

- EAP/ELT/ESP Practitioner (T1-T4, T6)
- ‘teacher of communication’ (T5)
- ‘languages & communication specialist’ (T7)
Questions Asked

a) Feelings about teaching on the AD module
b) Main teaching challenges of the AD module
c) Transferrable skills/ experience from ELT/ EAP background
d) Teaching approach & methodology with AD students (NS) compared to (NNS) cohort
e) Most/ least effective ways of teaching on the AD module
f) Importance of links between AD module & FY subjects (Arts & Humanities/ Business/ Social Sciences /Psychology)
g) Advice for ELT/ EAP practitioner teaching AD for the first time
a) Feelings about teaching in AD context

Theme: Feeling uncomfortable/ lacking in confidence

“I don’t enjoy teaching AD as much as EFL. It’s not something I trained to do…” (T5)

“I feel less confident…” (T1)

“...out of my depth...damaged my confidence..” (T3)

“...initially...an uncomfortable experience... more self-conscious and exposed as a teacher” (T4)
Findings - Feelings about AD

Theme: Positive experiences

“...quite rewarding...I have been able to use my EAP experience to good effect....” (T2)

“I gain huge satisfaction from working with this cohort... different challenges...” (T6)

Overall, I am extremely motivated as I can see how I could help individuals develop their skills... (T7)
Theme: ‘Language’ in the student-teacher dynamic

Shift in ‘language power dynamic’ when teaching NS vs NNS... “made the content more critical” (T4)

“...language work was not successful. In ELT classes students understand the metalanguage. However, home students do not....” (T3)

“...fallen completely flat...unsure how to approach language activities...there are some language needs to be addressed.” (T1)

No need to grade language or scaffold lexis (T4, T5, T7)
Theme: The role/ identity of the tutor

“my validity as a language teacher in delivering a non-language course... imposter issue” (T2)

“Being their teacher (in a school like way) and taking a much more disciplined approach...” (T5)

“my role seems to be different...the need to ...let go of some of my [ELT] habits” (T7)
Theme: ‘Transition’ period for tutor

“I had not taught home students before, and the learning curve was steep” (T5)

“...process of adjustment to AD teaching... a readjustment of my view of self as teacher...” (T6)

The teaching experience would be easier next time (T2, T3)
b) Main challenges of AD module as a teacher

Theme 1: Student motivation/ attendance (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5)

Theme 2: Sts seeing AD as irrelevant/patronising (T1, T7, T4, T7) e.g.

“...patronised with the teaching of skills they considered (often quite erroneously) they already possessed” (T4)

“accusations of being patronising have resulted from focusing on...language issues.” (T1)

“some students... feel they have little to learn from the AD module” (T7)
Theme 3: Student ‘attitude’ - confidence/ anxiety issues

“...retaining complete composure during the process of transition...‘difficult’ behaviours on the students’ part.” (T6)

“...there is a lot of bravado amongst the students, with many of them anxious ...” (T3)

“...the transition... is an overwhelming experience for some students, in terms of anxiety and self-consciousness ...” (T4)

“... low confidence levels and are sensitive to critique and feedback.” (T7)
c) Skills/ experience from ELT/ EAP useful for teaching AD
- Classroom management (T3, T4, T6)
- Materials & approaches from EAP (esp. Academic writing skills) (T1, T2, T3, T5, T7) e.g.

“...there is a lot of overlap in terms of skills...” (T7)

“...the same difficulties in giving presentations, or with... essay writing” (T5)
d) Teaching approach & methodology with AD sts (NS) vs (NNS)

Theme: Student-centered class/ CLT approach (+ / - )

Student-led/ group/ communicative activities work well (T4, T6, T7)

"...tried to encourage greater interaction... mixed success... prefer to work on their own" (T2)

"...communicative strategies... do not transfer very well." (T1)
Findings: Most/ Least effective teaching

e) Most effective ways of teaching on the AD module

Student focused/ Pair or Group work \( (T4, T6, T7) \)
One to one tutorials/ feedback sessions \( (T1, T2, T3) \)
A variety of tasks \( (T1, T4, T6) \)

e) Least effective ways of teaching on the AD module

Extended whole class discussions \( (T3, T5, T7) \)
f) Importance of links between AD & FY subjects 
(Arts & Humanities/ Business/ Social Sciences /Psychology)

Very important (T1, T3, T5, T6, T7)

“...helped students to see the relevance of academic skills to their subject area” (T1)

“...this is the best way to get the students engaged with AD” (T3)

“[these links are] in line with EAP theory... This is good practice” (T5)
g) Advice for ELT/ EAP practitioner teaching AD for the first time

Use your EAP skills & materials (T1, T2, T5)
Expect AD to be different from ELT context (T3, T4, T6)
Remember sts are anxious/ nervous (T2, T4, T7)
Remember ‘transition’- sts need scaffolding & guidance (T2, T3, T5)
Findings: Advice for Other Practitioners

“Don’t be afraid to use [EAP] materials and approaches ...However...they will complete activities far more quickly” (T5)

“Be thick-skinned... teach it anyway, because chances are they don’t [know it]!” (T3)

“Focus more on the individuals than on the syllabus/curriculum” (T6)

“...seminars can be quite a face-threatening environment... students [have] mixed feelings...” (T7)

“View it as a positive experience in terms of self-reflection on current ELT/EAP practice...” (T4)
Teacher Identity & Transition
- ‘Identity trajectory’- develops over time through collective/individual practice within a particular context (Wenger, 1998 cited in Ashwin, 2015, p. 5)
- Negative student feedback → despondency// enhancing teaching (Ashwin, 2015, p. 9)
- Reassurance in reflecting & sharing T experience in transition process

Student Needs
- Needs of FY home st can be similar to IFY st e.g. training for academic writing (Jones, 2017, p.935)
- Avoid making assumptions about sts (Ashwin, 2015, p.18)

Transferrable Skills
- ESAP course design skills e.g. liaising with subject specialists & material development (Basturkmen, 2010)
- IFY/ EAP practitioner- broad range of transferrable skills (also English language specialism)... but need to modify our approach


