Supporting English Language Development: Exploring options for students and staff

Key Words

feedback, feedforward, English Language Development,

Abstract

A defining feature of the contemporary university is linguistic diversity, with English as an Additional Language (EAL) students making up a great proportion of Australian universities (Baik & Greig 2009). Given this context, universities are now required to support students' ongoing English Language Development (ELD) and this work is part of the Academic Support Units. ELD support strategies are underpinned by the Good Practice Principles (DEEWR 2009), as well as approaches to embed ELD in the curriculum (Briguglio 2014). This might involve a university-wide approach, using Post-Entry Language Assessment (PELA) tools (Harper 2013). However, as presented in Degrees of Proficiency (Dunworth, 2013), strategies can include embedding within disciplines, workshops and credit-bearing units among others. Evidence shows that corrective feedback is one way to address ELD (Bitchener 2012) and Podorova's (2016) academic feedback toolkit provides a valuable model for work in this area. This model has the advantage of addressing students' own writing within their discipline studies and for markers to provide targeted feedback. Deakin University has offered a PELA for several years. Yet more recently, Deakin's Academic and Peer Support Services (APS) has explored additional strategies. In Trimester 1, 2017, a language feedback/feed-forward pilot was devised and trialled in two large Bachelor of Commerce units (Management and Marketing). The aim was to equip tutors with ways to more explicitly describe the language problems encountered in students' written work and provide greater direction to existing resources and strategies designed to improve students' written communication. Concurrently, resources for students included ways to act on feedback they had received on their assessments throughout their university studies so far. Early results indicate that this approach to ELD is productive, as it focuses on increased teacher/tutor development and students' awareness and strategy building. The presentation will describe the project in more detail, providing background information and a justification for this approach. It will report on its effectiveness using survey data and reflections to address the perceived efficacy of learning to give and receive effective feedback. It will also consider steps to further develop and implement a greater variety of ELD programs in the future for enhancing students' written communication.

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