Promoting Graduate Skills in Modern Languages Students

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Our 'reflective learner project' wants to:

1) develop a shared vision of **"graduate skills"** across stakeholders
2) find ways and means to stimulate students' **reflectiveness with regard to their learning**, from induction

This should mean:

- an increase in student academic attainment;
- a decrease in the number of students with welfare issues - support personal growth;
- a change of the departmental culture: a shared culture of teaching and learning.

Start as you mean to continue

Previous research on transition to year abroad (Whittle 2012 & 2013) demonstrated:

Across 2nd and 3rd year surveys and 3rd yr ethnographic diaries, there emerged a mixed picture regarding expectations

1. even highly motivated students can be rather clueless with regards to their expectations and the emotions they attach to them;
2. expectations need to be harnessed so that the student gains the best outcome of their studies, including their y/a.
3. y/a may only be one instance of a mismatch of expectations – direct and indirect impact on academic outcome and employability.

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Definition: the reflective learner[1]

The student:

- recognises **emotional content** and can question its role and influence;

- regularly **critiques their own behaviour**, shows awareness of the influence of prior experience, and considers the influence of alternative perspectives;

- identifies areas of **further development** and acknowledges the need for additional learning;

- learns to **stand back** from the issue and critically evaluate both their own and others' reactions.

[1] Adapted from FLTHE/EAPHE – PCAP notes on "Reflective Writing", produced by CLAD staff, UoB 2013/14

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Developing "graduate skills"

Most recently Wilson 2013 on "Making 'Professionalism' Meaningful to Students in Higher Education"

- professionals exercise specialist knowledge and skills with judgment;

- they identify with a community based on shared practices and values;

- they have a shared sense of responsibility and service;

'Professionalism' continued

Therefore, courses in HE need to

- enable students to self-evaluate and explore personal standards;

- illustrate "contextual variation";

- enable students to explore "the relationship between external codes of ethics set by professional bodies and students' own personal codes and values";

- discuss "how what might first appear to be externally determined norms, practices and values are the result of both explicit and implicit cooperation and negotiations among members of a professional community"

Meaning and transferability to ML

- skills defined on the level of "cognitive presence" (e.g. Garrison et al 2001);
- performing skills at this level requires a thorough understanding and knowledge of the subject and its ways of working and thinking.

Example of grad skills in German

At the end of the stream [NB Australian for 'programme'], students should have acquired all of the following graduate attributes:

1. the skills involved in scholarly enquiry in German-based disciplinary studies.
2. an in-depth engagement with disciplinary knowledge via the German language.
3. the capacity for analytical and critical thinking and for creative problem-solving in German Studies.
4. the ability to engage in independent and reflective learning in German Studies
5. information literacy in German Studies
6. the capacity for enterprise, initiative and creativity in German Studies.
7. an appreciation of, and respect for, diversity in language and culture.
8. the skills involved in collecting, documenting, organising, and systematically analysing information.
9. a capacity to contribute to, and work within, the international community.
10. the skills required for collaborative and multidisciplinary work.
11. a respect for ethical practice and social responsibility.
12. the skills of effective communication.

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Method

- Focus group interviews in 1st and final year
- Across several languages

- Thematic analysis (qualitative approach): Braun/Clarke 2008

Purpose of student focus group interviews

1. find out whether induction is effective with regards to **transition** and **student engagement**

2. find out whether students are

    a) **aware of** all the **support** they can access here and

    b) actually **use it**.

3. find out how students **FEEL** about their course (feeling = higher order thinking), how they judge their **progress**

➤ **1** Effectiveness of induction with regards to **transition** and **student engagement**:

Students' capacity to **remember during induction**:

- students remember having received (far too much) information,

- but report having forgotten

- or hesitate with remembering

- or are not sure about this information

Q: Can we give a lot **less information** initially and focus on other, **activating, input?**

➢2 Awareness of support:

- students acknowledge **knowing about resources** as well as **learning strategies** and their **value** BUT do **not** necessarily **access** them

Q: If students knew their personal tutors better earlier, would the hurdle to go see them be lower?

What type of activity could we envisage for personal tutors to undertake with their 1st year tutees early, within an official induction slot?

➢ **3 Feelings** on transition:

- Students display a narrow range of **expressions** to describe their feelings.

- are predominantly **negative**, with 'scared', 'hard', 'difficult' and 'a struggle' standing out.

- Students' **feelings on progress**: negative and positive feelings are more balanced; students understand that they could have made more progress if …;

- they are well aware of the **support**.

Feelings continued

- The vast majority of students enjoy their language modules most
- What students connect with positive feelings / fun: interactive course methodology, inclusion of culture, and a teacher they trust

Q: Can we include **more activities** into induction which take account of them as a whole person more, and activates their positive feelings?

Q: Can we have recourse to Academic Skills; Chaplaincy and other stakeholders to promote some of these?

Act on findings by

discussing the format of induction and make changes where appropriate:

- introduce **learner diaries** and **blogs**
- **tutor meetings** in week 0 with first year students
- use big welcome meeting as a **networking event** for 1st year students through interactive tasks & the use of technology (Padlet)
- change the induction course (1st yr sem 1 + 2) to **focus on (professional) values.**

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Sources

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