More than just grammar:

A collaborative project assessing, addressing and tracking the transition needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) students at UTAS

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Sessions aims

- Is language the key?
- Language is an important element among many.
- Is better language screening the solution?
- It is part of solution – wider curricular changes and collaboration are also needed.
Session outline

• Who are the CALD students?

• Why do they decide to study at UTAS?

• What is the role of the CALD unit?

• What is the CALD/EnglishAssist English proficiency test, and what were the key findings of this project?

• What factors other than English impact transition of CALD students?

• What recommendations does our project suggest for supporting successful transition of CALD (and other non-traditional) students?

Who are these students?

1. CALD = Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
   • Domestic – not International Students
   • HECS / Centrelink Eligible
   • Voluntary migrants / Forced Migrants (Humanitarian Entrants)
   • Approx 600 students at UTAS – mainly African, S Asian, Middle Eastern origin.

   Not

2. International Students
   • Full Fee Paying Overseas Students (FFPOS)
   • Student visa holders (mostly)
Admission: CALD students

- English language is not taken into account (nationally) for permanent visa holders (no legislation).
  - Must meet general entry and course specific requirements.

Settlement factors outside study

The Settlement Experience

PHASES OF ADJUSTMENT

PHASE 1 (ARRIVAL)
PHASE 2 (REALITY)
PHASE 3A (NEGOTIATION)
PHASE 3B (ALIENATION)
PHASE 4A (INTEGRATION)
PHASE 4D (MARGINALISATION)

TIME IN COUNTRY
SATISFACTION

The CALD Programme & the Student Lifecycle

Pre - Application Outreach Activities
Realistic Introduction
Pathways Planning

Application Applicant Data
Extended Orientation
Mapping Environment
Testing / Admin Help
Building Independence

Enrolment Data
Administrative Assistance
Varying Enrolment

During Study
Serious difficulties encountered
Referral by staff / self referral
Skills Support
Welfare Support
Monitoring
Volunteering Opportunities
Job application skills
To employment

To employment
English language proficiency test for CALD students: a three year project

Rationale of the test

Consistent with DEEWR (AUQA audited) Good Practice Principles

1. Universities are responsible for ensuring that their students are sufficiently competent in the English language to participate effectively in their studies.

7. Students’ English language development needs are diagnosed early in their studies and addressed, with ongoing opportunities for self-assessment.
Design of the test

- Engages students in an ‘authentic’ academic task
- Assesses students’ proficiency across aspects of language including discourse structure and referencing as well as grammar and vocabulary
- Currently is not compulsory (nor is it compulsory that students follow the advice given)
- Is used to advise students on appropriate pathways to university study
- Can be used to raise students’ own awareness of areas of strength and weakness in their English proficiency

Assessment criteria

- Task focus
- Essay structure
- Cohesion
- Communicative competence
- Academic register
- Vocabulary range and accuracy
- Grammar range and accuracy
- Incorporation of source material
- Referencing
Example descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohesion</th>
<th>A+</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The ideas are organised in a logical way. The argument is well developed, coherent, and logical.</td>
<td>The ideas are mostly organised in a logical way. There is satisfactory development of the argument. The argument is mostly coherent and logical.</td>
<td>There is some logical organisation of ideas. There is some development of the argument. The argument is sometimes logical and coherent.</td>
<td>There is some attempt to organise the ideas in a logical way. The argument is sometimes logical and coherent.</td>
<td>There is little logical organisation of ideas. The argument is occasionally coherent.</td>
<td>There is very little or no logical organisation of ideas. The argument is rarely coherent.</td>
</tr>
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Overall grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade and explanation</th>
<th>Pathway advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A +</td>
<td>• UniStart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>• Additional support from CALT and/or English Assist as required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>• University Preparation Program (UPP) recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>• Further English language study recommended before taking UPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
### Level of Academic Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score on test</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Pass or above in all units</th>
<th>Failing 1 unit/year</th>
<th>Failing 2+ units/year</th>
<th>Withdrawn from all units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Key findings of the testing project

- We cannot assume that CALD students will enter UTAS “sufficiently competent in the English language to participate effectively in their university studies”.

- The test has been successful in identifying those who would benefit from further English language and/or literacy study.

- The voluntary nature of the test creates a situation where students may not follow the pathways advice.

- English proficiency is not the only factor in successful transition of CALD students.
What factors other than English impact transition of CALD students, and how can these be addressed?

Academic literacy – what is it?

Murray (2010, p.58) gives the University of Western Australia’s definition of academic literacy: “the capacity to undertake study and research, and to communicate findings and knowledge, in a manner appropriate to the particular disciplinary conventions and scholarly standards expected at university level.”
Academic literacy in an Australian university context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Culture of Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• High level, discipline appropriate language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Critical thinking and understanding assessment tasks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conventions around persuasive argument</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Study practices (reading, note-taking, research)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conventions around ownership of knowledge</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Information literacy and research skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Understanding of teacher and student roles</td>
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International students:
- fees, compliance, work/visa issues, course restrictions, health insurance, welfare issues, specific administrative issues, specific scholarships, parental expectations and constraints on area of study.

Other domestic students:
- mix of 'traditional', equity and non-traditional groups, e.g., migrant or mature age background. Some experience problems similar in magnitude to CALD or international students.

CALD students:
- refugee, settlement and welfare issues, torture and trauma, gaps in education and realistic expectations (self and family), family and community commitments, financial commitments in country of origin.

Expectations based on prior high performance

Cultural adjustment

Social adjustment

English language

Scholarship andCentrelink issues

Student Services, Division of Pro-Vice Chancellor (S&E)

U N I V E R S I T Y O F T A S M A N I A

• Academic adjustment
• Academic skills
• Figuring out how uni works academically, socially and administratively
• Unit and course-related matters
• When and how to access and use the services that are available
• Balancing life, work and study
• Impacts of events or circumstances (e.g., health, bereavement, relationships, finances) on study

• Bradley
• Internationalisation
• HEPPP
• Social Inclusion

High level, discipline appropriate language

I have to try to understand how I can express my ideas in a formal way on paper because it’s quite different to the way we speak outside [the university].

High level, discipline appropriate language

• An early, low-stakes assessment task (submitted and returned before Census Date) can be used to identify students in need of extra support (Kift 2009)

• Early referral to relevant support unit

• In-class discussion of models of good writing

• Discipline-specific language workshops
Assessment

Critical thinking and analysis is a new concept for me… I used to ask the lecturers “What do you mean by thinking critically?”

It was much more … get the lecturer’s information and summarise it.

Where I came from, we do not have much pleasure in academic activities like reading intensively. Here, a one-year old child will be taught how to read, and from a very early level to their university level it’s almost in their blood.

The lecturer has not told us yet to start doing the second assignment…
Assessment

Sometimes I think “No, the expert said it, it should be like that”. In my essays you see long quotations and it’s actually a problem. I do try to avoid using them but I tell myself “It should be like that. If I change it they will penalise me.”

Suggestions for assessment

• Clarify assessment tasks and scaffold the steps of assignment writing.
• Ensure that ‘the process skills … needed to complete the assessment task have been taught or practiced’ (Kift 2009).
• Provide examples of good, fair and poor performance of assessment criteria (Kift 2009).
• Have students work together in tutorial in pairs/groups to brainstorm research questions for particular assignment topics.
• Provide examples of good/bad paraphrasing and discuss the reasons why we reference and paraphrase.
Engagement

If material is orientated to the Australian culture you just feel like no, I don’t know much about it and I don’t want to say stupid things.

We do bring a positive contribution, but that comes from us fully participating. We have a part to play in the development of the university.

• Review assessment strategies to identify cultural bias and adjust if necessary to eliminate that bias (Whalley 1997).

• Be aware of use of idiomatic language.

• Make curriculum time available to help students connect their previous education and experiences with current content (Kift 2009).

• Encourage students to work collaboratively (Kift 2009).

• Encourage and facilitate teacher-student interaction (Kift 2009).
Summary of suggestions

• Early identification and referral (including widening and strengthening English proficiency testing)
• Teaching the processes of thinking, research and writing
• Collaboration with Learning Support staff (CALT, EnglishAssist, the Library) to offer thinking and writing workshops related to particular assessment tasks
• Being inclusive and establishing an atmosphere in which everyone is welcome

I can speak from my personal experience and my cultural perspective, and then others will give the academic view, and then I will start picking up from there.

I want to learn, I want to know what you know. If we all have that way of thinking, I think we can make a better society.

References


Student Services, Division of Pro-Vice Chancellor (S&E)

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Want to follow up?

The CALD unit and EnglishAssist are happy to be contacted:

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