Tutors' Perceptions on the Pedagogical Validity of Teaching 'Taboo' Topics in the Second Language Learning Sector

An investigation exploring the extent 'EAL Steps for Classroom Integration' is effective in primary school language teaching

'Employability and the Arts Based Course – a Defence of the Media Production Degree

Toward an Alternative to the Traditional Writing Centre Model in Non-Anglophone Contexts: A Small-scale Study in Prague, Czech Republic

A study into Teacher Perception and Practice of Inclusive Education for Disabled Learners in Nigeria and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side. An Action Research Project using a ‘flipped classroom’ model

Reflections on student assessment as measurement and guidance towards achievement: 'I said I taught him. I didn't say he learned it.'

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Reflections on student assessment as measurement and guidance towards achievement: ‘I said I taught him. I didn’t say he learned it’.

David Kitchener
Welcome to the second edition of the University of Bolton journal, Policy and Practice in Education, which presents a small selection of our Education research students’ work. All papers submitted are peer reviewed and have to meet prescribed criteria to be accepted for publication, a process illustrating the never-ending debate as to how do we measure academic prowess or attainment? To what extent can one be fair? What criteria should a piece of academic work be judged by and how do we know it is reached? These are extremely complex questions but form the core of what we as educationalists do. For example, you are assessing this as you read it; what are your thoughts so far and to what extent do they reflect a fair appraisal; and how do you know? The papers presented here are not in any sort of order of merit but, if asked you to rank in terms of quality, how would you decide? The following exercise is presented to highlight some of the dilemmas of educational assessment.

The table below provides an overview of forms or models of assessment noted in a research exercise conducted 5 years ago at the University (Kitchener, 2010). The 1743 validated modules as recorded on the University database were examined and the type of assessment recorded against the highest weighting. Where two or more assessments had an equal weighting, each was recorded separately which equates to 2139 items of assessment.

Table 1. Profile of University of Bolton validated modules. Numbers indicate frequency of occurrence as the highest assessment weighting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay/Paper</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group assignment/role play/coaching session</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual presentation including poster and seminar papers</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal/reflective learning log/diary</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview/viva</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical or creative project/research or work based assignment</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal progress report/plan/record book</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research project or dissertation proposal or plan.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/marketing plan</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination/test</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical review of research paper/primary source</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching observation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation/thesis</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening, speaking and writing tasks</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report/critical review</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio/practical folder/workbook</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The figures therefore only reflect weighted assessments required to be recorded for validation, the study did not explore such aspects as formative assessments delivered as exercises to further engage and deepen learning but carrying no score. However, as discussed later, formative models can have a role in developing learning as suggested by Earl (2012), for example, who describes formative assessment as an integral feature of learning, the data helping both tutor and student to shape and inform the experience with the results contributing to managing planning based on noted developmental needs. However, perhaps ironically when I spoke to a sample of students, they were frequently unenthusiastic in completing tasks carrying no score leading to their degree classification. A gleaned impression was such reticence reflected an aspect of an almost consumer type relationship with the University, perhaps arising as a consequence and reaction to the neoliberal market approaches informing higher education contexts, (Crouch, 2011; Giroux, 2014), the students having an inherent expectation of a classification as a tangible product, an expensive purchase of degree study experience.

The 10 categories can be viewed as occasionally overlapping in their interpretation but there is still an impressive and imaginative range. However, where two assessments have an equal highest weighting (50/50) the majority, perhaps surprisingly, adopt the same format twice such as two portfolios or essays. The figures represent highest weightings which suggest perhaps finality in the assessment mode though for a student reaching this summative stage this might mean actually achieving several smaller scored assessments, portfolio building being the strongest indicator of layered assessment, one module required an extraordinary 24 separate assessments to be completed successfully to meet all of the learning outcomes. Whilst 24 is almost certainly unnecessarily prescriptive, the criterion-referenced approach is, one would expect, potentially more likely to be both valid and reliable in that the narrowness of a measure of a specific skill requires a very clear model of measurement. O'Donovan et al (2001) felt too there could be an opportunity to adopt a criterion-referencing approach in a HE Business School, even framing the criteria within a grading grid, but even then there remained an unacceptable degree of subjectivity in interpretation. A taxonomy might be a start in coding, Bloom et al (1956) being the most well known, but the essence of the model is a bewildering array of simplistic behavioural terminologies inviting a multiplicity of interpretation which are of minimal help in measuring, the definitions being so incredibly general, indefinable and subjective.

It was not unusual for a presentation to have lower weighting than an essay but arguably there are significant overlaps in the experience of preparation for the student in that for it to be deemed meaningful, there would be an expectation of such aspects as specialist subject knowledge complemented by the sharing of pertinent research and informed by analysis and criticality. In essence, a verbal essay. It is with this overlap as an example that I want now to move the discussion to questioning whether uniform assessment is equitable and fair; is it possible some of the difficulties educationalists experience with assessment are created by imposing a uniform model? Perhaps we should start with the student and then negotiate the appropriate assessment?

Essays in the table are the most used mode of assessment but how many students will ever write one when they complete their course? Are we imposing a genre which is inappropriate? The presentation discussion above suggests much overlap so why shouldn't a student have opportunities for more presentations and fewer essays during the course of their degree? The chances are this will enhance employability skills more. Interview/viva score a meagre 10 but could it be possible that a viva based on a poster be potentially more revealing of insight than an essay? Are essays popular because the process of assessment they invite is convenient and efficient for tutors? Once a module is validated to include a certain type of assessment, this is what has to apply, no matter what the learning needs of the students are. Such a format implies an annual homogenous group of students, which clearly is not the case, so why this rigidity of assessment? In essence, if assessment is to be meaningful, revealing, less subjective and more exactly provide a measure of engagement, why not let the student choose the assessment mode? This would be challenging for tutors, but why not? A choice would remove the assessment as a possible barrier and provide more fluidity and opportunities for students to communicate their potential. If a student excels at presentations but struggles when writing an essay, why keep insisting on more essays?

Linked to a more enabling approach, no examples of peer assessment were uncovered suggesting assessment is almost entirely tutor–led. Peer assessment in higher education is not a new concept, Dochy et al (1999
in a review of 63 studies found the approach encouraged students to become more responsible for their learning and more reflective. Boud et al (2014) note peer learning in higher education is inextricably and positively linked to peer assessment, an apparent informality more closely reflecting everyday learning but still meaningful and productive. Liu and Carless (2006) see peer feedback as a perquisite precursor to grading and wonder why academics are so reticent in applying a process which enhances the learning experience. Passive learning with no attempt to connect with taught themes is nigh on impossible when the student becomes the assessor. Assessment should not be some sort of add-on at the end of a programme of learning but rather be implemented as integral to the learning process. Is it possible academic resistance reflects some sort of fear of loss of control or authority, rebalancing the status quo can be uncomfortable? (Freire, 1972).

It was interesting to note lower weighted assessments whilst scrutinizing the module database and occasionally a reflective journal was weighted as a zero. In such cases it is unclear as to its purpose. This is a pity, Moon’s (2013) useful appraisal convincingly argues as to the positive nature of reflection in deepening understanding and Bulitt and Martin, (2005) feel it can narrow the gap between theory and practice in HE teaching. This is a fascinating angle as to the purpose of assessment, should there be more emphasis on the process of learning as a function of insight rather than the more usual insistence of assessment being informed by an appraisal of prescribed knowledge? Linked to this concept, there were very few examples of study skills being taught as an accredited module and recorded as a final assessment.

Gardener and Gardener (2012) make a useful distinction as to the purpose of assessment in that it could more productively be viewed as part of learning promotion rather than the traditional mode of assessment of learning. Leathwood (2005) highlights a wider feeling of moral panic in some quarters by the misconceived belief that universities have begun to lower standards by a weakening of assessment, however defined, to ensure student success. Assessment then is at the core of a higher education practice and thankfully will remain so. This overview merely highlights some of the conundrums and is intended to simply encourage debate which returns the discussion to the opening paragraph, which of the following would you score highest? And why? Should this journal be an audio file? Why insist on uniform guidelines for submission, why not include slides? Should an adherence to Harvard conventions be applied? And so on. Difficult to come to a justified conclusion, isn’t it?
References


Tutors’ Perceptions on the Pedagogical Validity of Teaching ‘Taboo’ Topics in the Second Language Learning Sector

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Profile

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to establish teachers’ perceptions of the pedagogical value of introducing taboo or controversial topics into an L2 classroom. In order to achieve the aims of this study a semi-structured interview was designed and conducted with five experienced ESOL tutors. A focus group of trainee tutors were also interviewed for purposes of comparison and triangulation. Overall, participants agreed that the introduction of taboo/controversial topics did have some pedagogical relevance. Specifically from a language learning point of view taboo/controversial topics were seen to be technique that could prompt previously unknown vocabulary and linguistic structures. Others recognised the potential for such issues as a method to widen the learners understanding of the attitudes and values the target culture has. In conclusion, the personal perceptions of the tutors indicate that many understood that there was an efficacy to using taboo/controversial issues as a learning tool, ranging from basic language skills to promoting cultural enrichment, and potentially promoting a higher level of societal engagement. Yet, the primary concern of maintaining the welfare of the learners was the dominating factor as to whether tutors would introduce taboo/controversial issues into the class. Lastly, there are indications that the influence of L2 tutors on possible changes to the current method of avoidance of taboo/controversial topics is much greater than realised.

Keywords: Second Language Learning, Teachers/Tutors, Taboo, Controversy, Pedagogy, Teaching/Learning Methods.
Introduction

The effect of ‘taboo’ remains a constant censor in society, and whilst the actual nature of the offensive lexis can change, language does not necessarily define the cultural attitudes to which it belongs. The relationship between the culture and language is dialogical nature, and so a complexity of factors affect how attitudes and language evolve, and subsequently how ‘taboo’ morphs. Arguably, knowing and using taboo words does not automatically guarantee cultural comprehension, especially if they are utilised incorrectly (Bada, 2000). Yet, should this mean that any and all potentially ‘taboo’ or controversial topics be avoided in the L2 classroom? Unfortunately, sources discussing the potential pedagogical value of introducing taboo/controversial topics in the L2 classroom are limited.

From the early stages, the study decided to focus upon teacher’s perceptions of the pedagogical value of introducing taboo or controversial topics into an L2 classroom. In order to assess this three research questions were formulated. The first question proposes an examination of the existing attitudes of by second language teachers to the introduction of a perceived ‘taboo’/ controversial topic in the classroom. The second question aims to evaluate the types of resources/materials and support available to tutors. The last question explores a framework/strategy that could be implemented to encourage discussion that adhere to inclusive practices, and improve the students’ ability to think critically about controversial topics.

Literature Review

The issue as to whether taboo subjects should be taught has been discussed by various authors but no definitive answer has been concluded (Evans et al, 1999; Holster, 2005; King, 2009 & Hudson, 2011). The sensitive nature of doing so, and the potential class conflict that may arise from introducing controversial topics, is regarded as a serious limitation. However, it is arguable that there is a discrepancy between many tutors’ teaching practice, which is generally not introducing controversial topics, and their belief that such topics should be addressed. This concern has been identified in academic spheres, such as Byford et al. (2009) and Oulton et al. (2004), and by non-academic, but reliable sources (Dellar, 2013; British Council, 2006). This indicates the subject area this study is researching is being discussed in public sphere, as well as the academic environment, implying that this issue is relevant to contemporary English language teaching and learning.

Various scholars point to the seamless connection of both language and culture, and argue that the dialectical nature of the two should not be underestimated (Chomsky, 2006; Kramsch, 1995 & 2001; Bryam & Grundy, 2002; Nault, 2006; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). McDevitt (2004) holds that since no human is independent of its culture then studying a second language is studying the nature of people other than oneself. It has also been stated that if an individual is not aware of the cultural elements of a society then they will ‘encounter significant hardship communicating meaning to native speakers’ (Bada, 2000: 101). It is stated that without the incorporation of culture the study of language is inaccurate and incomplete, and the tendency for individuals to ‘espouse ethnocentric views’ when faced with a different culture will not be discouraged (Genc & Bada, 2005: 74). Consequently, this will lead to difficulty understanding opposing perspectives, potentially causing a rejection of the ‘other’ culture.

The issue of teaching controversial issues, and the anxieties of doing so, by tutors has been discussed by various disciplines, at different education levels, but remain fairly absent in the language learning sector (Hitchings, 2011; Oulton et al., 2004; Cotton, 2006; Dewhurst, 1992; Hess, 2008). The majority of the discussion does stem from civic educators and provides frameworks for social studies education. Underpinning these discussions is the argument that students need to develop their critical thinking skills through higher-order thinking tasks (McLeod et al., 2010). This will begin the process of becoming learners becoming engaged and responsible citizens. Hess (2008) sums up this frequently proposed reasoning succinctly stating that if individuals learn how to ‘deliberate controversial issues, especially those that focus on public problems…’ then the individual will be able to participate effectively in a democratic society (p.124).

The foundation of these ideas appear to stem from the philosophy of critical pedagogy, first described by Paul
Freire (1972), and developed by subsequent proponents (McLaren, 2002; Kincheloe, 2008). Its basic premise is that education cannot be divorced from politics, and that agendas determined by authorities, as well as notions brought to class by both tutors and students, should be examined. Repeated analysis of one’s preconceived notions allows for a continuing process of ‘unlearning’ and ‘learning’, and so question your assumptions.

Further to this, if taking the constructionist view, students are not passive receptacles of information, but bring their own diverse range of understandings and experiences into the classroom. It then can be concluded that individuals learn from one another and constructing new meanings that relate to existing schemata (Bruner, 1961; Good & Brophy, 1994). The classroom, by its very nature of being a public space, is a place where different concerns, ideas and beliefs will be voiced and it is the purpose of this school environment to develop understanding to become socially responsible citizens (King, 2009; Kelly, 1986). Therefore, the questions remains centred on how to approach the discussion of controversial issues since there appears little guidance in resolving the challenges that arise when discussing taboo or controversial issues.

However, there remains a strong culture of omission in English Language learning in regards to topics deemed too sensitive for students, especially for learners who originate from conservative societies, such as areas in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) (Hudson, 2011 & Aydarova, 2012). Numerous arguments can be levelled against this approach of ‘avoidance’ to language teaching. Hudson (2011) argues that controversy is the ‘spice’ of a language and by removing it a ‘dry, technical and boring language’ is left leading to demotivation and behavioural problems (p.128). Furthermore, in deciding what to omit tutors are appointing themselves as ‘guardians of a language’ by censoring information. A pointless endeavour in an age of globalisation and international communications where an awareness of culturally sensitive topics is increasing (Hudson, 2011; Hyde 1994: 297). Kumaravadivelu (2008) argues that by not teaching culturally specific customs will discourage the promotion of a global cultural conscious. Learners should confront their inherent beliefs as well as others as a part of this development.

A particular point worth noting relates to the morality of censoring the language. The literature related teaching controversial issues in language learning it becomes apparent that little has been written in regards the ethical nature of censoring topics. Gray (2013) strongly states that tutors are facilitators of cultural norms, and in omitting controversial issues are in fact reinforcing a taboo that further marginalises sections of society that may ‘offend’ a culturally conservative learner; such discussion of sexual identities. This idea is supported by Evans et al. (1999) who hold that the power of taboo is transmissible, and that if one controversial topic is ‘tabooed’ this could lead to a ‘prohibition of discussing issues’ in general (p.296). Yet trying to avoid all topics that could be deemed offensive is impractical since anything can be offensive to someone. Evans et al. (1999) recommend that using common sense when selecting materials to avoid a ‘watered-down curriculum’ (p.300).

In order to create an environment where topics can be freely discussed Oulton et al. (2004) advocates the use of a balanced approach. This is where multiple perspective are outlined for learners to draw their own conclusions, after acknowledging all sides. Strategies employed by the teachers within the study involved organised debates, role-play and resource-based learning. Yet whilst a range of views are offered it remains evident that students can selectively choose information that supports their preconceived notions, and so a failure to directly challenge assumptions is present (Barton & McCully, 2005). However, it is arguable that the individual could successfully express, or act, an opinion contrary to their own without truly employing critical thinking, and reflecting upon their own assumptions. Thus, undermining the purpose of such activities.

In addition to the drawbacks previously outlined, Kubota (2014) points out that the balanced approach is inadequate when tutors are faced with a spontaneous introduction of a controversial topic. With no prior preparation it would be unreasonable to assume that a balanced approach, accounting for all perspectives, could be implemented with such short notice. Kubota (2014) discusses this in relation to a student who denied a historical genocide, a view that the tutor had never contemplated, and ‘caught [him] off guard’. From this episode Kubota reflected that a preferred answer is generally desired from teachers who introduce a contentious issues, calling it a ‘privilege’ approach, and is potentially a way to avoid causing unnecessary offence or class conflict.
However, it is notable that a significant factor in maintaining neutrality is fear of reprisal, and it remains questionable whether neutrality offers the best route for learners to critically engage. Cotton (2006) suggests that teacher neutrality could allow some students to dominate the discussion, and prevent a deeper exploration of the topic in hand. Additionally, if the teacher remains constantly neutral then this will result in an environment where all views, not matter how extreme, are equally valid, and that an individual’s behaviour is above criticism. The resulting problem is succinctly argued by Nieto (1995), who states if all views are treated as equally valid regardless of the extremity of the view, such as Holocaust denials, then ‘people and events can lose their moral center’ (p.197).

Clearly there is no absolute answer to how one should introduce, discuss and debate controversial issues. The diversity of the classroom is undeniable and the teacher will exercise caution when dealing with these subjects. Though alternative approaches based on different theories have been formulated they are all framed in conceptual terms. Studies or well-defined strategies on how to actually implement different teaching methods, such as critical affirmation, are rare. The theory of engaging higher-order thinking and fostering critical thinking skills may be sound, but it makes a rather large assumption that all learners, and tutors, are prepared to undertake a process that sees them ‘detach’ from their preconceived notions, or are even able to truly understand a perspective that may so alien to their own.

Methodology

The aim of this study to investigate the personal opinions of experienced and novice tutors who teach English as a second language. In broad terms it seeks to establish whether tutors regard the discussion of controversial/taboo topics in the classroom as an effective method of language and cultural learning. A specialist, or purposive, sample group has been used as participants have been selected based on a predetermined criteria of the target population (Newby, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). The study required data from tutors that are specialised in L2 teaching, specifically in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and are knowledgeable in their professional field. Thus a sample within these parameters was selected. Three of the participants are employed at a university, and work with L2 students aged eighteen and above. The remaining two interviewees teach at local college, and thus work with L2 students aged fourteen to nineteen years of age.

This study followed Kvale (2007) ‘seven stages of an interview inquiry’. Firstly, the purpose of the study was formulated, and from this, it was decided that the design of the study should be an interview with qualitative questions posed. It is an effective method in obtaining data about participants’ attitudes and values, which is precisely what the study aims to ascertain (Cohen et al., 2007; Byrne, 2006). A semi-structured interview was decided upon, and a schedule of ten questions was originally drafted. This was conducted in a one-to-one pilot study with an experienced tutor. A semi-structured interview was then decided upon to allow follow-up questions.

All six interviews were conducted in private rooms over a three week period. Before the interview a pre-activity was presented to the participants. Six topic areas identified as controversial in the Evans et al. (1990 cited by Evans et al., 1999) study were given to the participants on cue cards, with an additional three blank cards (Appendix 7). These areas were abortion, pornography, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, open discussion of personal/family relationships and obscene language. First the participants were asked to write up to three topics they considered controversial on the blank cards. After this, they were shown the six topic areas and asked whether they agreed with that the items presented were controversial. Participants were then asked to rank the cards in order of which topics they would find most difficult to discuss in the L2 classroom.

Following this activity, the participants were asked eight questions and their answers recorded on a digital dicta-phone. At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed and an opportunity for them to add any information or ask any questions was offered. Once all the interviews were completed the recordings were then transcribed by the researcher. From the transcription an inductive approach to coding was used, whereby the coding structure emerged from the data through a process of tagging. From here, links between the codes was interpreted to begin building ‘themes of associated concepts’ (Newby, 2010: 469).
Findings & Discussion

Overall, participants agreed that the introduction of taboo/controversial topics did have some pedagogical relevance. Specifically from a language learning point of view taboo/controversial topics were seen to be a technique that could prompt previously unknown vocabulary and linguistic structures. The fact that the subjects were controversial meant that some participants reasoned that this would facilitate a higher level of engagement from the learners, which would be of particular importance if the class was generally apathetic. Others recognised the potential for such issues as a method to widen the learners understanding of the attitudes and values the target culture has. In learning what was acceptable, or not acceptable, the participants reasoned that this would assist in the learner adapting to another way of life that was potentially very different from their native country, and provide them with a basic civic education so they could effectively function within it. The conviction to which participants believed taboo/controversial topics had in promoting cultural enrichment, and thus enhancing language learning, was dependent on how the tutor perceived their role as educator to be. For some, the primary purpose was to teach English, and these questioned whether taboo/controversial topics were necessary to achieve language learning, arguing that other methods could serve the same end. Others, who saw themselves as social facilitators, were more open to idea that controversial issues had a place within the L2 learning environment in terms of cultural enrichment and participation. Thus, they were more willing to assign pedagogical value to the introduction of taboo/controversial issues.

From the interviews it was possible to discern that previous experience of purposely introducing taboo/controversial topics was limited to a few of the participants. This meant that an examination of existing resources or support was limited. Rather, discussion centred on hypothetical reasoning based upon the participants' current teaching position. All the participants held the assumption that should they want to introduce a taboo/controversial topics then their colleagues, and institution, would support them. Though this was markedly less certain with the trainee tutors, possibly due to having less confidence in their own efficacy, which means their belief in their own capabilities to achieve the student outcomes, or in the security of their job position (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolf-Hoy, 2001; Byford et al., 2009).

In regards to existing L2 resources, none of the participants could identify any specific materials that are aimed at approaching taboo/controversial issues in the L2 classroom. From this, adaptation of existing L2 teaching methods were recommended, such as the use of realia, guest speakers and role-play, which were framed to introduce new vocabulary, or linguistic structures. These techniques also offer a way to introduce taboo/controversial subjects whilst maintaining an emotional distance, so that learners did not have volunteer their own viewpoints. Focus remained on stressing the importance of effectively managing the introduction, but with little guidance offered in how this would be achieved. Advice given centred on action to take should a significant conflict arise, which was to abandon the session altogether and possibly reprimand any unacceptable behaviour.

In terms of developing a possible framework to help manage the above problem, as well as promoting inclusivity and critical thinking, some limited suggestions were provided, especially since the potential link between language learning and critical thinking had not previously been considered. Adamant amongst the participants was that the tutor should know their learners, in terms of religion, background experience, culture and ethnicity, before introducing a taboo/controversial issue. Clearly, the process of acquiring this knowledge would be a long-term affair and thus substantial amount of preparation is required, perhaps weeks in advance. Trust would have to be developed between the learners and tutor so they were a cohesive group, which would enable an open discussion. The development of critical thinking was mainly perceived to be achieved through ensuring that learners’ present their viewpoint with a justified reason as to why they thought this. Probing questions aimed at encouraging the learners to ‘trace back their opinions’ was suggested as a way for them to challenge their assumptions. Similarly, the method suggested to promote inclusivity was a top-down approach of reinforcing ground rules that emphasise the fact that everybody’s opinion is valid, and offensive language or behaviour would not be tolerated.

Overall, it was apparent that the majority of the participants had not considered the possible effects that taboo/controversial topics could have on language learning in detail until this study. The result of this was that though
many identified a linguistic-based learning or cultural enrichment, the connection to the possibility of enhancing critical thinking skills was not naturally developed or expanded on until they were prompted in the last question. Regardless of personal perceptions on the pedagogical value of taboo/controversial issues, the concern for the learners’ comfort and emotional safety was found to be the dominating factor in determining if such issues would be introduced into the L2 class. A decision that is personal and unique to each tutor and their class.

**Theoretical Implications**

The findings support the assertion that controversial/taboo topics are systematically omitted from the language learning sector, through both teaching styles and resource material (Evans et al. 1999; Gray, 2013). The absence of perceived offensive subjects remains the status quo, mostly done to prevent conflict within the L2 class, even when this practice contradicts the tutors’ personal opinion that such issues should be introduced (Oulton et al., 2004; Byford et al. 2009). The evident idealism expressed by the majority of the participants that taboo/controversial topics should be introduced in the L2 class appear to stem from a conviction that tolerance could be developed through these learning experiences. Whether high order thinking is achieved by L2 learners, the process facilitates the development of skills to refute others and justify themselves. If these skills are argued to be important as so delivered as part of the standard education of native speakers, then these skills can be seen as essential civic competencies that allow the L2 learner to participate in the society more effectively as well (Hess, 2008; McLeod et al., 2010). However, whether open discussion will be encouraged in this manner in the future is doubtful without more research.

Tutors play a critical role in the ‘stifling or promoting’ of discussion of taboo subject. It has been argued that by avoiding contentious issues L2 teachers are instrumental in reinforcing a taboo that is not reflective of the target culture (Bickmore cited by Evans et al., 1999; Thornbury, 2006). This requires an informed decision made by the tutor, yet for those who do desire to introduce such issues support and guidance is limited. Responsibility for the omission of taboo issues can be, and have been, placed on L2 publishers’ reticence to include them (Gray, 2002; Helgesen, 2007 & Viney, 2008 cited by Masuhara et al., 2008; Rajabi & Ketabi, 2012). There was not a high awareness of supportive resource material aimed at helping tutors broach taboo/controversial subjects, though it has been indicated that the tutors were capable of adapting existing L2 teaching practices to accommodate such issues. Evidently, the influence of the institution and its explicit policies may restrict this, but there was an understanding amongst participants that in working in a supportive climate then a substantial level of autonomy could be granted (Meyer & Bowan, 2008). It indicates that there is a possibility that this autonomy could be utilised in introducing taboo/controversial issues, perhaps on an experimental basis. Therefore, indicating that the tutors themselves hold much more influence over the nature of teaching practice than previously asserted, especially if not overly reliant on existing resources.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this investigation into teacher’s perceptions of the pedagogical value of taboo subjects in the second language learning classroom has uncovered a complexity of factors that can affect the perspective of the individual. The primary concern of maintaining the welfare of the learners was the dominating factor as to whether tutors would introduce taboo/controversial issues into the class. Yet this was a matter of application. The personal perceptions of the tutors indicate that many understood that there was an efficacy to using such issues as a tool, ranging from basic language skills to promoting cultural enrichment, and potentially promoting a higher level of societal engagement. Owing to the fact that this is a preliminary study into an under-developed area of pedagogy these results cannot be generalised to a wider population, though they do present some interesting areas for development.

In particular, the latent influence of the tutor presents some interesting potential in establishing steps to erode the culture of omission within the L2 sector. The encouragement for tutors to engage with taboo/controversial issues in a more proactive way could engender a deterioration of a tradition that promotes the avoidance of taboo/controversial subjects. The dialogical nature between teaching theory and practice ensures that that
implementation of taboo/controversial topics as a learning tool in classrooms would inform academic discourse, and vice versa. Thus, beginning the removal of the ‘taboo’ in discussing the practical applications of taboo/controversial subjects in regards to L2 learning, and generating discourse which can assess the pedagogical value of such issues more clearly.
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‘Facilitating Greek young learners with Asperger syndrome into the mainstream EAL (English as an Additional Language) classroom through the use of Interactive Whiteboard Technologies’

Sophia Sagia
Profile

Sagia is a teacher of English and German as a foreign language in Greece. She holds an MA and a PhD in English from Washington International University and a BA in Business Administration from the University of Patras. She also holds BTEC certificates in “Coping with emotional and behavioural disorders in children” and in “Managing students with different educational needs in an inclusive environment” as well as certificates by the Greek Kapodistrian University in “Autism”, “Parents Counselling”, “Educational Psychology” and “Dyslexia and Learning Difficulties”. She was a Local Secretary for the Cambridge-ESOL exams in 2003-2004. She has successfully completed an MPhil in Special Education from The University of Bolton. Her research interests include learners of EAL with Autism Spectrum Disorders and inclusion for SEN children.

Acknowledgments

The completion of this research would not have been possible without a few individuals who have supported me throughout my education. Therefore I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr David Kitchener for the valuable guidance, academic support and patience, to my husband for his encouragement, invaluably constructive criticism and advice and to the research participants and their families for their cooperation in this study.

Abstract

Students on the spectrum are often seen as having difficulty in learning a foreign language. This assumption often works as an additional barrier to their successful integration in the mainstream education, robbing them of one more learning opportunity in comparison to their peers. Their abilities have often been overlooked or underestimated and their needs have been given low priority. However, on the basis of their cognitive abilities children with Asperger syndrome are attractive candidates for inclusive education although some teachers still express their concern. Obstacles to participation reside mainly in the school environment and such barriers can be eliminated as new technology seems to offer exciting opportunities to that end, IWBs being one of them. Recent literature has indicated a plethora of ways to support children’s learning through the use of the IWB.

This study explores ways to facilitate the learning and inclusion of students with Asperger syndrome in EAL through the use of the IWB. The research took place in a language school in Greece and a case study approach was employed with naturalistic observations and semi-structured interviews so as to investigate how the IWB as a teaching and learning tool enhanced the teacher’s pedagogical practices and allowed her to meet the specific needs of the two participants.

Findings suggest that new technologies offer new answers on dealing with barriers for children’s participation in education and social life but also that inclusion is inherently dependent on the teachers’ perception of technology as a facilitating factor, on their attitudes towards children’s with AS needs, in-service training and on the provision of sufficient resources. The case study also reports on various strategies that can potentially help students with AS meet their learning objectives.

Keywords

ASD (autism spectrum disorders), AS (Asperger syndrome), EAL (English as an Additional Language), IWB (interactive whiteboard), inclusion
Introduction

Asperger syndrome with characteristics first defined by Hans Asperger (1944) lies within the autistic spectrum. It is characterized by difficulties in social interaction and communication and stereotyped behaviors. Although subgroups of AD, Asperger's disorder and PDD-NOS were combined into one broad diagnosis: autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in DSM-V since May 2013, it is still widely used by people on the spectrum and practitioners alike.

Most students with Asperger syndrome receive their education in mainstream classrooms with teachers who have limited experience and training with children on the spectrum (Myles, 2003). Social skills deficits remain the greatest challenge for them. According to Wire (2005) and Humphrey & Lewis (2008) a number of barriers prevent these students from making the most of their education although a proportion of individuals can achieve high academic qualifications (Baron-Cohen, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2002).

Children with Asperger syndrome are typically in the normal or higher range of cognitive and intellectual ability (Choi & Nieminem, 2008). Thus, most children with Asperger syndrome are placed in mainstream schools. However, such factors as an inclusive school culture and appropriate teacher training have been overlooked, thus allowing for general problems connected to the dynamics of the classroom to emerge.

In Greece, where this research was undertaken, students on the spectrum are often misunderstood by teachers who find them challenging to work with and as literature suggests a legislative framework is not enough for an inclusive education (Padeliadou & Lampropoulou, 1997; Faragoulitaki, 2001; Vlachou, 2006; Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010; Gena, Alevizos et al, 2013).

Students with AS interact with peers but often in an odd and self-centered way as they have difficulty with social communication (Wing, 1981; Howlin & Goode, 1998). They also take language literally (Attwood, 2006) and find it difficult to understand and predict actions of others (Baron-Cohen, 2008). This has often prevented them from having an equal opportunity to fulfill their cognitive potential. This is so in the field of foreign languages (Oda, 2010).

Education is the key for inclusion and social justice. Inclusive education is every child’s right. However, the daily reality for children with disabilities is frequently one of discrimination and exclusion (Slee, 2007). Providing equal opportunities of foreign language learning to everyone including children on the spectrum relates to fundamental human rights. Creating an “autism friendly society” does not necessarily have to be very difficult or costly. The types of adjustments required can often be small and easy to do, with a bit of creativity and a lot of empathy (Slee, 2011). Children with AS deserve no less.

Language learning is a powerful tool for building tolerant and inclusive multicultural societies. Success in foreign language learning extends beyond communicative competence and includes personal and social development, tangible advantages in the job market, reduction of isolation, opportunities for meaningful communication and increased ability to understand and empathize across cultural lines. The assumption that people with autism have less ability to acquire foreign languages still prevails, although many studies indicate that their language development is unhindered (Hermelin, 2001 cited in Oda, 2010; Wire, 2005; Attwood, 2006; Besnard, 2008 cited in Oda, 2010).

Thus exclusion or in the best case problematic inclusion in the language classroom is often the result and students with AS find themselves locked in a vicious circle of educational rejection.

The real work of enacting inclusion in the school environment belongs to teachers, parents, children and support staff working together in participation and dialogue so as to find a form of inclusion that can meet learner needs and maximize inclusion. As Ravet (2011) proposes, collaboration, flexibility and creativity accompanied by an understanding of autism is the only “recipe” for the inclusion of children on the spectrum. The move towards mainstream inclusion, which has been largely welcomed, is not always fully supported with
adequate training or resources. Regarding teacher training many teachers in mainstream schools think that the education of students with AS lies outside their responsibility as they feel teaching lessons concerning social and life skills is the work of special education teachers. In order to avoid barriers to these students’ learning and participation, there is a need to shed light on teachers’ perceptions and beliefs. As far as resources are concerned technology enhanced education has been a major trend in recent years so there is a significant body of research in the area of digital technologies and Asperger syndrome. There is limited research, however, into the use of Interactive Whiteboards (Interactive equipment used in conjunction with a laptop and a projector to incorporate software, Internet links and data projection) in relation to pedagogical practices in foreign language classrooms and especially children with AS. At the same time with the inevitable proliferation of new technologies in the classroom the role of the teacher is changing. Teachers who are enthusiasts have immediately integrated IWBs, others have been cautious and a few have ignored them. As Wheeler (2001) states some teaching resources become obsolete, computer based testing will make older forms of assessment redundant, teaching strategies and resources can be shared through the internet. Therefore, teachers, including those of children with AS must begin to reappraise the methods by which they meet children’s learning needs.

Methodology

This research has adopted a mixed methodology comprising elements of a case study and action research following an ethnographic paradigm. This methodology was chosen because of the small number of participants and my relationship with them as their teacher of English and the fact that it was conducted in a naturalistic setting. It dealt with the study cases of two children with Asperger syndrome included in a group of eight (six typically developing) who are learning English as an additional language. The case study was selected as it brings us to an understanding of a complex issue and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research through extensive description and contextual analysis (Yin, 2002). Action research was chosen as it is the key to making research relevant to the concerns and needs of teachers and the education profession (Kemmis, 1986). It is carried out by teachers in their own classrooms and the research goals and questions are local and specific to their own teaching environment (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). So this attempt to reflect honestly and critically on one's teaching practice and to share these reflections with colleagues brings added value to this project.

This study aims to give a portrayal of a specific situation identifying the unique features of interaction within it and providing an example of “real people in real situations” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). It examines the practical experiences of a teacher integrating the IWB into her practice in an effort to meet the curriculum and at the same time to facilitate learning of English as an Additional Language for students with AS. The goal in this project was one of describing a specific group in detail and of explaining patterns that may exist and not one of discovering general laws of human behavior.

The research project took place at a Language School situated in a suburban area of Athens, Greece. Courses in language schools in Greece aimed at children and teenagers are specially designed to improve students’ language skills and provide preparation for the recognized language exams (mainly CELA, University of Michigan Examinations, ESB, Edexcel etc.)

Throughout the research conscious efforts to maintain confidentiality were made. This project was conducted according to the University of Bolton “Code of Practice for Ethical Standards in Research involving Human Participants”. Consent letters were given by parents of the participants and the students themselves agreed to be interviewed. The identity of the participants, “Mary” and “James”, has been protected by the use of pseudonyms.

Data collection

Research instruments were used for both the baseline and the intervention phase which included language skills observation protocols, behavior observation protocols and basic language skills control lists so as to check
the behavior and the language skills of students. Questionnaires for students and parents to collect information regarding their goals and expectations in EAL learning have also been used and examples of students’ work and tests results before and after IWB application in terms of motivation and interactivity. Data were also collected from legislation and literature, field notes and diary keeping.

Two assistants were used for the observations (an experienced EFL teacher and a psychologist specialized in students with autism). There were 10 observations of whole-class lessons in the baseline phase (5 by the language teacher observing discourse management and language skills and 5 by the psychologist observing behavior and social skills) and 10 observations in the intervention phase. Baseline phase was undertaken from September 2011 to May 2012 and Intervention phase from October 2012 to May 2013.

In order to enhance internal validity, the research triangulated the views of parents and students. A phenomenological approach respects the meanings created by the participants. In this way, “the other’s” way of seeing the world is communicated through the words of the students in the interviews. The words from the students themselves provide an insight and illustration of the growing published understandings about the characteristics of Asperger syndrome.

Although this is a small study which makes no claims to generalize the findings, I felt that within the brief of illuminating the research questions, cross checking in this way provided validity. The commitment to truth, openness and ethics that underpins all the processes and procedures in this research contributed to keeping it honest and believable.

Findings

The research focuses on understanding whether the use of IWB can facilitate foreign language learning for students with Asperger syndrome and I aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Do Interactive Whiteboard Technologies help students with Asperger syndrome develop specific language skills in English as an additional language (EAL)?
2. To what degree such technologies modify and affect the teacher’s role?
3. Can IWB Technologies facilitate foreign language learning for students with Asperger Syndrome (AS) in terms of motivation and interactivity?
4. Can IWBs facilitate inclusive education in the foreign language classroom for students with Asperger syndrome?

Collected data indicated that both participants were enthusiastic with the use of IWB. They were willing to participate in the lesson. Comparison of their behaviors after the intervention phase showed that their social skills in the classroom environment improved. This improvement was apparent due to the fact that participants wanted to engage in activities with other students. Social interactivity was enhanced and student motivation was increased. The findings suggest that IWBs are appealing to children with Asperger syndrome, force students to engage with others and provide opportunities to teach attention, social interactions and communication. The IWB can provide assistance in the areas of social and behavioral learning for children with AS through modeling and visual support.

There was some improvement in student attitude towards the lesson itself. Students’ questionnaires showed that both children liked learning English. “James” reported that he liked taking tests and “Mary” liked being with “friends”; however they both felt bored in class when activities that didn’t interest them came up. They always felt frustrated in the speaking activities and had problems understanding reading texts. Students’ answers were consistent with parents’ answers as they want to obtain knowledge on the subject. Parents think English will be important for their future and students feel they will be able to communicate through the Net. On the other hand parents feel that activities that frustrate them are grammar ones while learners feel the hardest for them is the speaking part of exams.
Regarding the logistics of the lesson with the use of IWB there were fewer interruptions during the lesson as both participants remained focused and more actively involved. Visual stimulation was used to the full and students were eager to take part in every lesson. However, there were also signs of competitiveness among students on IWB games and both participants had problems accepting “defeat”. While enthusiasm peaked, the major challenge also lurked i.e. the danger of the enthusiasm turning to obsession and private use of the IWB. Instead of enhancing social skills, exercises can easily become more stereotypical. IWBs are appealing to children with Asperger syndrome, force students to engage with others and provide opportunities to teach attention, social interactions and communication.

Regarding language skills reading comprehension remained challenging for both as the two participants showed little understanding of abstract concepts and ideas, metaphors and idioms. The Speaking part of the Cambridge KET test is two-paired, conducted face-to-face with another candidate and this was confusing for both participants. “James” had little problem asking and answering the questions but couldn't hold eye contact, while “Mary” seemed better at holding eye contact but had problems remaining to the topic. Nevertheless, they both showed improvement after the use of Cambridge KET videos showing what they had to do and the visual support created by the teacher. As for the writing part of the test they had problems to elaborate answers. As a result the IWB use in itself does not guarantee linguistic development unless the teacher uses certain strategies to help learners.

Once again the teacher plays the most important role as he/she is the one to create the appropriate material for learning. The teacher’s role of “facilitator” is highly dependent, however, for success upon the amount of prior preparation. Teachers need strategies to help them cope socially and academically with clear explanations and encouragement of positive interactions. The IWB creates a new set of routines and the teacher has to be flexible and resourceful to create appropriate activities which enhance learning and socialization for students with AS. The findings accord with previous literature which indicates that if learning is to occur some cognitive effort on the part of the students is also required. In this view the role of the teacher is one of setting tasks which present some challenge to the learners and then “orchestrating” activities (Woods & Pollard, 1998; Kennewell, 2001).

The success of inclusive education for children with AS relies on the right mixture of prior planning, resources, good communication and creativity as well as appropriate inclusive practices. Building a school culture that supports interactivity sets the groundwork for an IWB implementation. However, the IWB is only a medium through which interactivity may be afforded. It is the user of the board who chooses to take full advantage of the IWB potential. The teachers’ confidence and competence with ICT remain centrally important.

Discussion - Limitations

Perhaps because a case study focuses on a single unit the issue of generalizability looms larger here than with other types of research. However, much can be learned from a particular case and there is no reason to doubt that at least similar findings would be obtained with other children in other settings.

A second limitation is the fact that language skills performance was mainly linked with a particular exam in English, Cambridge KET and the students’ results before and after the introduction of the IWB. However, language performance is wider than results in language exams as many students fail in them no matter how competent in language performance due to various reasons.

Another limitation is the fact that this research was conducted in a language school where classes involve a small number of students coming twice a week. A typical mainstream state school usually means a large number of students in the classroom and unexpected variables that may affect students’ social relationships and academic results. Generalization may be enhanced if relevant research is undertaken across different school settings (not limited to private language schools) such as state schools etc. where conditions are dramatically different.

It is interesting to note that the high levels of social engagement and initiation occurred when the activities...
incorporated the students’ with AS preferred interests. Further research may be needed in this area.

This research brings together all these issues in a naturalistic setting and examines how teachers try to reorganize their practice and role and how students are facilitated to renegotiate their position and achievement in the classroom habitat. Despite these generic limitations I believe that this research apart from adding to a growing body of literature on the subject it also, due to its strong naturalistic orientation, may serve as a basis to understand better how the inclusive practices for pupils with AS work in the EAL classroom and to generate future research and discussion in this regard.

Conclusion

The inclusion of children with AS in mainstream schools presents both challenges and opportunities. At the same time the traditional classroom environment in recent years is being replaced by utilizing technology through IWBs, Wikis, Podcasts, social media, online communities. Given the challenges associated with autism spectrum, emerging technologies may be a means to support these students in mainstream education.

The use of the IWB may be the most significant change in the classroom environment in the past decade which transforms the teacher’s role. This study has hopefully added to the growing body of literature in an attempt to help children with AS in foreign language lessons through the use of the IWB.

This research showed that although the IWB is a support for good language teaching it is not a panacea. It can’t help a weak teacher and won’t teach on their own. In other words, a good whiteboard needs a strong teacher to complement its abilities. A whiteboard cannot only open new avenues of education but can turn just about anything into an interactive lesson.

A balance is needed including various strategies to best help them participate in a meaningful way. The challenge therefore today is for teachers to understand how best to use technology and create activities meaningful and applicable to their learners’ with AS needs. The case study above showed that the more sound the pedagogy that informs the technology use, the more meaningful its integration. Teachers should fully understand the affordances of the IWB, develop the expertise and use appropriate software that also affords interaction.

Teachers cannot make inclusion work in isolation. The real work of enacting inclusion in the school environment belongs to teachers, parents, children and support staff working together in participation and dialogue so as to find a from of inclusion that can meet learner needs and maximize inclusion. I hope that this study will enhance educators’ interest to conduct in-depth research exploring the changing educational opportunities for children with AS, as well as software developers’ and EAL publishers’ interest to design applications in association with pedagogical approaches in the field of English as an Additional Language.
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An investigation exploring the extent ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ is effective in primary school language teaching

Salma Khan
Profile

I currently work as a primary school teacher with over 12 years of experience. I have an interest in EAL, particularly for international new arrivals, and would consider this to be my specialist area. With a Masters in Inclusive Education, I hope to be able to share my expertise with other teachers to further enhance inclusive practices in other schools.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to ascertain teacher perspectives on the use of ‘EAL steps for Classroom Integration’ as a tool to support teachers of international new arrivals with their daily planning; from teaching suggestions for themselves to preparing suitable activities and assessment. A need was felt for the research following the understanding that although there is ample information available for teaching English as an additional language in schools, research has shown teachers to feel underprepared from the absence of clear guidance. The author has carefully selected and presented information ‘in a nutshell’ and offered it to participants to guide their professional duty of ensuring integration of new arrivals in their classes.

Data was collected through two interviews and a focus group. The interviews, taking a before and after approach directly compared responses, with the focus group as an opportunity to corroborate findings. This short study saw an impressive turnaround in approaches used by participants who were able to engage learners and see progression through the changes that had been made to teaching strategies. It created confident and proficient, practicing EAL teachers with motivated learners, leading to the recommendation that ‘EAL steps for Classroom Integration’ should be widely available.

Keywords: EAL, International New Arrivals, integration, education, support, teaching
Immigration is currently a prominent and topical issue in the UK with families arriving from all over the world to work, study, accompany/join others or seek asylum. Figures for immigration show an increase from a total of 526,000 arriving in 2013 to 641,000 arriving in 2014 (ONS, 2015). In addition to this, up to 750 refugees are also settled into the UK each year through The Gateway Protection Program. 2011 Census data shows that 13% of the population were not born in the UK (ONS, 2012), a figure which has doubled in the last 20 years. At present “there is no reliable data on the number of people living in Great Britain whose first language is not English” (DCSF, N.D) but “there could be up to 200 languages spoken by long-term residents in the Greater Manchester area” with around 40% of children likely to be multilingual (The University of Manchester, 2013).

Compulsory school aged children arriving from overseas with little or no English are enrolled into mainstream schools as soon as possible. As children are always taught with their peers, this has created the difficulty for many schools to include new arrivals in lessons with a curriculum intended for children who can speak English. A system of addressing the language needs of the diverse nation is needed. ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ is a tool created by the researcher to support primary school teachers with effective classroom provision for their pupils who are international new arrivals (INA). INA is the term used to describe pupils who have joined the school at any age having arrived from a country outside the UK. ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ facilitates good classroom practice of teachers working with children who have English as an additional language (EAL). This paper reflects a research study conducted to ascertain participants’ perceptions of the usefulness of the tool in order to evaluate its effectiveness.

Approaches to teaching EAL in schools.

Although ‘International New Arrivals’ is a fairly new phrase to British education, the issues of teaching children who have arrived from other countries, in mainstream schools is not. Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 referred to the provisions that were necessary to be made to allow ethnic minorities to access education. The use of funds to remove bilingual children from the mainstream classroom to be taught in language teaching centres off site or makeshift language centres onsite soon became frowned upon and declared a form of institutional racism (CRE, 1986, p9) as children were withdrawn from their right to an ‘education according to their age, ability and aptitude’ as stated under the Education Act of 1944. Since the Swann Report (1985) was published, bilingual learners have been expected by government to be taught in the mainstream classroom throughout the day (Wardman, 2012). Much information has been developed since then to promote the awareness of significant and influential philosophies of researchers whose work is still advocated in EAL practice today.

Cummins’ contributions included BICS/CALP (Cummins, 1979), Common Underlying Proficiency (Cummins, 1980) and Task Difficulty (Cummins, 1984). His theories distinguish skills required to participate in daily conversation from skills required in abstract or academic discussions (Smyth, 2003). Once these were established, he showed how language acquisition is based on meaningful input that is understood by the learner. He further revealed that the development the child’s home language boosts English learning and personal development, recommending that teachers should promote and encourage the use of home language Cummins’ (1980). Cummins (1984) established a model (Quadrant) to demonstrate the usefulness of tasks set by the teacher in the development of language at different stages of proficiency. His idea of task difficulty presented in his Quadrant make it possible to refine teaching practices to create practical solutions to differentiate lessons and tasks for INA.

Some of Cummins’ thoughts have been supported by later researchers, for example Kenner (2010) and Martin (2003) have more recently shown the increase in motivation and grasp of English when allowing children to converse in the home language.

On the other hand, the work of Cummins has been heavily criticised too. Edelsky et. al.(1983) and Baker (2006) proposed that successful language acquisition needed to be assessed through a response to real life situations not merely the ‘meaningless literacy exercises’ that only produce children who can be successful at school (p35); a fair comment to make in an age where education strives to meet the nation’s workforce needs. Krashen’s theories (1982) do address this though. He explained language acquisition to be a subconscious process, claiming that language development was reliant on acquisition and not learning so taught language that had not been
subconsciously learned would not be useful for spontaneous speech in real life situations. Instead, Krashen (1982) proposed five hypotheses to include: input, acquisition-learning, monitor, natural order, and affective hypothesis. He established the conditions necessary for learners to progress in their knowledge of the second language (i+1) by relating emotions to learning; positive emotions contributing to motivation and negative emotions such as fear and embarrassment hindering the ability to acquire language. The notion of building on existing knowledge (i +1) is well established in education with Piaget's Schemas (1952), which would support Krashen's attempts to explain how second language is learnt, however Cummins' theories should not be disregarded as they provide tangible methods of practical application in the classroom.

In addition, effective Teacher and peer interactions have also been promoted by Smith (2006) and Day (2002). Day studied classroom dynamics and the relationships of a new arrival summarizing that the relationships created conscious and unconscious dynamics to promote English use. Smith studied how planned interactions between learners allowed the pupils to support each other's learning; both resulting in recommendations for planned classroom interactions and collaborative learning to accelerate English language use.

A small sample of beneficial perspectives have been provided above, many more are available. But there still remains ample suggestion that a mainstream pedagogy is needed to generate a consistency of approach between schools and children’s experiences (Haworth, 2009; Mistry & Sood, 2012; Murtagh & Francis, 2012) and even with so much research suggesting otherwise; code switching (the use of the home language to support learning) is still sometimes not accepted in classrooms (Williams, 2011). This seems to demonstrate that even though there is research and recommendations available, they are not fully understood and utilised or even known of. If individuals were aware of the different pedagogies for teaching EAL, they should be able to decide for themselves which methods or techniques suit their situations and may not need to rely on such direction.

The National Curriculum and EAL

Curriculum 2014 contains two paragraphs within the inclusion statement regarding the planning, monitoring and support that pupils who have EAL may need in order to take part in all subjects (DfE, 2013, p8). Curriculum 2000 had the same points written in the inclusion section on p37 (DfE, 1999). It would have been beneficial to see the government responding to the current changes in society by including contemporary guidance for EAL or new arrivals.

The National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC) indicate several problems with the National Curriculum. NALDIC claims that it fails to recognise the diversity of the population, the different stages of language acquisition that children are at and the complex process that is required for these children to fully access the curriculum as has been recommended (2012). EMASUK has also pointed out that “from these statements clearly the government are expecting every ordinary teacher (i.e. not a linguist) to work with both English speaking and non-English speaking children in their classrooms at the same time” (2013). Two major EAL bodies have independently highlighted the same concern the researcher has; there has not been proper regard to the EAL statements that have been made in the National Curriculum- a legal document which teachers must follow.

For language development, the National Curriculum focuses on the English curriculum “which has been considered a good model for both first and additional language learning” (NALDIC, 2011). There is a specific requirement for schools to meet the complex needs of EAL. A clear expectation has been made for schools to know the needs of these pupils, monitor progression, plan for pupils to develop their English and allow for active involvement in all lessons (DFE, 2013). To ensure that these requirements are met, there would need to be training for teachers to understand the specific needs and how to address them, resources and support material available, and clear guidance on assessment in order to monitor children and use this as a means of ‘assessment for learning’ to guide teachers with planning suitable future learning experiences.

Murakami (2008), Cajkler & Hall (2009), Mistry & Sood, (2011), and Murtagh & Francis (2012) are just a sample
of the many researchers that have found teachers to be unprepared for the requirements of teaching EAL learners due to insufficient input at initial teacher training level. It has also been identified that there is a need for a clearly specified pedagogical framework. The feeling of a lack of direction could be improved if teachers had a clear programme to work towards and if training for teachers and support staff was as readily available as it is for other subjects (Murakami, 2008).

“Students with EAL (need to be) given necessary time and resources to help them achieve….they need access to good quality assessment and teaching resources” (Murtagh & Francis, 2011, p210), but both are limited in their availability (ibid). There are minimal EAL resources available in comparison to what can be purchased for other subjects, and suppliers provide no guidance on how best to use these in schools for maximum impact on learning at the various stages of language acquisition. Resources need to be more readily available for schools to be able to “provide the support pupils need to take part in all subjects” (DFE, 2013, p8) as recommended in the National curriculum.

Monitoring and assessing pupils’ language use is a cause for concern with teachers having only a limited awareness of current national expectations (Cajkler & Hall, 2009). There is no nationally agreed assessment method but QCA (2000) has published guidance on assessment and levelling EAL. Demie and Strand (2006) point out many schools have not needed to assess language proficiency because there is a strong relationship between stage of English development and educational attainment. This contradicts the research of Cummins (1980) who explains that a child’s knowledge and the ability to express that knowledge in English are not parallel. I have found QCAs guidance to be ambiguous and inconsistent between teachers due the vagueness of the statements and the inconsideration for age when using them to assess. Demie and Strand’s research only highlights the need for a consistent and clear assessment process which teachers are competent in using so that they can analyse the information to personalise teaching for the pupils with EAL.

EAL Steps for Classroom Integration—the study.

The tool, initially assembled in 2012, was to provide the researcher’s school with a systematic approach to EAL planning, assessment, monitoring and teaching for its teachers who were faced with a number of INA in each class arriving throughout the year. The Department for Education (DfE) promote supporting INA as ‘a whole-school issue, involving all staff’ (2008, p61) and state the best support for new arrivals is ‘quality-first teaching in an inclusive curriculum’ (ibid). Although there was enough pedagogy, research and reports describing good practice for INA and EAL, the researcher felt that information was not presented in an easily accessible format to make maximum use of. ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ is based on the language assessment system of NASSEA (The Northern Association of Support Services for Equality and Achievement) (NASSEA, 2001) and combines it with many freely available recommendations that support each stage of development. It summarises, organises and presents them into a format that should be more manageable to understand and make use of for day to day teaching strategies, lesson and activity planning as well as for assessment. The information on the tool needs little explanation to teachers as it is a collection of ideas that are familiar in teaching but specifically beneficial for new arrivals. Using it should allow staff to meet the DfE requirements for INAs in their own class. Feedback received from teachers at the researcher’s school as well as the local authority’s integration service had been encouraging so it was decided that a formal study to investigate the extent that ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ is effective for primary school language teaching should be conducted.

The school selected for the study was recommended by a local authority support service as suitable for the study as they had recently accommodated several new arrivals via their service. This situation was new to the school; containing mostly white British children, professional development and support was being sought to embrace the new arrivals. Five teachers with varying experiences were nominated by the school to participate in the study, all participants had at least one new arrival in the class. Data collection consisted of two interview sessions and a focus group. Each interview generated responses to the same six open ended questions, with interview one acting as the opportunity to establish a baseline before the participants were introduced to ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ in order to make comparisons from. Shortly after the first interviews, and 1.5
hour training session was sufficient to introduce the tool, and explain with examples how to use it. The second interview was conducted after a period of 6 school weeks in which the teachers could put ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ into practice. A focus group with all five participants was used to discuss the themes that emerged from the interviews in order to examine inferences that had been made from analysing the interview data. This, along with samples of work from children’s books made it possible to corroborate the data.

Findings

The study demonstrated that teachers perceived the tool to be useful in many ways for themselves to support planning and teaching, which influenced the improved performance and participation of their children in lessons.

Findings show that using ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ creates a greater awareness of using teaching strategies that allow INAs to participate in lesson inputs, making teaching more accessible to them. This was demonstrated through two significant factors; a considerable reduction in the instances of children being excluded from lessons to be kept occupied with more seemingly purposeful activities such as phonics, and an increase in the use of strategies aimed at making lessons accessible for learners of EAL by adapting practices to include the use of visuals, hand gestures, facial expressions, clarifying vocabulary, speaking clearly, careful use of questioning, deploying various methods of encouraging interaction and expanding or recapping explanations which support to minimise the language barrier. The improved teacher performance allows new arrivals to be included in all lessons to ensure that school curricula and experiences are accessible to them.

Using the tool also expands teacher’s abilities to plan suitably differentiated tasks which develop language use in the context of the curriculum. A contrast in the quantity of abstract and cognitively undemanding activities such as copying and colouring-in being replaced by a varied range of cognitively undemanding but high context (sorting, ordering pictures, matching, labelling) and high context, cognitively demanding tasks (cloze, following written instructions, ordering sentences). With the increased use of visual prompts to support learning and the replication of activity types across subjects allowed children to be presented with a differentiated task for each lesson. The value of preparing such tasks had the added advantages of a decreased need for adult support with new arrivals as well as an increase in engagement with tasks from learners. A more balanced use of teacher and TA support could be deployed across the whole class to ensure that other groups were not disadvantaged. Also, as children were presented with tasks they could access independently, they were motivated to complete them; gaining a sense of achievement.

‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ allows teachers to use assessment to monitor learning as well as use assessment to inform future planning for new arrivals. The combination of assessment descriptors and targets on the tool proved useful for the participants who otherwise had no method of assessing the children. All participants were able to determine the ‘step’ their new arrivals were working at and from this were able to select suitable targets to direct learning towards the next ‘step’. What began as a haphazard approach to establish suitable tasks soon developed into a structured method of working with new arrivals to push their learning further. Teachers can now plan for activities within lessons as well as during intervention sessions that are pitched to stretch the children just far enough to be manageable with support. Moreover, the systems in place are simple enough to be managed by more than one adult simultaneously; TAs that worked with the children shared the responsibility of assessing regularly to set further targets to work towards during focussed intervention sessions and all participants were comfortable that they could provide evidence for progression.

Teachers’ fears concerning teaching new arrivals are significantly reduced when using ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’. This was evident when comparing the data at the beginning and the end of the study. Participants had worries around what to teach, which activities would be suitable, how to show progression and the potential increase in work-load for them. They were in a situation that was new to some of them, relying on ‘trial and error’ with frustrations from not having clear teaching strategies that guided their daily work. By using the information on the tool, participants’ fears of managing the needs of their new arrivals were no longer apparent as they had access to a range of teaching ideas and activities, an assessment method and targets for children.
to work towards which gave them the strategies to achieve that they previously did not have. Participants discussed their children positively and could explain how they had made a difference to their learning and confidence through the new practices in place. They were able to monitor progression and were secure in the knowledge that they could now demonstrate the progress that had been made. Having access to the tool with information presented as it was saved the teachers the time and effort of gathering ideas that may or may not have made a difference to the children. By supporting the teachers with their fears and anxieties, they were able to make the differences to their practice which made an impact on their children's learning.

As well as supporting the teacher, ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ has values for the children too. Other than those related to learning, which have been discussed above, the use of the tool allows the development of independence in the children and supports to reduce barriers to learning. The beginning of the study saw a heavy reliance of adult support for the new arrivals due to the nature of the tasks that the children were being presented with or the assumed inability to participate in lessons which resulted in withdrawal for an ad-hoc intervention. Unfortunately this denies opportunities for INAs to mix with the rest of the class, learn language in a natural setting, and learn the social skills of interaction and ‘unwritten’ classroom rules. New approaches allowed the children to be more independent around the class by working alone, with a partner or in a group more often; children supported each other so had further opportunities to build friendships and develop social skills as well as to practise their English naturally. Providing achievable activities that children recognised and knew how to accomplish created confident learners that could work without continuous adult support for all participants. Planning these opportunities also allowed for adults to be redirected to support other groups in the class as well so that all the children had a balanced approach to provision whilst the new arrivals had the freedom they needed to become members of the class.

The recommendations for teaching strategies and activities on the tool support to reduce the barriers to learning that INAs may have. In addition to language barriers, it is possible for new arrivals to have additional difficulties preventing them from learning, such as social and emotional troubles arising from past experiences or simply from relocation and adjustment. The practices promoted in ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’, combined with the structure the teachers were able to provide from using it began to develop independence in the children with a noticeable increase in their motivation and self-confidence as well as accelerated learning. This was seen as a contributing factor to alleviate anxieties faced by new arrivals that inhibit potential learning. Not only were the strategies assisting INAs but it was also noticed that other children benefit from the new strategies that the teachers were adopting too. Clear and precise language use whilst expanding and recapping explanations supported more than just the new arrivals; indigenous children who needed such consolidation or clarity before beginning a task now also had access to it. Teachers noticed that it supported them to understand and complete activities accurately and with less support than previously needed. Strategies recommended for new arrivals are not always additional to or above what could be expected of good teaching, so by putting these methods to the forefront of the teachers attention simply reminds them to do it more often; good teaching benefits all children.

The school used for the study was at a very early stage of addressing the needs of their international new arrivals; for the five participants, a massive advancement in professional development in the area of classroom integration for INAs was seen over the duration of the project. For those schools which have already started addressing this, it would be naive to suggest that it could make such a difference as seen in this project yet ‘EAL Steps for classroom Integration’ would still be helpful to emphasise the flow that is needed between assessment, and classroom practice, as it places them side by side. It makes the general statements used for assessing language specific enough to be transferrable between adults without losing meaning or interpretation, which is a necessity if assessment data is to be adequately robust to carry through the school. An at-hand reminder of good teaching and saving time to think of suitable activities would also be added advantages for all teachers.

This research project has allowed the researcher to conclude that ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ is an extremely effective tool to upskill teachers to meet the needs of international new arrivals through planning, assessment, lesson delivery and choice of activity. Minimal training is required to use the tool as implementing
the suggestions on it do not require any additional knowledge or specific expertise from the teacher. Positive changes to practice can be made immediately with benefits to the child’s confidence, motivation and accelerated learning apparent in a short space of time. At initial teacher training and as a form of continuing professional development, ‘EAL Steps for Classroom Integration’ would be a valuable method of addressing inclusion for children who have EAL.
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‘Employability and the Arts Based Course – a Defence of the Media Production Degree’

Michael Farr
Profile

My first career, following graduation in 1984 from Manchester Polytechnic, was as a location lighting camera man; initially for the BBC and then, after ten years, in a freelance capacity. Throughout this time I maintained and pursued a keen academic interest in the visual cultures. My passion for the subject led me first to study with the Open University, then at the University of Manchester, where I graduated in 2005 with a Masters degree, and in 2013 with a PhD, both from the School of Arts, Histories and Visual Cultures.

My interest in teaching at HE level began eleven years ago on a voluntary basis, but was quickly followed by part-time positions at the universities of Chester, Manchester and Salford. In 2009 I was offered a full-time position at the University of Chester as a lecturer in Media Production. In August, 2013 I joined the staff in the Media department of the University of Bolton where I now lecture in Media Production – specifically cinematography and visual theory.

Abstract

There are challenges within the delivery of Media Production degree courses that stem from a misalignment of student/employer expectations, and can be summed up thus: Most students attend Media Production courses to improve employment prospects within the industry and believe that this is best achieved by focusing on acquiring technical/practical expertise. As a result they are often reluctant to engage with broader aspects of education associated with critical thinking. Potential employers, however, are not overly concerned with new recruits having expertise of current technologies. Of equal, if not of more importance are ‘transferable’ skills, many of which are developed through critical thinking exercises.

As a result, graduates from Media Production courses enter the work place believing they are sufficiently prepared for what is a very competitive industry, but, in reality, they lack the skills employers look for. Inevitably the academic reputation and credibility of these courses is progressively undermined, and graduate dissatisfaction increased.

The process of creating media product, however, draws heavily on the same transferable skills most employers seek in new recruits. The proposition, then, is that increasing critical thinking elements within these courses will simultaneously enable students to perform better at subject level AND increase their employability, both within the media industry and beyond. But how might this be achieved if students feel critical thinking contributes little to their employability?

Keywords

Media Production, Critical Thinking, Employability
Introduction

This report adds to research already undertaken, (Yorke, 2006; Knight & Yorke, 2004; Fallows & Steven, 2000) by focusing on inherent problems within the delivery of practical-based arts courses explicitly linked to professional practice; specifically Media Production degree courses. The problems, it is argued here, stem from a misalignment of student/employer expectations, and potentially impact upon curriculum design, content delivery and student employability (areas debated throughout the HE sector since the 1990s - see Fallows & Steven, 2000). While this report responds to modules delivered at the University of Bolton, the problems it discusses are not presented as unique to this institution.

My concern regarding this misalignment is that year upon year graduates from Media Production courses enter the work-place under the impression that they are sufficiently prepared for what is a very competitive industry, but are, in reality, actually lacking the skills employers look for (this problem is not unique to arts-based courses as an article in The Telegraph newspaper recently highlighted – Smith, 24/1/2015). The result is that the academic reputation and credibility of media courses are continually and progressively undermined, and graduate dissatisfaction increased. Professor James Curran has raised such concerns before, most recently at the 2013 MeCCSA conference in Derry (Curran, 2013). His keynote speech highlighted the ignorance and prejudice that Media Studies programmes experience. Although this report is specifically concerned with Media Production degrees – there is a subtle difference – they are tarred with the same brush. And because Media Production degrees are, essentially, practical-arts based courses, they are further criticised for lacking realistic career opportunities.

Based on personal teaching experience, I believe students undertaking Media Production courses compound the situation because they are often unwilling to engage with the intellectual challenges associated with the critical thinking exercises common to traditional degrees. This is because they feel that they are of little relevance to their career ambitions. What students believe is of more importance, and are therefore more willing to put their energies into, is the acquisition of technical skills and an extensive knowledge of specific technologies. Unfortunately, such entrenched decisions rarely conform to employer expectations. As a result Media Production courses are often maligned, with accusations being levelled that they are less than academically challenging, they lack intellectual rigour, and that they do not adequately prepare graduates for the work-place.

What this misalignment of student/employer expectations masks, however, is the fact that the process of creating media product draws heavily on the same transferable skills the majority of employers are reportedly seeking in new recruits; transferable skills that the University of Bolton’s current Careers Service Employability Guide announces its students should possess when they graduate, and lists as: communication, team work, organisation and planning, problem solving, initiative, self-awareness, flexibility, numerical interpretation, personal impact and confidence, and action planning. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that Media Production courses are, if not unique, then very rare in this regard. This being the case, I argue that if critical thinking exercises can be increased in what are heavily practical curricula, in such a way that they will be willingly engaged with, then students might perform better at subject level AND increase their employability; not just within their area of study, but across a range of career options. (There is ongoing debate regarding the definition of employability, but this report draws on the HEA’s currently accepted definition offered by Yorke, 2006)

It must be stressed that this report does not promote a purely vocationalist approach to HE. The sole function of universities should not be the training of students – the majority of whom enrol while less than twenty years of age - for specific career paths. On the contrary, what this report works towards is the proposition that universities should be able to prepare students for a choice of career paths yet to be determined. Of the fifty-six students initially surveyed for this report, just over 60% suggested that they were studying Media Production as a means of entering the media industry, suggesting that nearly 40% of the cohort might be seeking an alternative career. That said it is also the case that universities should also be able to support specific career ambitions should students express them. A pre-determined career path and the broader pursuit of knowledge, need not, indeed, should not be mutually exclusive; and, it is proposed here, the Media Production course that can boast a significant critical thinking element can achieve this balance.
Nor does this report negate the value of teaching technical skills. They are an essential requirement for the production of media content; but not the only requirement. Evidence collected for this project suggests that employers within the media industry (and, indeed, many other industries) want new recruits to have the capacity to learn how to use new technologies, as and when they are introduced into the respective work places. But the same research also indicates that the majority of potential employers expect to teach new employees how to use the technology they rely upon, implying that graduates need only a basic understanding of specific technologies.

The Need for Inquiry

In part, it is the contemporary digital landscape that necessitates this research, with concerns from within the media industry itself being voiced at four conferences held in 2014, each aimed at those seeking entry-level employment in the digital media industries: the Digital Skills Festival 2014, Manchester; BBC Vision 2022 – Technology Day, Media City; Royal Television Society Student Conference, Media City; and Working in the Media Industry, Bradford. In all four the importance of ‘soft’ or ‘transferable skills’ was regularly and repeatedly emphasized as being of equal, if not of greater importance than knowledge of specific technologies.

In addition, because Media Production courses are regularly maligned as lacking in intellectual rigour, leaving graduates considerably disadvantaged in their search for employment both in and out of the media industry, we, as convenors of such courses, have an obligation to determine if these criticisms are justified; and if so, to address them. We also have an obligation to constantly monitor student and employer expectations of each other – especially so in the digital industries. The importance of technology in the digital age should not be underestimated, specifically in the northwest. Manchester is the second largest digital centre in Europe - London being the first (Foggett, 2014) - but universities must be sure that what is delivered to the student body has long-term value and is not merely a form of technical catch-up in a rapidly changing industrial landscape. Alice Webb, Chief Operating Officer for BBC North, acknowledged that technology is moving so fast that it is difficult to guess what might happen next, implying that focussing too much on current technology should not be of primary importance for graduates. It is, she stated, ‘ideas [that] are our lifeblood – we need content’, a point reinforced by Ralph Rivera, Director of BBC Future Media (BBC Vision 2022 Conference, 2014). Without doubt, using technology and adapting to its developments is essential, but it is only part of the picture.

Of course, there is also the ongoing debate surrounding the value of critical thinking exercises in HE, and how best to implement them, and this modest study reinforces some of those areas already covered (Fisher, 2007). And because the role of the university is constantly being debated in relation to employability (Alexander & Alexander, 2002), studies such as this one should be ongoing.

Plan of Action

The plan, then, was to investigate why those who study on Media Production courses might be reluctant to engage with critical thinking exercises, and to determine how this might be resolved so as to convince students of the contribution to their employability, both within and beyond the media industry, these exercises can make. A focus group comprising a mix of twenty-six Foundation Degree and BA (Hons) undergraduates – all of whom were studying the same practical film production module - was taken from the initial group of fifty-six students. They were asked, amongst other questions, why they chose to study Media production at degree/foundation degree level. Half of them did so to work within the media industry. They were then asked if they believed that such a degree could directly help to secure employment within that industry – all but two felt it would. What, then, was the most useful attribute that they felt they could learn whilst at university? For just over half of them it was the acquisition of knowledge of technology and how to use it.

Pursuing this line of inquiry further, they were asked to rank, on a scale of 1-10 (10 being very and 1 being not at all) how relevant they felt the learning of practical/technical skills (such as camera operating, editing etc.) was
to securing employment in the media Industry. The results: Position. 10 - 20 votes, Position. 9 - 2 votes, Position. 8 - 3 votes and Position. 5 - 1 vote, confirmed my initial assumption that the majority of students studying on Media Production courses feel it is of more value to their career ambitions to concentrate on the acquisition of technical skills and an extensive knowledge of specific technologies.

All students were made aware of the exercise before they agreed to take part, and anonymity was assured for everyone completing the surveys.

Simultaneously a range of potential employers from the media industry were asked to prioritise the following eight skills/abilities with regard to new recruits (1 being the most important and 8 being the least): Knowledge of specific technology, Interpersonal communication skills, ability to research thoroughly and broadly on any topic, generating ideas for media content, problem solving, question the validity of the results of their research, work within a diverse team toward a common goal, and time management skills.

The list was compiled following a series of earlier conversations/communications with potential employers within the media sector, combined with the previously mentioned skills the University of Bolton presents as those ‘that it expects all its graduates to leave with’ (Bateman and Sheppard, 2013, pp.4-5).

While the positioning of the last five qualities listed was evenly spread, the responses to the first three are worth closer scrutiny. Only one employer placed ‘Knowledge of specific technology’ at No. 2, the rest relegated it to 5 or below. ‘Interpersonal communication skills’ was considered the most important attribute by all but one of those surveyed, and the ‘Ability to research thoroughly and broadly on any topic’ was positioned at 4 or above by everyone.

The results from these two surveys indicate that a significant number of students attending Media Production courses do so to improve their employment prospects within the media industry. This, in itself, is not uncommon (Bateman & Sheppard, 2013, p.2) and not necessarily problematic; but it would seem that the same students are under the misapprehension that this is best achieved by focusing primarily on the learning of technical skills, which is why they are often reluctant to engage with the more traditional aspects of education that might be described as critical thinking. In contrast to what students believe, however, the majority of those employers surveyed stated that they are not overly concerned with new recruits having expertise of current technologies. What they see as being of equal, if not of more importance are the ‘transferable’ skills that can be developed through critical thinking exercises combined with the production of media content. (The definition of critical thinking is complex - see Bowell & Kemp, 2005 and Fisher, 2007 - and subject to ongoing debate; this study uses Moon’s summation, Moon, 2005, p.12)

In short, motivated by convictions established prior to enrolling on their production courses, students are putting their energies into the wrong area of study in a vain attempt to impress potential employers, and at a cost to their employability and the reputation of the degree they are undertaking.

The modular system of curriculum delivery, it is argued here, does little to alleviate the situation; allowing students the potential to compartmentalize subject matter (see Gibbs, 2012 for further discussion on this issue). If the relevance of one module to a student’s ambition is not immediately obvious then it will not readily be engaged with. And if, as my evidence suggests, many students believe that the most important aspect of an arts based course is knowledge of technology and technical skills, then separate and individual critical thinking modules will be undervalued. If, however, students can be convinced of the importance of such a learning process to their employment prospects – an approach the HEA seemingly supports (Ball, 2003) - they might engage with it more eagerly.

My challenge, then, was to try to embed a series of critical thinking exercises into a heavily practical module in such a way as to entice students to commit to them - a form of critical thinking by stealth.
Implementing the Changes

The module I chose to work with requires students to produce three films, the middle one being a short documentary. It was regarding the production process of this factual film that I decided to introduce two seminars presented as intending to improve film production technique, but devised to simultaneously develop the cohort's critical thinking skills AND address as many as possible of the eight employability skills listed in the employers’ survey. These exercises were inserted into two existing three-hour practical workshops, and lasted an hour each.

Over the two seminars I showed the students extracts from two British documentaries that focused on different ethnic groups: the inhabitants of a giant rubbish tip in Lagos, Nigeria; and the Amish community in America. In an attempt to engage the students I explained that analysis of these films would teach them a great deal about documentary structure, camera operating, sound recording and post-production, which it certainly would. The emphasis, at least as far as the cohort was concerned, was on the practical and the technical.

In the first week I divided the cohort into groups of five or six and showed them what is known in the TV industry as ‘the pre-title tease’ of a BBC Two documentary called ‘Welcome to Lagos’ (Searle, 2010). This is the section of the film before the opening credits intended to reveal enough of the subject matter to keep viewers interested. The individual groups were then asked to discuss what they felt the film might be about, following which the discussion was opened up to the whole cohort.

Repeating this process - working in small groups and then opening up the discussion to the whole body - we analysed the photography, editing and sound (music, effects, interviews and voice-over) initially to explore the structure of the film and the technicalities involved. But in addition I steered the debate into a much more critical approach. That is, I asked them to consider and discuss the effectiveness of, for example, the combination of music and images, the gender and ethnicity of the narrator, the impact of unpleasant images - the film is about people who live and work on a giant rubbish tip – when juxtaposed with more positive scenes. The intention was to lead the students into considering how limiting information, or delivering it in carefully controlled combinations, affects the audience’s interpretation of what they see and hear.

The debate led, as expected, to issues of authorship, meaning, and audience consumption, and touched upon the work of theorists Erwin Panofsky and Roland Barthes to name but two. With regard to the narrated script, or voice-over, I asked the students to consider not only whose voice we could hear, but who might have written the words and directed the actor with regard to delivery? Of course, without research they could not know, but they could consider the situation as being pertinent to the audience’s understanding of the film. Offering them the information the group then debated how the ethnicity, class, education and political persuasion of the film-makers might impact on what was presented as a ‘factual’ film, raising issues of imperialism and globalization.

Following what was, in reality, an exercise in the critical analysis of a given text, I repeated the structure of the seminar the following week using a Channel 4 film, by the same production company, about a group of Amish teenagers who visit Britain to experience a more conventional lifestyle (‘Amish: World’s Squarest Teenagers’, Whalley, 2010). Prompted by the lively discussion regarding the previous week’s film, the students quickly began to openly debate what they felt the film-makers were trying to suggest, both about the Amish and about British teenage culture. Once again, and to ensure they engaged with the exercise, I used the technical elements of photography, picture composition, sound recording, voice-over and music as starting points for our debate.

Without discussing the concept of critical thinking with the cohort, I argue that what was offered as an opportunity to consider the technicalities and practicalities of film making simultaneously impacted on four of the skills potential employers had indicated as desirable; these being: ‘Interpersonal communication skills’ and ‘Working within a diverse team toward a common goal’ (when discussing ideas and opinions in small groups and then presenting them to the rest of the cohort); ‘Generating ideas for media content’ (when considering how they might choose to film different ethnic/social groups in order to present their own agenda); and ‘Questioning the validity of the results of their research’ (when debating authorship issues and agendas). I would
also argue that there was ongoing consideration of technical issues (if not specific technologies). The impact of photography, sound and editing cannot, and were not, debated without considering issues of how the different technologies were used.

Following this exercise the students were asked, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being not at all and 10 being very much so) how relevant they felt these seminars and exercises were to their understanding of film production; to what extent they felt that this form of education should form a significant part of each year's curriculum; and how much did they enjoy the exercises. All but two placed the exercise at 7 or above on each question suggesting that the students could not only see the value of this method of learning to their career ambitions, but that they enjoyed the experience as well.

The module then required them to produce a short factual film which, as has been argued, demands students employ all eight of the transferable skills listed above - and most of those that the University of Bolton hopes all its graduates possess - if the end product is to be affective.

Conclusion and Further Development

Admittedly, as an action-research plan in its earliest stages the reliability of this study is questionable. Working with such a small focus group (only twenty-six) over a limited period of time – eight weeks - delivers results that are best used as a starting point rather than as conclusive evidence. The same is true of the number of potential employers surveyed – while comments came from all nine approached, only six completed the survey. And although they were chosen from a range of job areas and company sizes from across the UK, their number remains small. That said, the evidence collected from this group supports findings from existing research and, indeed, the University of Bolton's own stance on employability skills.

The value of this report, then, lies in its justification of further and prolonged research into these issues. The next step is to expand the investigation to include all students studying Media Production across all three undergraduate years at the University of Bolton, and all the staff who teach them. No single module can realistically address the entire range of transferable skills that employers are asking for, nor can they all accommodate the same type of critical thinking exercise. For this revision of the curriculum to be effective, it needs cohesion at the planning stage and consensus regarding its implementation. A greater number of potential employees will also be surveyed. Initially this will be restricted to those working within the media industry as there already exists substantial evidence detailing what employers in other industries look for in new recruits. Long-term, it would be ideal to follow graduates who have experienced three years of this re-structured curriculum into the work place to investigate how they and their employers might benefit from it. While such a time-scale seems daunting, the real value of this research relies upon its contemporaneity and should, I argue, be ongoing in some form or another. The speed at which the digital industries are evolving requires a constant monitoring of the relationship between graduates and employers.

Despite its limitations, however; this initial study does go some way to confirming that students studying Media Production courses believe learning technical skills should be their primary concern; employers are more impressed by transferable skills (skills that are essential to the production of media content and that critical thinking exercises can significantly improve); and that, introduced strategically, students will engage with critical thinking exercises if they appear directly linked to what students perceive as vocational skills.

What this early research might also offer is a means of combatting the erosion of public confidence in what I feel is a valuable area of study. By introducing more critical thinking exercises into traditionally heavily practical based curricula, students will not only be able to perform better at subject level, but they will increase their employability across a whole range of career options. But, and this cannot be stressed enough, any increase in critical thinking exercises in these course must be strategically executed; they must be embedded carefully so as
References


Toward an Alternative to the Traditional Writing Centre Model in Non-Anglophone Contexts: A Small-scale Study in Prague, Czech Republic

Shaana Aljoe MA, TEFL University of New York in Prague (USA/CZ) and Bolton University
Profile

Shaana Aljoe currently teaches English Composition to first-year international students at the University of New York in Prague, Czech Republic which is a private, fully-accredited, English-medium University. She founded the University’s first Writing Lab and is also the English Language Programs Director. Her research interests focus on the provision of writing assistance for L2 students in non-Anglophone contexts. Having established student writing assistance at one university using the American format of provision, she now advocates for alternative forums of writing support in a European context.

Abstract

Is the most efficient form of university writing support for international students a conventional writing centre where only one-to-one tutoring is provided? In a European context, given that writing support is still a relatively new concept, the answer to this question appears to be no. Although many English-medium universities that currently exist in non-Anglophone contexts provide traditional one-to-one tutoring, mirroring a format that originates in the United States, it has become clear through one small-scale study in Czech Republic that both European students and those from other nations prefer to be tutored on a one-to-many basis. This is an account of how that preference was detected by offering students a choice between conventional and not-so-conventional forums of assistance. I propose that in a European context, the American format of one-to-one tutoring might be dispensed with in favour of a more inclusive forum of assistance described as ‘one-to-many’ and labelled English Composition Tutoring Classes at the institution where the discovery was made. The distinction between these classes and seminars is made in an effort avoid confusion. I conclude by suggesting that writing centre directors and tutors might rethink their traditionally formatted facilities in order to better serve the students attending their English-medium universities, especially those located in non-Anglophone contexts.

Keywords

University writing labs/centres, writing tutor, EAP, NNES, Composition studies
Introduction

The most common form of tertiary level writing support model for multilingual students is currently a writing centre where mainly one-to-one consultations with a tutor exist. The concept and practice of one-to-one consultations is a familiar one but its efficacy is worthy of consideration. Higher education researchers working with multilingual students question the efficacy of this writing support service model outside of an Anglo-American context (Leibowitz and Goodman 1997). The most common type of tertiary level writing support is a writing centre; a stand-alone entity, separate from other traditional departments where students can, on a voluntary basis, expect a one-to-one conference on aspects of academic writing with an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) trained tutor.

However, academic writing and writing support are still relatively new concepts for European students studying in the English language at English-medium institutions. It is argued here that an additional, permanently scheduled, ‘one-to-many’, classroom held writing support setting can further support the traditional ‘one-to-one’ writing support model. Moreover, if only one form of support can be provided, in a European context, the one-to-many classroom format of tutoring should be chosen instead of the traditional one-to-one model first developed in the United States.

The significance of writing support in non-Anglophone contexts

At universities, courses are traditionally administered over a period of approximately 12 weeks through a number of regularly scheduled classes that comprise one semester. Two semesters make up the conventional academic year starting in the autumn and continuing through until the spring. Many universities also provide similarly scheduled seminars in addition to classes for more advanced and/or detailed small group discussions. What distinguishes seminars from a one-to-many tutoring model is that in seminars students are tutored as one cohesive group, whereas one-to-many tutoring provides a classroom space for individuals and small groups of students to practice various aspects of writing with an EAP tutor who floats between individuals and small groups providing guidance as needed or requested.

Writing support programs, often referred to as writing labs or centres, exist at accredited institutions operating in Anglophone contexts and increasingly at those located in non-Anglophone contexts. The existence and progress of the European Association of Writing Centres, The Writing Lab Newsletter, and The Writing Center Journal are evidence of this. Writing tutors face unique challenges in our attempts to instruct international English composition students. Working at English-medium, Anglo-American, higher education institutions which are located outside of contexts where English is not the commonly spoken language inside and outside the classroom, writing support tutors have a responsibility to share their experiences in order to progress toward a global framework for writing support, and more importantly, its assessment.

Research pertaining to writing support in the form of writing centres or labs in an American or Anglophone context is rich (Clark & Healey 1996; Shakespeare 1985; Donnelli & Garrison 2003; Thompson 2006; Moberg 2010; Ryan & Zimmererelli 2006; Lerner 2003), however research into writing centres outside of this context is comparatively less. Today, in an Anglo-American context, the provision of a writing centre at many universities is commonplace. Locating a college campus without a physical or electronically accessible writing centre or tutorial service is challenging. The growing number of writing support initiatives at this level of academia underscores the importance of written English in academic contexts. This paper presents a solution to a problem encountered by an English-medium university writing centre located in a non-English geographical context. The increasing proliferation of accredited, international, English-medium, institutions suggests the need for further research into the models of the writing support that they offer.

Many of the writing support tutor training guides available focus on a readership that is U.S. based. The guides are written for tutors of English as Second Language (ESL) writers (Bruce and Rafoth 2004; Elmborg & Hook 2005; Ryan & Zimmererelli 2006). Although practitioners in Europe can learn much from these manuals, tutors located outside the U.S. have additional considerations in that they teach at English-medium tertiary institutions
that are located in non-Anglophone locations. This means that the level of exposure to the target language—English—is much reduced. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper second language (L2) students are better described as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) learners than ESL learners.

The development of one university writing centre in Prague.

In the autumn of 2009, an EAP trained composition instructor established a traditional writing lab at a private, English-medium, American accredited university in Prague, Czech Republic. The lab was an ad hoc solution to the vexing problem of high failure rates in first year English Composition courses. Management reported that the effect of failure rates in one course was increasing student attrition rates of the University generally. In this University’s particular instance and at this stage of its inception, it was premature to consider the ethical issues such as text ownership that so many researchers call attention to today (Clark and Healy 1996; Pemberton 1995; Barnett 1997). Although ethical considerations affect writing centre policy from the beginning, more important at the time was making a centre available to students at the earliest date possible, preferably in time for the start of the semester. A sense of urgency developed after management recognized that establishing such a facility was an important factor that separated the University from others located in native English contexts.

Figure 1 provides a national profile of registered first-semester students in autumn 2009. From this group a small number of survey respondents, enrolled in the first-semester English Composition course, volunteered to complete the writing centre consultation form after visiting the centre for assistance with an assignment. At this university degree-seeking students are required to successfully complete two semesters of English Composition in order to fulfill prerequisites for more advanced courses where a higher level of language skill is required. Exemption is possible for one or both semesters through transferred credit systems or internationally recognized Advanced Placement tests. Considering that most of the students entering the institution are non-native English speakers (NNES) they will most likely be required to take both semesters of English Composition. The figure (1) below illustrates the highly diverse nature of a first-year cohort.

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<tr>
<th>UG Intake Nationalities breakdown</th>
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<td>Cyprus</td>
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<td>Other*</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>157</td>
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(Troneckova, 2011)

*Other nationalities can include: Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Germany, Macedonia, Georgia, Greece, Iraq, Pakistan, Italy, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Portugal, Armenia, Bulgaria, Belarus, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Nigeria, South Africa, Israel, Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, Canada, U.K., and New Zealand.

Due to the pilot scheme nature of that first writing centre in 2009, no budget or funding was allocated for its establishment and maintenance. In spite of this, a rudimentary writing laboratory was established consisting of furniture commandeered from existing library stock; a large, stand-alone desk in one of the four rooms
comprising the school library with two chairs, one of which is occupied by an experienced EAP trained composition instructor (the tutor). Initially, the writing lab was open for a few hours once a week and, after moving to a private office to better accommodate one-to-one sessions, increased operation to three hours a day, four days a week, and consultations would last from 10 to 30 minutes where students were seen on a first-come, first-served basis.

This initial writing lab represented a welcome addition to the University and was a proud achievement. Adding value to my institution was heartening, and the feedback from the students who came for a consultation was also encouraging. Satisfaction surveys were mailed to students and more than half believed the addition of a writing lab for students was indeed beneficial. However, it became apparent that the lab – and its one tutor – were not enough to satisfy the demands of a student population that is 95% NNES. EAP learners deal with issues that are shaped by their perceptions and location. Researchers are becoming increasingly aware of the distinctions between writing centres within and outside of Anglophonic contexts. Writing centre professional, Muriel Harris (1986) observed that multilingual students have 'habits, behaviour patterns, perspectives, ways of delivering information, and other cultural filters that an affect writing in ways we often do not sufficiently attend to and indeed are in danger of ignoring’ (87).

Further, Gerd Brauer (2006) identified the problems that many university tutors outside of the Anglo-American experience encounter. Many students in this context misunderstand the role of the writing lab tutor, do not view writing as a process, or do not feel the need to attend at all for one reason or another (134). His experience at the University of Education in Freiberg, Germany, directly reflects the challenges that many writing tutors encounter in non-Anglophonic contexts.

The catalyst to move beyond conventional one-to-one tutoring

After the writing lab had been in operation for one year, it became clear that another form of support was necessary to address management’s concern that the writing lab, as pleasant as it was to have one, could not provide enough support to curb failure rates, therefore another writing support solution had to be found. Although the writing lab was a welcome addition to the facilities offered by the university, it did not seem to have a significant effect in terms of reducing failure rates in English Composition. In brief, a way had to found for writing support to accommodate a greater number of students.

The Introduction of an English Composition Tutoring Class: ‘one-to-many’ tutoring

The solution came in the offer of a non-credit English Composition Tutoring Class (CTC) for students to attend on a voluntary basis. The CTC operated in virtually the same manner as a traditional one-to-one tutoring session in the writing lab, but allowed many students to obtain writing support with a tutor in a classroom environment. The CTC was given a permanent time slot in the daily schedule of university courses, and students could attend individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Again, the CTC was the responsibility of one professionally trained tutor; but students did not work together in one cohesive group as would happen in a traditional classroom or seminar.

A comparison of the established writing lab with the CTC after its first year of operation is shared here which serves to inform developers of future writing support initiatives at other non-Anglophone based, English-medium tertiary institutions. Both the writing lab and the CTC were ad hoc creations from the beginning; the CTC was a natural outgrowth from the writing lab given the diversity of the student population. The most significant differences between the two forms of writing support after only one year of operation were compelling.

It became immediately apparent that students who had never visited the lab readily visited the CTC. Reasons for this lie partly in cultural differences; two or three students sometimes visit the writing lab together where one of them would request help on an assignment. Furthermore, some students felt uncomfortable with the one-to-one consultation of the lab and felt more at ease working on their writing in a larger classroom setting.
Both the writing lab tutor and the CTC tutor are composition instructors and students reported feeling uneasy approaching their respective composition instructors for additional help. A greater number of students visited the CTC than the writing lab. This was probably more a matter of physical space, but attendance records reveal that far more students could be accommodated in one week at the CTC than in the lab.

Another observation made after the first year of offering the CTC was that students attended the CTC regularly. One reason for regular attendance is the inclusion of CTC in the regular schedule of classes. Students knew that help was available whenever they browse a full course timetable. The writing lab also appears on the schedule of classes, but the opening hours are limited which may not be convenient or even alienate some students. Furthermore, students visited both the lab and CTC. Although the incidence of confusion or alienation is rare, it is worth highlighting to show that given the geographical context, students must use their own initiative to gain as much L2 language exposure as possible. Far from being language zealots, these students realize that exposure and practice are critical to success in this context. And lastly, composition failure rates were reduced to the satisfaction of management. It is possible that students’ awareness of the high composition failure rates may have also contributed to this result. The appearance of the tutoring classes on the complete courses timetable may also have alerted students to the importance of accuracy in their writing.

Due to the disparity between what multilingual students think is appropriate and what is actually acceptable academic writing, some researchers have advocated requiring first-year English composition students to attend a writing support session (Leibowitz and Goodman 1997, 87). I argue that this mandate may prove unnecessary if international EAP students are offered a less conventional, customized forum of writing assistance.

It is worth noting here, that although many writing centres also provide electronic formats of writing support, Writing support specialist, Eric Moberg (2010) asserts that “the use of both on-line and brick and mortar service delivery models allow program and institutions to accentuate the advantages of each and accommodate for weaknesses” (2). This would mean that the introduction of the CTC counterbalances the weaknesses of the one-to-one consultations occurring in the writing lab and, it seems, vice versa. Many universities are connected digitally so students have access to online assistance. This kind of help is invaluable to students, but “the technology should be seen as a tool, not a magic wand,” (1). More research is needed to determine to what extent is electronic writing assistance valuable for students.

Conclusion
Support and interventions for multilingual students can take a variety of models, but the most common seems to be the North American style where a one-to-one conference is held between a tutor and a student. This report attempts to broaden the framework to accommodate student resistance to seeking help and increased student demand in an efficient manner. By experimenting with or redesigning the writing support forums offered, especially to international students in non-Anglophonic contexts, composition instructors will likely find that students respond more positively to being given a less conventional forum of assistance from which to seek help.

Although increased study has contributed much to the writing centre movement, researchers believe much more is needed that focuses on evaluating writing support at tertiary institutions in specific international contexts (Law & Murphy 1997; Donnelli & Garrison 2003; Lerner 2003; Thompson 2006). American accredited English-medium universities such as those that exist in non-English-speaking locations will likely benefit from redesigning, establishing, and maintaining Composition Tutoring Classes over traditional one-to-one tutoring conferences as a means of providing multilingual international university students the academic support needed to flourish in English-medium higher education.
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A study into Teacher Perception and Practice of Inclusive Education for Disabled Learners in Nigeria and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Nneka Uju Aghamelu
Profile

Nneka Uju Aghamelu is a doctoral student at the University of Bolton. She is a member of the academic staff at Trafford College, Stretford Manchester, UK, where she teaches IT in Business with Health and Social Care. Nneka holds a BSc Double (Hons) in Computer Science and Engineering from Lagos State University Nigeria, an MSc in Technology Management from the University of East London and a PGCE in Secondary School ICT. Nneka has thirteen years of teaching experience, which spans from primary school setting from 2002 to 2005 as a computer studies teacher; Secondary school setting from 2007 to 2011 as an ICT and BTEC Health and Social Care Teacher and she now teachers IT with Health and Social Care in Further Education. Nneka’s main area of study is disability, classroom inclusion and special education. She has worked alongside pupils with autism spectrum disorder at Jewels School, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo teaching Primary school aged children with special need in a mainstream classroom.

Abstract

Teachers are seen as key bodies to implement inclusive education. Positive perception and attitudes are therefore argued as playing a considerable role in implementing inclusive practices successfully within and outside the classroom. The aim of this study is to examine how teachers in Nigeria and in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), perceive the teaching of disabled learners and what attitude they display towards inclusive education. It also examined which variables are related to their attitudes and how these affect social and educational inclusion of disabled learners in mainstream schools. A broad survey was undertaken with sample comprising of 516 secondary and primary school teachers from both countries. The analysis revealed some thematic key factors that impact on teacher perception and practise of inclusion for disabled learners. It mainly reveals that the majority of teachers hold negative attitudes towards the inclusion of these types of learners. Five variable key factors obtained from the themes were teacher characteristics towards the disabled learners, inappropriate classroom management technique, the system of recruitment and career development, the parental involvement and other contextual factors like availability of resources and funding. Nevertheless, the recommendations provided at the end of this paper portrays a further in-depth research to address the themes mentioned above in other to domesticate a framework for these teachers for the inclusive learning of disabled pupils in these two countries.

Keywords

Inclusion, Inclusive education, disabilty, cognitive impairment, teacher perceptions
Introduction

Inclusive education for disabled learners is a dynamic process constantly evolving (EENET, 2013). Children’s right to inclusive education is widely recognised in international human rights law. The most recently adopted instrument is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which explicitly states that education for disabled children should be inclusive. (CSIE, 2013)

The UK Equality Act, (2010) states that a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities and includes clarifications and exclusions to a definition which includes medical conditions. In this paper, the author refers to ‘disabled learners’ to include secondary and primary school pupils with sensory, physical and intellectual impairments or who have mental health difficulties. Also, ‘inclusion’ is intended to mean ‘the participation of disabled children through the provision of fully accessible information, environments and support’ (Lansdown, 2003 p.2). The aim of this paper is to analyse teacher attitudes towards “impacting” learning inclusively for disabled children within mainstream classrooms in Nigeria and in Democratic Republic of the Congo by considering the compounding factors that pose barriers to promoting classroom inclusive practices.

Literature suggests that the concept of disability has been examined from various cultural perspectives in Nigeria and in the DRC (Eskay et al 2008). Many Nigerian researchers such as Mehta (1978), Ogbue (1981), Obani and Doherty (1984), Ikpaya (1990), Afolabi, (1990) and Ozoji (1990) found that the basic problem affecting disabled pupils was the overcoming of negative attitudes and misunderstanding about the significance of their ‘handicapped’ conditions. Focuses of their research were only based on societal perception of these disabled pupils but not on their teaching and learning. Ajuwon (2008) recommends from his content analysis there is need to undertake rigorous research into the needs of the large number of general education students and to assess how inclusionary practices will impact the general classroom atmosphere. Disabled pupils were not specifically addressed in his writing about inclusive practices. ATIAS Scale study (Attitudes toward Inclusion in Africa Scale, 2012) was carried out broadly by this same researcher where his participants were a sample of educators attending two national conferences on special education in a state in Nigeria and thus were not representative of all special educators throughout the country (Ajuwon, 2012). A finding was the issue of classroom inclusive practice for disabled pupils required a phenomenological approach with direct interaction with these teachers in order to adequately explore the issue and develop effective response strategies. Likewise in DRC, no thesis exists specifically about classroom Inclusive teaching and learning for disabled pupils, thus; this specific area is still under researched.

Multiple barriers remain and hinder the full participation of students with disabilities in education in the two countries. Lack of information, combined with discriminatory attitudes towards the disabled at all levels of society, contributes to the continued neglect of the human right to education. “Inclusive education in a developing country implies the equal right of all children to the ‘educational package’, however basic that package may be.” (Miles, 2005 p.7), the implementation of the above stated argument is not visibly being utilised in Nigeria and in DRC. According to Kofi Annan; ‘Education is a human right with immense power to transform, on its foundation rest the cornerstone of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development’ (UNICEF, 1999 p.4). Has this human right preached by Kofi Annan been made sustainable in Nigeria and in DRC, especially for students with disabilities? The author hopes to unravel this within this paper.

One focus of social justice principles is possibly to promote inclusive education, ‘every citizen is entitled to an equal set of civil, political and social rights, including the means to exercise these rights effectively’ (Miller, 2005, p.5). CSIE (2013) promotes such a principle arguing countries have obligations under international human rights law to provide inclusive education for all children and this has been partially pursued in the UK via the (Equality Act, 2010). DRC and Nigeria’s educational goal pursuits were less ambitious. These countries’ primary priority was to increase the number of pupils enrolling into school thus an inappropriate education for some members of the class was secondary in importance to them when compared to not receiving education at all. Inclusive Education for learners with disabilities is therefore a low priority.
This study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate perceptions and practice inclusive teaching of disabled pupils in Nigerian and DRC mainstream classroom. Quantitative methods were employed to frame parameters to enhance objectivity. According to Myers (Myers, 1997) it entails collection of data which can be measured and analysed statistically. A questionnaire-survey method was employed with some qualitative data source in the form of open ended questions and attempted a purposive mixed method approach to data collection by utilising open-ended questions in order to review participants’ perceptions and attitudes towards disability, their teaching styles with an emphasis on inclusive practises (through multiple choice question in a Likert scale).

As this is a study involving a large sample, steps were taken to determine the degree at which it was similar to the population of teachers teaching disabled pupils in both countries to ensure at least reasonable evidence for generalizing of the findings to that population. As Schumacher and McMillan (1993, p.125) note, ‘often researchers will describe the subjects carefully to show that although they were not selected randomly from a larger population, the characteristics of the subjects appear representative of much of the population’. 516 teachers from Nigeria and DRC were involved in the study with the survey running in both primary and secondary schools. These participant schools were pre-selected by the education authorities with a focus on schools with higher number of disabled pupils at enrolment.

Findings

The findings reveal that university graduate teachers in Nigeria do not consider teacher training important and those that went through teacher training colleges did not acquire university education and both parties therefore lack adequate subject knowledge to be fully competent. The trained respondents indicated more confidence in their professional competency to teach disabled pupils than their untrained counterparts. These findings are consistent with those which underline the fact that teachers who have an open perception over inclusion are more confident in their own abilities to implement inclusive education (Buell et al., 1999).

A question was posed to find out how many of these teachers are aware of the real concept behind the word “cognitive disability and impairment”.

21% of teachers from both Nigeria and in DRC are unsure of what non-visible impairment means, instead, they are only aware of the visible physical impairment characterised by the medical model of disability. Also, 23% of teachers in Nigeria and 32% of teachers in DRC do not know about the existence of non-visible impairment in their pupils, only 56% of Nigerian teachers and 47% of the DRC teachers claim to be aware.

In both countries, many mainstream classroom teachers believe that children considered “different” are not their responsibility, an idea which revealed the fact that there are many schools where the medical pathological model still dominates educational activity (Angelides, Stylianou, and Gibbs, 2006). Therefore, due to the negative effect of the medical model of disability, “many visibly disabled people internalise the negative message that all disabled people’s problems stem from not having ‘normal’ bodies” (Carson, 2009 p.9), and this led them to believe that their impairments automatically prevent them from taking part in social and/or educational activities.

Teachers did not feel that they are prepared or competent to teach disabled pupils together with those categorised as having no disability. The main reason appears to be that they do not have sufficient training to create inclusive educational activities (Hay, Smith, and Paulsen, 2001). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), apart from the 14% who are unsure if they actually obtain Career Professional Development (CPD), a little above half of the remaining 86% answered “Yes” (44%) and the other half answered “No” (42%), meaning there exist fifty-fifty chance that training and career professional development is not being practise in DRC.
This could only imply that CPD is not being practiced or they are unaware of what CPD really entails. CPD is very beneficial to the individual, group or school and contribute immensely to the quality of education in the classroom. According to Day (1999 p.4), ‘CPD is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives’. For these teachers to perceive and practise inclusive education appropriately, ‘CPD should be seen as important and useful as a means to update teachers skills and knowledge for the benefit of themselves and their pupils’ (Hustler et al, 2003, p.6).

A more positive finding was that teachers with more experience are more convinced that they are capable to adapt the educational activity in order to take into consideration all pupil’s needs. This could be explained by a larger professional experience, self-confidence and more types of students which have learned under their careful supervision. These are similar result obtained from those of Kalyva, Gojkovic, and Tsakiris, (2007), who found that those teachers with more relevant experience in teaching have a more positive attitude towards inclusion than those without experience in teaching.

The views of classroom teachers and educators from the two countries were categorised in five areas: Personal Characteristics (e.g. attitude, behaviour towards disability); Classroom Technique (e.g. classroom management skills); Recruitment and Development (e.g. Teacher selection process, CPD and Training), Parental Involvement (e.g. Parent - Teacher Association) and Contextual Factors (e.g. funding, resources and facilities.

The most prevailing factor is the first, Teacher Personal Characteristics which defines teacher attitude and behaviour towards children deemed disabled with a negative perception of teachers towards acceptance. A further question as to prospects of disabled learners following graduation from senior secondary school indicated that:

- Do not believe in disabled pupils achieving and see it pointless - 30%
- I have hope they could learn skills that would help in future but have never come across it - 2%.
- I have no knowledge about the child ones they leave school - 10%
- No prospect as they are not prepared for outside world - 50%
- Parents should put them through for basic skills and there was no further education plan - 8%.

Responses also suggest no solid connection nor a promising teaching bond between classroom teachers and their disabled learners. More than half of the teachers worryingly felt that disabled pupils are ‘attention seekers’. This type of perception would only yield social inequalities, leading to the disabled learners’ social, emotional and educational need not being met. Other barriers expressed by participants in open-ended comments are; Lack of support from parents, lack of adequate teaching resources, and insufficient classroom accommodation.

Conclusion

Initial and preliminary reflections suggest some specific conditions need addressing in order to provide more effective inclusive teaching for disabled pupils including; a restructure of teacher recruitment and selection processes; an improvement in the teacher training curricula; more help from the school governing bodies and educational authorities; Increased teaching resources and more time for preparing educational activities; reduced class sizes and creating and developing opportunities for interactive partnerships between teachers, pupils, parents and carers. A reform of curriculum should be considered in parallel with proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and teaching the disabled and inherent principles.
References


Shaana Aljoe currently teaches English Composition to first-year international students at the University of New York in Prague, Czech Republic which is a private, fully-accredited, English-medium University. She founded the University's first Writing Lab and is also the English Language Programs Director. Her research interests focus on the provision of writing assistance for L2 students in non-Anglophone contexts. Having established student writing assistance at one university using the American format of provision, she now advocates for alternative forums of writing support in a European context.

**Abstract**

Is the most efficient form of university writing support for international students a conventional writing centre where only one-to-one tutoring is provided? In a European context, given that writing support is still a relatively new concept, the answer to this question appears to be no. Although many English-medium universities that currently exist in non-Anglophone contexts provide traditional one-to-one tutoring, mirroring a format that originates in the United States, it has become clear through one small-scale study in Czech Republic that both European students and those from other nations prefer to be tutored on a one-to-many basis. This is an account of how that preference was detected by offering students a choice between conventional and not-so-conventional forums of assistance. I propose that in a European context, the American format of one-to-one tutoring might be dispensed with in favour of a more inclusive forum of assistance described as ‘one-to-many’ and labelled English Composition Tutoring Classes at the institution where the discovery was made. The distinction between these classes and seminars is made in an effort avoid confusion. I conclude by suggesting that writing centre directors and tutors might rethink their traditionally formatted facilities in order to better serve the students attending their English-medium universities, especially those located in non-Anglophone contexts.

**Keywords**

University writing labs/centres, writing tutor, EAP, NNES, Composition studies
Introduction

The most common form of tertiary level writing support model for multilingual students is currently a writing centre where mainly one-to-one consultations with a tutor exist. The concept and practice of one-to-one consultations is a familiar one but its efficacy is worthy of consideration. Higher education researchers working with multilingual students question the efficacy of this writing support service model outside of an Anglo-American context (Leibowitz and Goodman 1997). The most common type of tertiary level writing support is a writing centre; a stand-alone entity, separate from other traditional departments where students can, on a voluntary basis, expect a one-to-one conference on aspects of academic writing with an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) trained tutor.

However, academic writing and writing support are still relatively new concepts for European students studying in the English language at English-medium institutions. It is argued here that an additional, permanently scheduled, ‘one-to-many’, classroom held writing support setting can further support the traditional ‘one-to-one’ writing support model. Moreover, if only one form of support can be provided, in a European context, the one-to-many classroom format of tutoring should be chosen instead of the traditional one-to-one model first developed in the United States.

The significance of writing support in non-Anglophone contexts

At universities, courses are traditionally administered over a period of approximately 12 weeks through a number of regularly scheduled classes that comprise one semester. Two semesters make up the conventional academic year starting in the autumn and continuing through until the spring. Many universities also provide similarly scheduled seminars in addition to classes for more advanced and/or detailed small group discussions. What distinguishes seminars from a one-to-many tutoring model is that in seminars students are tutored as one cohesive group, whereas one-to-many tutoring provides a classroom space for individuals and small groups of students to practice various aspects of writing with an EAP tutor who floats between individuals and small groups providing guidance as needed or requested.

Writing support programs, often referred to as writing labs or centres, exist at accredited institutions operating in Anglophone contexts and increasingly at those located in non-Anglophone contexts. The existence and progress of the European Association of Writing Centres, The Writing Lab Newsletter, and The Writing Center Journal are evidence of this. Writing tutors face unique challenges in our attempts to instruct international English composition students. Working at English-medium, Anglo-American, higher education institutions which are located outside of contexts where English is not the commonly spoken language inside and outside the classroom, writing support tutors have a responsibility to share their experiences in order to progress toward a global framework for writing support, and more importantly, its assessment.

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The development of one university writing centre in Prague.

In the autumn of 2009, an EAP trained composition instructor established a traditional writing lab at a private, English-medium, American accredited university in Prague, Czech Republic. The lab was an ad hoc solution to the vexing problem of high failure rates in first year English Composition courses. Management reported that the effect of failure rates in one course was increasing student attrition rates of the University generally. In this University’s particular instance and at this stage of its inception, it was premature to consider the ethical issues such as text ownership that so many researchers call attention to today (Clark and Healy 1996; Pemberton 1995; Barnett 1997). Although ethical considerations affect writing centre policy from the beginning, more important at the time was making a centre available to students at the earliest date possible, preferably in time for the start of the semester. A sense of urgency developed after management recognized that establishing such a facility was an important factor that separated the University from others located in native English contexts.

Figure 1 provides a national profile of registered first-semester students in autumn 2009. From this group a small number of survey respondents, enrolled in the first-semester English Composition course, volunteered to complete the writing centre consultation form after visiting the centre for assistance with an assignment. At this university degree-seeking students are required to successfully complete two semesters of English Composition in order to fulfil prerequisites for more advanced courses where a higher level of language skill is required. Exemption is possible for one or both semesters through transferred credit systems or internationally recognized Advanced Placement tests. Considering that most of the students entering the institution are non-native English speakers (NNES) they will most likely be required to take both semesters of English Composition. The figure (1) below illustrates the highly diverse nature of a first-year cohort.

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<td>US</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Troneckova, 2011)

*Other nationalities can include: Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Germany, Macedonia, Georgia, Greece, Iraq, Pakistan, Italy, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Portugal, Armenia, Bulgaria, Belarus, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Nigeria, South Africa, Israel, Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, Canada, U.K., and New Zealand.

Due to the pilot scheme nature of that first writing centre in 2009, no budget or funding was allocated for its establishment and maintenance. In spite of this, a rudimentary writing laboratory was established consisting of furniture commandeered from existing library stock; a large, stand-alone desk in one of the four rooms
comprising the school library with two chairs, one of which is occupied by an experienced EAP trained composition instructor (the tutor). Initially, the writing lab was open for a few hours once a week and, after moving to a private office to better accommodate one-to-one sessions, increased operation to three hours a day, four days a week, and consultations would last from 10 to 30 minutes where students were seen on a first-come, first-served basis.

This initial writing lab represented a welcome addition to the University and was a proud achievement. Adding value to my institution was heartening, and the feedback from the students who came for a consultation was also encouraging. Satisfaction surveys were mailed to students and more than half believed the addition of a writing lab for students was indeed beneficial. However, it became apparent that the lab – and its one tutor – were not enough to satisfy the demands of a student population that is 95% NNES. EAP learners deal with issues that are shaped by their perceptions and location. Researchers are becoming increasingly aware of the distinctions between writing centres within and outside of Anglophonic contexts. Writing centre professional, Muriel Harris (1986) observed that multilingual students have ‘habits, behaviour patterns, perspectives, ways of delivering information, and other cultural filters that affect writing in ways we often do not sufficiently attend to and indeed are in danger of ignoring’ (87).

Further, Gerd Brauer (2006) identified the problems that many university tutors outside of the Anglo-American experience encounter. Many students in this context misunderstand the role of the writing lab tutor, do not view writing as a process, or do not feel the need to attend at all for one reason or another (134). His experience at the University of Education in Freiberg, Germany, directly reflects the challenges that many writing tutors encounter in non-Anglophonic contexts.

The catalyst to move beyond conventional one-to-one tutoring

After the writing lab had been in operation for one year, it became clear that another form of support was necessary to address management’s concern that the writing lab, as pleasant as it was to have one, could not provide enough support to curb failure rates, therefore another writing support solution had to be found. Although the writing lab was a welcome addition to the facilities offered by the university, it did not seem to have a significant effect in terms of reducing failure rates in English Composition. In brief, a way had to found for writing support to accommodate a greater number of students.

The Introduction of an English Composition Tutoring Class: ‘one-to-many’ tutoring

The solution came in the offer of a non-credit English Composition Tutoring Class (CTC) for students to attend on a voluntary basis. The CTC operated in virtually the same manner as a traditional one-to-one tutoring session in the writing lab, but allowed many students to obtain writing support with a tutor in a classroom environment. The CTC was given a permanent time slot in the daily schedule of university courses, and students could attend individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Again, the CTC was the responsibility of one professionally trained tutor; but students did not work together in one cohesive group as would happen in a traditional classroom or seminar.

A comparison of the established writing lab with the CTC after its first year of operation is shared here which serves to inform developers of future writing support initiatives at other non-Anglophone based, English-medium tertiary institutions. Both the writing lab and the CTC were ad hoc creations from the beginning; the CTC was a natural outgrowth from the writing lab given the diversity of the student population. The most significant differences between the two forms of writing support after only one year of operation were compelling.

It became immediately apparent that students who had never visited the lab readily visited the CTC. Reasons for this lie partly in cultural differences; two or three students sometimes visit the writing lab together where one of them would request help on an assignment. Furthermore, some students felt uncomfortable with the one-to-one consultation of the lab and felt more at ease working on their writing in a larger classroom setting.
Both the writing lab tutor and the CTC tutor are composition instructors and students reported feeling uneasy approaching their respective composition instructors for additional help. A greater number of students visited the CTC than the writing lab. This was probably more a matter of physical space, but attendance records reveal that far more students could be accommodated in one week at the CTC than in the lab.

Another observation made after the first year of offering the CTC was that students attended the CTC regularly. One reason for regular attendance is the inclusion of CTC in the regular schedule of classes. Students knew that help was available whenever they browse a full course timetable. The writing lab also appears on the schedule of classes, but the opening hours are limited which may not be convenient or even alienate some students. Furthermore, students visited both the lab and CTC. Although the incidence of confusion or alienation is rare, it is worth highlighting to show that given the geographical context, students must use their own initiative to gain as much L2 language exposure as possible. Far from being language zealots, these students realize that exposure and practice are critical to success in this context. And lastly, composition failure rates were reduced to the satisfaction of management. It is possible that students’ awareness of the high composition failure rates may have also contributed to this result. The appearance of the tutoring classes on the complete courses timetable may also have alerted students to the importance of accuracy in their writing.

Due to the disparity between what multilingual students think is appropriate and what is actually acceptable academic writing, some researchers have advocated requiring first-year English composition students to attend a writing support session (Leibowitz and Goodman 1997, 87). I argue that this mandate may prove unnecessary if international EAP students are offered a less conventional, customized forum of writing assistance.

It is worth noting here, that although many writing centres also provide electronic formats of writing support, Writing support specialist, Eric Moberg (2010) asserts that “the use of both on-line and brick and mortar service delivery models allow program and institutions to accentuate the advantages of each and accommodate for weaknesses” (2). This would mean that the introduction of the CTC counterbalances the weaknesses of the one-to-one consultations occurring in the writing lab and, it seems, vice versa. Many universities are connected digitally so students have access to online assistance. This kind of help is invaluable to students, but “the technology should be seen as a tool, not a magic wand,” (1). More research is needed to determine to what extent is electronic writing assistance valuable for students.

Conclusion
Support and interventions for multilingual students can take a variety of models, but the most common seems to be the North American style where a one-to-one conference is held between a tutor and a student. This report attempts to broaden the framework to accommodate student resistance to seeking help and increased student demand in an efficient manner. By experimenting with or redesigning the writing support forums offered, especially to international students in non-Anglophonic contexts, composition instructors will likely find that students respond more positively to being given a less conventional forum of assistance from which to seek help.

Although increased study has contributed much to the writing centre movement, researchers believe much more is needed that focuses on evaluating writing support at tertiary institutions in specific international contexts (Law & Murphy 1997; Donnelli & Garrison 2003; Lerner 2003; Thompson 2006). American accredited English-medium universities such as those that exist in non-English-speaking locations will likely benefit from redesigning, establishing, and maintaining Composition Tutoring Classes over traditional one-to-one tutoring conferences as a means of providing multilingual international university students the academic support needed to flourish in English-medium higher education.
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From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side. An Action Research Project using a ‘flipped classroom’ model

Neil Dougan
Profile

Neil was network TV Producer & Director for 24 years, making programmes for BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Sky. He directed celebrities, comedians, actors and politicians in long form documentaries; drama/docs; theme nights; comedy and ob docs. Subjects included; entertainment, music, film, arts, history, biographies, travel, current affairs and sport.

Subject Specialism

My subject specialism is Film and Television, which I currently lecture at undergraduate levels HE4, HE5 and HE6 in the School for Creative Technologies at the University of Bolton. My specialism arose in two ways. Firstly from my industry experience where I had 24 years in British Network TV as a Producer/Director and Series Producer making a wide range of programmes for all the major networks, BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Sky. I worked for the BBC for many years as well as many brass-plate independent companies in Glasgow, London, Birmingham and Manchester.

Secondly, before embarking on a Media career I graduated with an M.Arts (Joint Honours) in Film & Television & Theatre Studies from Glasgow University. That degree also academically underpins my subject specialism, as the Film & TV aspect was not practice based but theory led. This had meant that I am now also teaching critical theory and film studies as well as the practical aspect, which is unusual combination for someone coming from industry.
Evolution of my Education Project on ‘flipped classrooms’

As a full-time educator working in Higher Education it is important to keep a keen eye on innovative practices and on how I can improve my own teaching practice and in turn improve the lectures I deliver to students. When I was teaching at Edge Hill University something happened that changed how I looked at current teaching practices. I was teaching in the University’s brand new £18 million media center and I noticed as I walked through the teaching corridors and looked into the floor to ceiling clear glass classrooms that the lecturers were only using the SMARTboards to display YouTube videos and while actually instructing reverted to dry markers on the whiteboard. This practice seemed perverse in its Luddite approach to technology in a building that was meant to represent and enhance 21st Century digital technology.

That thought stayed with me when I began lecturing in Bolton and when the Education Project assignment arose in the PGDE course I thought to base it learning the SMARTboard technology, adapting it to Film and TV content for lessons. I begin researching into the subject and arranged what became an intensive extended session with a specialist in SMARTboard software. I had used it before when doing my CELTA certificate but the purpose in this session was to find a way to capture the moving image of film and television in SMARTboard and use it in my classroom for specific teaching purposes. The specialist is an educator himself and not just a technician so he was motivated to adapt the educational tool to my needs. Between us that day we achieved that.

My aim for the project at that point was to develop my skills in the software and continue to adapt it to my film and TV lecture content. Then I would offer to impart this knowledge and skill to my five fellow lecturers in the Media department. I mention this as a prelude into my eventual Education Project and it is connected and overlapping.

I observed that like Edge Hill many lecturers in Bolton University do not use the SMARTboard, a fact confirmed by the tutor who had just helped me. It struck me as ironic that we were teaching film and television and their place in 21st century digital technology to students using smartphones, laptops and operating on a variety of social media platforms while failing to engage with them in a technologically stimulating way.

My first step in doing the project was to identify the curriculum need in relation to my classroom practice. I decided that I needed to use some e-learning related practice that would stimulate not just the students but myself as lecturer. To do this would ultimately require Action Research, a term that our tutor had highlighted in class. I immersed myself in beginning to understanding that type of research. I quickly found that Lawrence Stenhouse advocated that ‘curriculum research and development ought to belong to the teacher’ (Stenhouse, 1975 p. 142). and that ‘it is not enough that teachers’ work should be studied: they need to study it themselves’ (p.143). That excited me but I tempered that with the realisation that I had to frame my present and future research within reflective practices. Carr and Kemmis (1986) see action research as a means to social change and ‘emancipatory’ both for students and teachers. They advocate that action research can be used to understand one’s own practice; to make one’s practice better; to accommodate outside change and to change the outside in order to make one’s practice better.

At the most basic level action research involves a cycle of planning or a spiral. That is planning, action, monitoring and reflection. This is a classic sequence but in reality as I found it does not necessarily start in planning and smoothly move forward. For me there was observation of existing practice (reconnaissance) before I was ready to intervene and change things. It’s an interesting phenomenon that an educator may find it difficult to separate one part of the process from another: A lecturer may find himself reflecting, as s/he is something that Donald Schón (1983) calls ‘knowing-in-action’ – and monitoring also will take place as action proceeds. That said once the first change has been completed the action research cycle would generally advance in the above manner. Having now begun to understand the action research methodology I needed a way forward in beginning my inquiry.

The breakthrough was Whitehead (1985) who asked six questions which enabled me as a fledging action
researcher to breakthrough and begin my inquiry:

I. What is your concern?
II. Why are you concerned?
III. What do you think you could do about it?
IV. What kind of evidence could you collect to help you make some judgment about what is happening?
V. How would you collect such evidence?
VI. How would you check that your judgment about what has happened is reasonable, fair and accurate?

The first three questions helped me identify my project. My concern was multi media students not being stimulated enough by the teaching methods on our courses. I was concerned because they may drop out and affect our retention rate and/or were silently displeased and unfulfilled with our School's (of Creative Technologies) lo-tech methods. What I 'wanted to do about it' was find a challenging practice that would invigorate their experience in the classroom but with a technological aspect to it so as to entice my media-aware students.

I began researching innovative ways of teaching and e-learning and after some time exploring another pet subject of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC's) I came across a related article that may not only change my practice but the nature of my educational career.

The Transformational Potential of Flipped Classrooms (Horn 2013) introduced me to the concept of a move away from lecturer-centered teaching to student centered learning by turning on its head (flipping) the structure of instruction. Horn explains that 'the flipped classroom is a form of blended learning in which students learn online…[and]…time in the classroom, previously reserved for teacher instruction, is spent on what we used to call homework, with teacher assistance as needed'. It was two teachers who allegedly originated the technique. Bergman and Sams (2010) were struggling to reteach lessons for absent students and so paid $50 in 2008 to buy software to record their lessons. These two highly experienced American chemistry teachers initiated an idea that has caught the imaginations of innovative educators and is a current ‘hot’ topic – the teaching practice of flipped classrooms.

What fired my imagination was that it appeared to be a solution not just to my concerns outlined above but to another more central and fundamental major concern I have been harbouring as a relatively new lecturer. That is; I could tangibly sense in the class that as I am giving lectures on various subjects there is a massive compromise taking place. Even though classes are meant to be representative of a clustered level of competence and ability, it is inevitable that some students are more able than others. In giving a lecture at a particular learning pace and despite checks and balances established via student feedback some students fall behind in their understanding of the lecture while others may be impatient that I am not getting to the next new point quickly enough as they have already understand the previous one. As for those who have missed the class, the structure outline of a lesson may all be that remains in a PowerPoint.

Flipped classrooms appear to address these issues plus offer the technological frisson that young learners may desire. Absentees can view online lessons while slower learners can rewind online tutorials again and again. However, Horn's article above being my inspiration it was far from being the best definition of what a 'flipped classroom' is. The core idea is to flip the common instructional approach. Tucker (2012) explains that with teacher-created videos and interactive lessons, instruction that used to occur in class is now accessed at home, in advance of class.

Class becomes the place to work through problems, advance concepts, and engage in collaborative learning. Most importantly, all aspects of instruction can be rethought to best maximize the scarcest learning resource—time. Flipped classroom teachers almost universally agree that it’s not the instructional videos on their own, but how they are integrated into an overall approach, that makes the difference.

The Flipped Classroom (Tucker, 2012)
While that explains ‘flipped classrooms’ in a detailed way, it is important to explain what they are not as there appears to be common misconceptions about what they are, usually from skeptics of the practice.

As McDougall insists (2012) The Flipped Classroom is not:

- A synonym for online videos.
- About replacing teachers with videos.
- An online course.
- Students working without structure.
- Students spending the entire class staring at a computer screen.
- Students working in isolation.

It was just as important to clarify to myself what it was not as much as what it was. I then discovered a phrase, which encapsulated it all – the title of this Education Project: ‘From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side.’ Over twenty years ago, in 1993, a small article by Alison King appeared in the journal College Teaching. That article would initiate a big debate on education reform. Its’ emphasis was to shift the role of the lecturer away from being the ‘the sage on the stage’ during class time to one where s/he empowers the students to embrace and own their studies supported by the lecturer now being by a personal ‘guide on the side.’

I used the action research outline in Waters-Adams (2006) as the basis of my Education Project. They advocated ‘research on action’ by using ‘action as a tool for research’. This helped me separate out the meaning of the two words in the one phrase ‘action research’. Even more usefully they explained that the ‘process [is] driven by a dialogue between the elements of action and the intentions behind action or [the] practice and the values behind practice’. (2006 : 98). The intentions and values behind the action were of great importance to me as explained above. I asked myself - why should I use action research? My answer - because I want to change my practice as an experiment. I asked myself what is practice? Simply put I concluded that it is the way I carry out my professional actions. I had encountered the notion of the ‘theory-practice divide’ and cutting across that divide appears to be action research which appealed to me as it appears to encourage a practitioner to consider both theory and practice as part of a single whole. What appealed to me most about embarking on action research for my Education Project was that it developed the capabilities of teachers as ‘professional knowledge makers, rather than simply as professional knowledge users’. As Waters-Adams, conclude,

In an age of centralisation and the proliferation of national guidelines and strategies, action research can help teachers feel in control of their own professional situation. (2006)

This, as I will explain later, has turned out to have a long lasting impact on my immediate career path and imminent PhD decision. Indeed, Carr and Kemmis (1986) describe action research as a ‘critical educational science’ and one, which it proved I became engrossed in. Using Waters-Adams (2006) I used their action research model. At this point in the process I was aware I was in the ‘reconnaissance’ stage where I had already mapped out my main area of concern and that I now needed to focus on what I could do about it. As mentioned above I decided to do an experiment in Flipped Classrooms. I had already used Waters-Adams (2006) golden rules for selecting a topic.

- ‘Keep it manageable – keep the focus small scale’ – I decided to use one small size class of 14 students.
- ‘It should be interesting to you’ – I decided to use a film studies class, which would be challenging both as a subject and as a class of our most able students.
- ‘It should be workable – you are not stumped for ideas, but can identify ways in which you might have a go at addressing your question’ – I chose a class where I could use flipped for one part of the class and compare and contrast with a traditional lecture within the same session.
- ‘It is not too disruptive of normal routines’ – I could use a lesson that was already in in one of my module and not have to bring a set of students together thus not in any way disrupting the my schedule or those of the University and students.

I had to prepare for my in class presentation to my PDGE peers and there were some important issues to
resolve. I examined all the modules I was teaching and decided that the one that I wanted to ‘flip’ as part of the Education Project was MED 4006 Reading and Researching the Screen. This is where I teach Film Critical Theory to first year HE4 students. Firstly because the subject matter lent itself to being ‘flipped’. That is, the main classical theory elements could be taught in the same way with the same materials every year. I could therefore make a pre-class video that could be used again next year and like-wise I could in principle ‘flip’ the whole module if this proto-type proved successful. The content could be replicated whereas many of my other modules were more fluid and open ended reactive to the needs of both the individuals and the group with many tutorial sessions e.g. work-based learning. Secondly the class is made of articulate engaged students who would embrace potential initiative and change rather than sabotage it through disengagement and non-attendance.

I also consulted my colleagues/peers and course leader. I explained what I intended to do and asked if they were comfortable with my intended one off practice. They plus my course leader all agreed that I should proceed for my benefit in relation to my PGDE. For the benefit of the students engaged in a different practice and for the Media tam to review at a later date. At this stage it was agreed there was no need to inform middle management, the Academic Group Leader, as this was strictly a pedagogical matter and not one impinging on administration, financial or protocol issues.

I presented my project to the class and I managed to overcome what I anticipated to be the most difficult aspect of the talk - that of explaining what the principle of a ‘flipped classroom’ is. I did so by showing the principle in three different ways; a short video, then a podcast and finally an infograph. I was using the very materials I could utilise to make a ‘flipped classroom’ to explain what it was it was. The deliberate irony was not lost on my peers and they seemed to understand the concept clearly in their feedback and they themselves began to debate the potential merits within their teaching environments in further education, secondary and primary school. The next step was to ask permission of the Reading and Researching the Screen students to undertake the new practice in their lesson and to further seek their participation in whatever research method feedback that I decided on. Waters and Adams (2006) suggest that there are three concerns about choosing the research method. The first is the ‘lack of time for an action researcher’ during their normal teaching schedule ‘…therefore difficult to maintain rigour in data gathering and critique’. I was concerned about this as my PGDE assignments continually impacted on new full time teaching schedule. The second is ‘validity as research’ which raises the question of action research ‘…carried out by individuals who are interested parties in the research’. Despite wanting to embrace action research ‘accusations of inevitable researcher bias in data gathering and analysis’, intellectually unsettled me and I began doubt my own reasons for researching flipped classrooms. Perhaps I was too positive, too excited with the new potential practice and I would inadvertently support its positive aspects and suppress its negative aspects in modeling it for the students. However Water and Adams asserts that, ‘it is impossible to access practice without involving the practitioner’, so far so obvious, but the conclusion alleviated my critical self doubt,

> Practice is action informed by values and aims, which are not fully accessible from the outside. The practitioner may not even be wholly aware of the meaning of his or her values until he or she tries to embody them in her action.

_Waters and Adams (2006)_

I was not only relieved I was invigorated to proceed with the research. That said I did so with some trepidation as I hadn’t conducted formal academic research before and I needed to understand the principles very quickly. This took me to Waters and Adams third concern about choosing the research method - ‘unfamiliarity with research methods’. It seems that, ‘action researchers frequently explore what may constitute adequate research methods at the same time as they are researching their practice’, leading to accusations of ‘unreliability in data gathering’. However the writer conclude that ‘flawed or not, the [action research] process provides the most reliable access to practice’. That freed me to continue – there was no other option but to proceed with the research albeit in a self-conscious reflective manner.

My next major consideration was the ethical aspect as any research involving other people has this dimension.
I knew this from my time producing and directing documentaries for network television dealing with sensitive religious and political topics as well potential exploitation of on and off screen contributors. With action research in education is obvious that is inherently ensconced in the social world it takes part in, that it would affect the daily working lives and studies of those working in the institution. I made it one of my main duties to ensure rights would not be infringed and to promote fairness in my interpretation of data. I consulted the respective students who all agreed willing and openly to take part.

I made a change from my class presentation to my peers where I stated that the subject of my ‘flipped classroom’ lesson would be ‘Cinematography’. Instead I chose ‘Sound in Film ’ as the topic. I did this for three reasons:

1. Cinematography is one of the most interesting topics in the module and it would be hard to gauge if the students’ interest in the lesson would be high due to this rather than how I was teaching it in a different way and therefore hard to measure with data.

2. I chose the topic of Sound in Film instead because it is regarded, rightly or wrongly, as one of the least appealing topics and is a challenge to teach either in a traditional way or even in a new different way.

3. Cinematography is a stand-alone two-hour lesson, however I had planned to Sound in Film in conjunction with Music in Film as they complement each other.

My biggest breakthrough thus far in the process was my realisation to not only introduce a flipped class on the topic of Sound in Film but to compare and contrast my teaching of Music in Film in a traditional way immediately afterwards, one hour of each subject back to back. I could therefore draw direct comparisons with immediate effect.

I had to quickly learn about the methodologies of qualitative and quantitative research and the principle of triangulation. While action researchers can use any method of data gathering it would have to give reliable and useful evidence of any effect that my action might have. There are many methods available but I decided the most appropriate in the given classroom circumstances to form the three sides of the Triangulation, Woods (1996) was to use: questionnaires for quantitative research; interviews for qualitative research; and reflective notes made by me immediately after each contrasting lesson. I had intended to use peer interviews with regard to my on-line pre-class video and/in class observation but time constraints both for myself and my colleagues proved too daunting.

I researched software that I could use to record my own online lesson without the need of outside help as time was of the essence. I was recommended Camtasia that other educationalists had recommended in online ‘flipped classroom’ forums I had joined for the purpose of research. I began a free month long trial only days before I was due to teach my class. The online tutorials though clear were too complex to learn quickly as it also involved editing your recordings within the software, a skill I am not too adept at. I enlisted the help of a technically proficient second year Film and Television student to produce my short online lesson on Sound in Film without which there would be no ‘flipped classroom’ and no Education Project.

Due to pressure of time I quickly wrote the script/lesson in the two hours before I was due to film and record it. I had to write the lesson as well as adapt it for viewing purposes. We recorded the lesson in one hour late one evening in the classroom where I would actually be presenting the lesson two days later. It was a simple mixture of in vision pieces to camera and PowerPoint pages interspersed with what I hoped was an entertaining presentation involving my son’s musical keyboard as a key prop and lesson ‘tease’ and various textual interruptions by me of expected reactions from students, “no don’t switch off, there will be handouts for the History of Sound”. To break the PowerPoint up I used an anecdote from a film director (Hitchcock) and a physical demonstration of a sound experiment punctuated with a sarcastic narrative about the students continual avoidance of pre-class reading, “you remember this, yes it’s a book! You can get one of these in a Big Room downstairs, it’s called a li-bra-ry”.

This is the link to that 12-minute online preparatory lesson.
On the day of lesson my usually full class of 15 students was depleted to 8, which was disappointing, but they
had phoned to say there had been an accident on the motorway delaying/preventing students travelling from
Manchester and others were involved in filming for another project, which had become last minute.

When the class arrived they were brimming with excitement declaring that the online video was ‘brilliant’, ‘so
entertaining’ and so on. There was a palpable air of excitement in the room (see my reflective research as part
of the triangulation). That said the proof would be in the delivery of the two contrasting lessons. Sound in
Film which the students had seen the 12 minute online introduction then have more detailed class tuition and
one to one consultation on any points they needed more explanation - the guide on the side - and Music in
Film which I was teach the traditional way – the sage on the stage – the guardian of the gateway of knowledge,
imparting information at one pace, one size fits all. I conducted both classes and after a break asked the students
taking part to fill in a questionnaire consisting of 20 questions. 17 were multiple choices and in the remaining 3
questions I used the Lickert scale ranging from 1 (for strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

As the final part of the triangulation I asked them to fill in a research interview form. I spoke with students
about the experience then asked him or her to write down their conclusions in response to a series of
questions. This qualitative approach allowed more detail about their observations to be accommodated. This is
a summary of those findings:

Part 1 of the Triangulation – The Quantitative Research Questionnaire

The responses were overwhelmingly positive in respect of the usefulness and appeal of the flipped classroom
practice. It is clear that they all fully understood what a flipped classroom was (Qs 1-4) and appreciated being
invited to take part (Q.5). Most had seen the pre-class video (Q.6). In Q.7 I tried to ascertain whether not
seeing the video before class made a difference but the three options provided by me proved confusing and that
is marked as void. As is Q.9 where I left one of the multiple choice options open-ended making it incompatible
with quantitative research. Creating the questionnaires was a challenging and rewarding part of the process
and a steep learning curve. 100% agreed that the video was good preparation for the class (Q.8) and engaging
in an educational way (Q.10). Nearly all agreed around 9-10 on the Lickert scale that it was engaging, that I was
more extrovert than usual in the video (Q12) and that in relation to humour that (Q.13) 'C: It was about right'
in the lesson and yes it did help remember facts and/or concepts (Q.14). This was an exciting find and one,
which I will explore further, in my teaching practice. They were unanimous that they learned more than usual
about a subject, Sound in Film (Q.15) but did find it hard to compare with the being taught Music in Film in the
traditional way. That said they were again unanimous (Q.17) that they would have learned more about Music
if it had been taught through flipped classroom. Most strongly agreed that they would like to be taught by this
method again (Q.18) and with me as the lecturer (Q.19). There was a mixed response to other lecturers doing
so but more favourable than not (Q.20).

Part 2 of the Triangulation – The Qualitative Research Interview

There was a very positive response to the video with strong compliments regarding the ‘refreshing’ humour
of the video ‘mixed with serious teaching’ was just right. The entertainment and humour ‘acted as a catalyst
for research and discussion’. All agreed that the video lead to them looking forward to the lesson, ‘absolutely!’
because ‘it [the video] sparked interest’ and ‘made it more exciting’ because ‘everyone was talking about the
video’ because ‘it was amazing’. The video also allowed them to be ‘more prepared for the lecture and had
questions ready to ask’, due to ‘an enthusiastic take on a subject by a well informed individual’.

When asked for the negative aspects, some said none while any other comments mainly centred on the
‘production values’ of the technical sound and lighting deficiencies of the ‘taking head’ parts. A recurring critical
comment was on the ‘reliance’ on PowerPoint slides and the fact they were ‘not visually intriguing’. I agree with
this and it can be easily addressed in the future with a little more preparation and time.

Most students felt ‘better prepared’ for the in class lesson by being ‘more focused’ by having a ‘head start on the Sound lesson and could grow in knowledge’ but one student warned that while they agreed like all the students that they would like to try the flipped classroom again, the video element should be ‘as a preparation for the lessons but not instead of the lessons’.

The students gave examples of how some but not all modules in their Media, Writing and Production degree course could be flipped. The ones that were mentioned as not being suitable were fiction writing based modules where the one to one tutorials are crucial and the ‘the more practical kinesthetic modules’ but flipped would work over all as ‘it would benefit as we can keep going back [to the video] and referencing’.

Part 3 of the Triangulation – Self Reflection after Action Research practice

In the first lesson on Sound in Film, it was clear to me that (in answer to my first three self reflective questions) that the students paid more attention than usual and were more engaged, asking more questions than usual as they had come prepared with questions. All those aspects lent themselves to the ‘positive’ outcome of the experiment. There were no outstanding negatives but luckily I had prepared extra material because when we stepped through the video PowerPoint, they had so absorbed the information we quickly came to the end of it. I had prepared a longer PowerPoint on Sound in Film and so was not only able to step off the sage’s stage and become a guide on the side for the pre-class video content but I then added extra material and information during the freed-up class time.

In the second lesson Music in Film, the lesson went well as a traditional lecture, which still involved the elicitation of answers from students and working them in pairs and threes. That said I could see that they were more passive than the previous lesson and asked less questions. I do not believe that tiredness played a part in this process but as this was the second hour of a two part, two hour lecture the students were not as alert as they were at the beginning of the first lesson.

In conclusion, I found that in my action research the ‘flipped classroom’ practice worked very well and the students’ responses have confirmed this. Their positive responses exceeded my expectations however I know that I could not sustain an entertainment led video for every lesson and the ‘novelty’ aspect of the one off lesson might soon wear off over the course of an entire module. That said this experiment has had a great impact on my professional development as I now wish pursue this action research by flipping the same module next year for all the lessons and perhaps making it the beginnings of an EdDoc instead of a PhD in Film and Television.

This account has concentrated on the individual practice of action research. Beyond flipping an entire module I would thereafter seek collaborative action research with my Media colleagues as

...some writers about action research claim that the ‘best’ (by which they mean the most ‘emancipatory’) action research is collaborative in nature, involving groups of people exploring and challenging the constraints of their professional lives.

    Elliott (1991)

During this process of action research I struggled with my intentions, values and beliefs, which are personal. Collaborating with colleagues would make the process easier and cross reference findings in a more transparent, less individualistic way.
References


Bibliography


Links to extensive ‘Flipped classroom’ research: https://21centuryedtech.wordpress.com/2012/07/18/flipping-the-classroom-a-goldmine-of-research-and-resources-to-keep-you-on-your-feet/

Reasons against flipping classrooms:
http://theinnovativeeducator.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/five-reasons-im-not-flipping-over.html
