Comparing the needs of non-traditional and international students

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Julie Wilson
Teaching Fellow at Durham University Foundation Centre

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Overview

❑ **Current internationalisation policies**

❑ **Reasons for 'culture shock'**

❑ **Social integration - potential problems and solutions**

❑ **Academic integration – potential problems and solutions**

❑ **The relevance of EAP for ALL students**

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What is an 'international' student?

Durham University's Vice-Chancellor Professor Higgins (2011):

'All students are international'

Durham's Internationalisation Policy: 'A World University'

Offers a 'window on the world' (Campbell, 2011)

All students are joining our 'Community of practice'

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Global citizenship:
a graduate attribute

Examples of these key transferable skills are:

- ❑ Self-management
- ❑ Learning skills
- ❑ Communication skills
- ❑ Teamwork
- ❑ Problem-solving
- ❑ Information Technology

They are equally important for ALL students

(Oxford-Brookes University, 2008)

Culture Shock

Factors that can affect transition:

International students

- Degree of cultural difference between home and host country

- Educational experience

- Home environment

- Previous travel experience

- Individual personality

- Language proficiency

Non-traditional students

- Degree of cultural difference between home and the university community

- Educational experience

- Home environment

- Previous travel experience

- Individual personality

- Communicative proficiency

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CULTURE SHOCK

Phases of Culture Shock
(Ryan, 2005, HEA)

1. **Physical shock** - environment, customs and practices

2. **Language shock** – not prepared for fast-pace; colloquial/ academic language/

3. **Academic shock** – teaching and learning approaches

❖ Social shock (Sovic, 2008)

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Is cultural background the real problem?

- Failure to see students as individuals, with unique needs, experiences, strengths & weaknesses
- Generalisations / stereotyping / labelling/ prejudice

E.g. Thinking 'Chinese students are shy and quiet' might translate to not asking for the student's contributions in class in order to 'spare embarrassment'

- Culture is not always linked to national boundaries; diversity within culture (Montgomery, 2011)
- Reforms (eg. in China) leading to more 'westernised' and 'internationalised' students (Hou et al, 2011)

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Identifying potential problems
Social integration

International students

- Adjusting to independent, communal living
- Isolation, or may tend to group with similar students
- Unfamiliar /uncomfortable with British ways
- Unfamiliar /uncomfortable with 'traditional' student social activities
- Absence of family/friends' support/pressure

Non-traditional students

- May feel an 'outsider' if living out
- Isolation, or may tend to group with similar students
- Unfamiliar /uncomfortable with international students' ways
- Unfamiliar/uncomfortable with 'traditional' student social activities
- Pressure of family commitments

Possible solutions

Effective Induction

- can help with all aspects of initial integration

- ground rules can be set out clearly, though with some degree of flexibility

- staff-student relationships can be established

- a sense of community can develop in group activities

- good opportunity for questions to be answered

➢ BUT due to visa issues, some international students may miss this opportunity, so induction process should last all year

Possible solutions

Mentoring/Buddy Schemes

- staff can encourage friendship groups

- previous year volunteers can mentor new intake – ie. home Primary Education students can mentor international students

➤ BUT some research suggests that this can be patronising/more divisive (us and them).
➤ Can be difficult to manage

Possible solutions

Field trips/cultural outings

- separate from main university activities – strengthens sense of 'foundation community' membership

- opportunity to invite previous year's students to join in.

- bonding opportunity (students/staff) with shared experience

- enhances appreciation of the area beyond the institution

➢ cost can be an obstacle

❖ research area

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Possible solutions

Language Cafe

• Informal opportunity for both international and home students to socialise in a safe environment and identify common interests

• Opportunity to use English and other languages to communicate

• Can be used for collaborative revision

➢ Organisation and timing can be an issue; cost of refreshments

Identifying potential problems
Academic integration

International students

- Adjusting to a new schedule of increasingly independent study
- Unfamiliar with required academic practices
- Developing criticality – new perspectives
- Adapting to different assessment criteria
- Engaging with new topics of study
- Group work

Non-traditional students

- Adjusting to full-time, increasingly independent study
- Unfamiliar with required academic practices
- Developing criticality – new perspectives
- Adapting to being assessed academically again
- Engaging with new topics of study
- Group work

Possible solutions:
Careful monitoring of attendance/progress

- Identify problems earlier – more chance of resolving issues

- Have a clear policy in place – make sure students know about visa rules and attendance requirements

- Pastoral/academic mentoring / tutorials / 'dialogic' feedback

- Study-skills support – establish good habits early

➤ Paradox – need to be overtly prescriptive to promote autonomy

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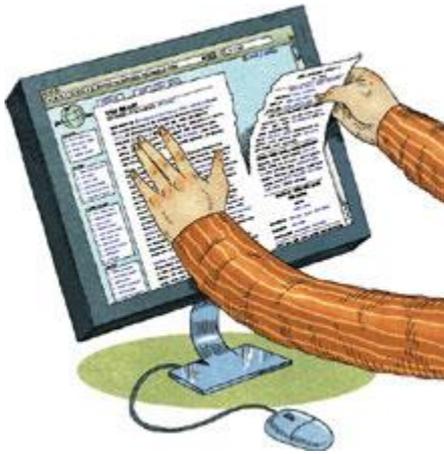
Possible solutions:
encouraging criticality

- awareness and understanding of important issues

- open and real discussion

- distinction between empirical fact and opinion

- understanding what is required of progressively more challenging types of question ie.

DESCRIPTIVE → **ANALYTICAL** → **EVALUATIVE**

Possible solutions:

assessment

- open discussion of marking schemes; clear guidelines for assignments

- use of alternative methods of assessment (eg. poster presentation; seminars; portfolios) to encourage and build confidence, especially at the start of the year

- provide constructive feedback - and guidance on how to use feedback effectively

- peer assessment and reflective activities

- moderation process

Plan
Implement
Assessment Cycle
Report/Revise
Assessment

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Possible solutions:
academic malpractice

- clear understanding of the importance of academic integrity in British universities – and the reasons behind this position

- open discussion of what they considered 'acceptable' before joining university

- case-studies as cautionary reminder of consequences

- importance of good note-taking

- teaching skills eg. re-phrasing/summarising/referencing

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Possible solutions:
cross-cultural group work

• encourage effective collaboration by initially incorporating it more in 'low-stakes' activities (formative) rather than 'high stakes' (summative) (Montgomery, 2011, Northumbria University)
• research suggests collaborative work is also more effective when groups have prior experience of each other (ibid)
• use wiki/e-portfolio to monitor contributions (eg. Lowes, 2011, Plymouth University)

➢ natural instinct to group with 'similar' people (Green and Bressan, 2011)
❖ potential research project

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Possible solutions:
new topics of study

- encourage discussion of tasks in tutorials/language cafes

- peer support and mentoring

- more choice of modules – though not always possible

➤ can be viewed by students as unnecessary when not thought relevant to chosen degree path

➤ can also reduce average marks
– timing of module?

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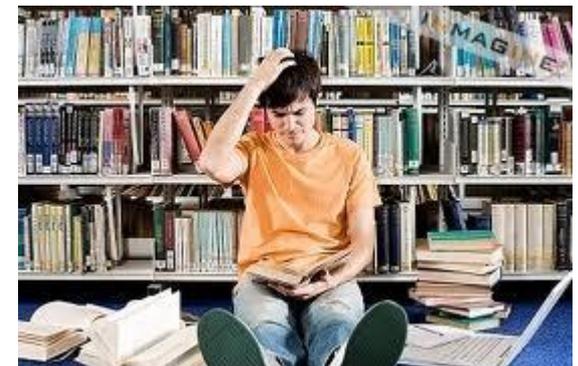
Possible solutions:
teaching academic skills

Academic writing

- importance of modelling tasks – in EAP and content modules

- awareness of conventions used in different tasks

- tasks need to be real and challenging – authentic materials and models

- careful selection of subject matter – difficult in mixed classes?

❖ Johnson, Shek and Law (1999): 'Writing as a skill for EAP is the **most deliberate act of communication** that we engage in.'

Possible solutions:
teaching academic skills

Academic reading and research

- well-planned, staged tasks that have relevance

- overtly taught strategies for reading and research (ie. skim/scan; highlighting key terms etc.)

- Independent research projects related to progression routes

- importance of note-taking

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Possible solutions:
teaching academic skills

Academic listening

- raise awareness of verbal 'discourse markers'
- think about 'top down' and 'bottom up' processing
- use authentic, meaningful materials and live lectures
- encourage effective note-taking skills

Academic speaking

- lots of structured practice
- identify useful language/phrases
- encourage equal participation
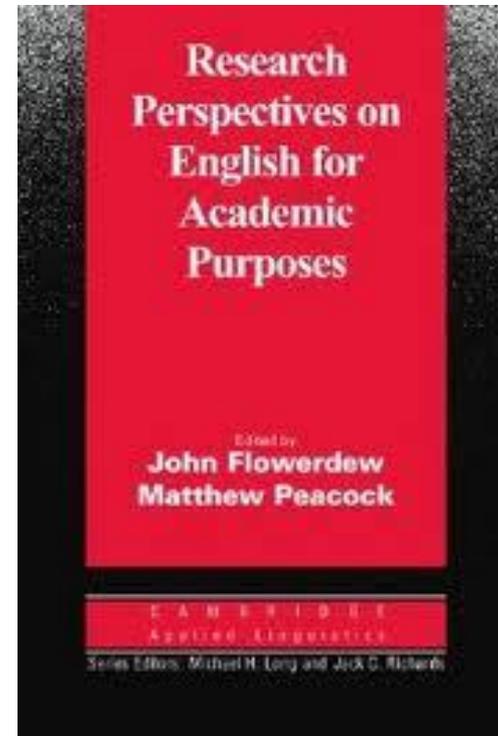

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What is EAP?

- English for Academic Purposes (EAP) - relatively new field of research

- Generally aimed at international students – global need for English

- Not an 'English language' course

- Increasingly aware that it can help home students' performance – especially foundation

Review of EAP literature

- Response to increasing number of non-native students studying in English medium universities

- Also relevant to non-traditional students' needs

Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes

Edited by
John Flowerdew
Matthew Peacock

CAMBRIDGE
Applied Linguistics

Series Editors: Michael H. Long and Jack C. Richards

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Of particular interest

- Small language errors less important – '**wide angle'** position that prioritises content in assessment

- Cultural function - EAP aimed at '**demystifying**' use of English in academic settings

- More **collaboration** with subject specialists – how language is used to represent 'target structure'

- '**The literacy teacher needs to educate not only students but also content teachers as to the nature of academic literacy**' (Johns, 2007)

Does EAP work?

One comment:

'**What we are probably doing is <u>accelerating</u> students' acclimatisation to UK academic expectations.**'

(Stavrakakis, Royal Holloway, 2007)

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