

InForm 2018

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

University of Sussex, Brighton

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)*
- International Sts
(NNS)



*For this presentation:
International sts = NNS
Home sts = 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



Academic Development for FY

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)

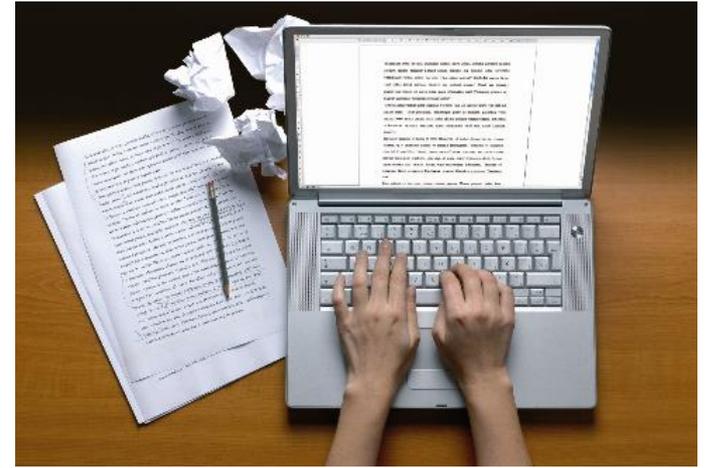
Cohort of approx. 700 sts (mostly NS)

- 4 strands: Arts & Humanities, Business, Social Sciences, Psy
- Diverse student profile e.g. range of levels; personal & learning needs; motivation & attendance issues

Academic Development for FY

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?

Research: Transition from NNS→ NS teaching

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

Research at University of Sussex

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)

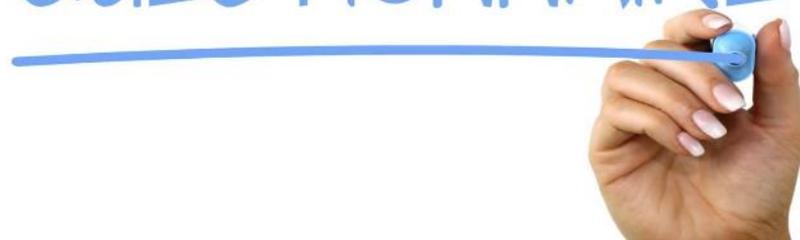
'teacher of
communication'
(T5)

'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

QUESTIONNAIRE



Findings- Feelings about AD

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)

Findings- Tutor Identity

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)*

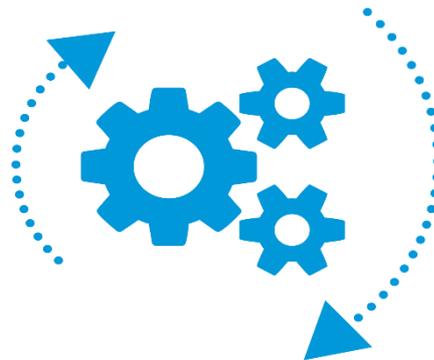
*“my **role** seems to be **different**...the need to ...**let go** of some of my [ELT] habits” (T7)*

Findings- Tutor Identity

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)

Findings- Challenges

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)*

CHALLENGE



Findings- Challenges

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)*

CHALLENGE



Findings-Transferrable Teaching Experience

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)

Findings- Approach & Methodology

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)

Findings: Importance of Links to Subjects

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)*

Findings: Advice for Other Practitioners

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)*

Discussion & Implications

Teacher Identity & Transition

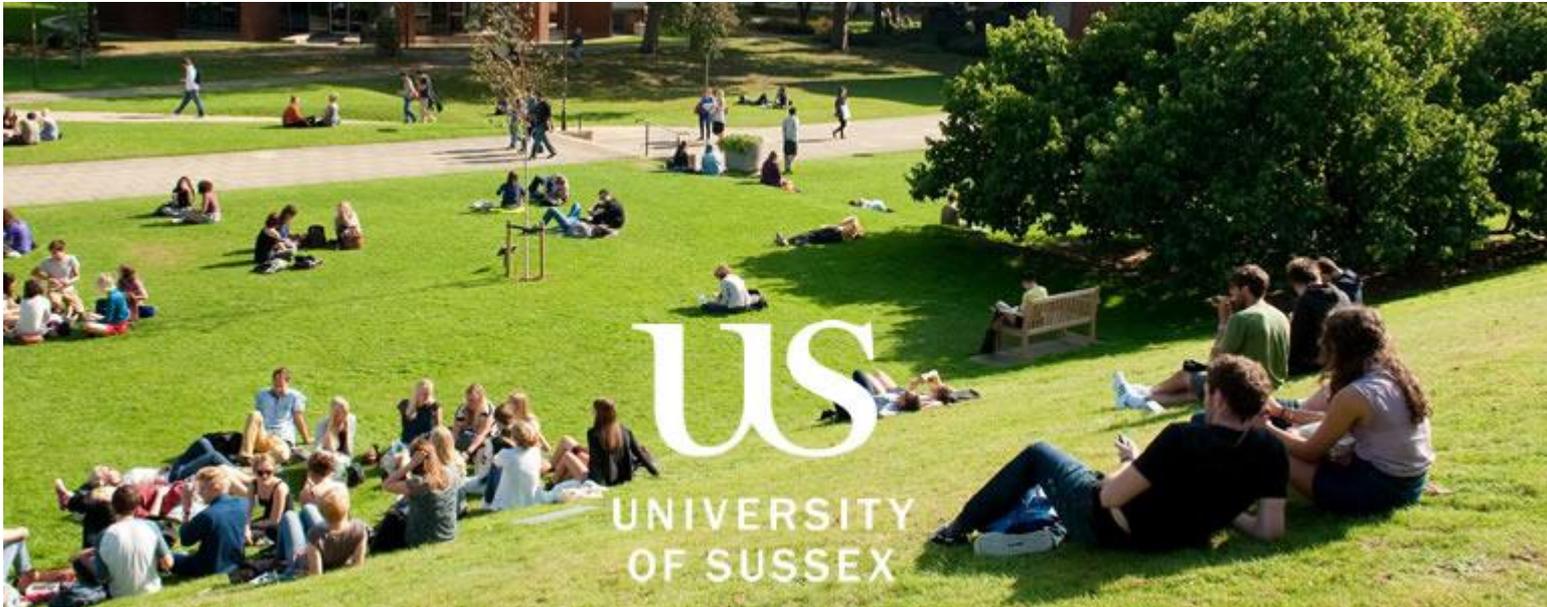
- 'Identity trajectory'- develops over time through collective/ individual practice within a particular context (Wenger, 1998 cited in Ashwin, 2015, p. 5)
- Negative student feedback → despondency// enhancing teaching (Ashwin, 2015, p. 9)
- Reassurance in reflecting & sharing T experience in transition 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



Deirdre McKenna

Email: d.mckenna@sussex.ac.uk

References

Ashwin, P. (2015) *Reflective Teaching in Higher Education*. London: Bloomsbury

Basturkmen, H. (2010) *Developing Courses for English for Specific Purposes*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Jones, E. (2017) Problematizing and reimagining the notion of 'international student experience' *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(5), 933-943

Kavanagh, M. (2017) 'Teaching Home Students: Teachers' Attitudes to a New Challenge'. *BALEAP: Addressing the State of the Union: Working Together= Learning Together*. University of Bristol, Bristol. Available at: <https://www.baleap.org/event/addressing-state-union-working-together-learning-together>

Kreber, C. (2010) Academics' teacher identities, authenticity & pedagogy. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(2), pp. 171-194

Munn, M. (2017) 'Cultural Practices within EAP and Study Skills/ Academic Development - for Ed.D in Education', *PR8008: Cultural Practices*, University of Chester. Unpublished Assignment