

Strategies for improving intercultural and international learning

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Over the last ten years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of international students studying certain disciplines (such as accounting) in Australia (Davies, 2010). However, many international students graduating from these disciplines lack the requisite English language level to secure professional employment in Australia (Birrell, 2006; Davies, 2010). This trend prompted the research team to investigate issues of international students' integration into the academic community and their difficulties in academic study, by attempting to follow the linguistic progress and participation of 14 international students throughout first semester 2011 in a group called the University of Canberra (UC) Noodle Club. The Noodle Club is aimed at creating cultural and linguistic networks between sympathetic Australian students such as those who are learning Mandarin Chinese at the University of Canberra and international students including those from the target language culture (in this case the Chinese culture). We used questionnaires and interviews to identify factors that might influence international students' confidence in tackling academic tasks. Our small-scale project suggests that (i) to assist international students in their academic studies, it is necessary to adopt an in-discipline approach which builds intervention strategies within lectures and tutorials of a unit/course/subject, rather than as an adjunct; and (ii) international students' needs in writing essays might not be adequately met, at present, by the way tutors and lecturers mark. A new way of enabling tutors and lecturers to provide targeted feedback at the grammatical level is identified and (iii) students can be encouraged to guide themselves during the process of writing using an e-assessment tool. Findings of this project lend support to previous research on the effectiveness of an in-discipline approach to language support (Zhang, F. et al., 2010) and suggest that such an approach may improve the learning of all students in higher education, not merely international students.

Keywords: improving academic performance of international students, feedback on essays

Conference Themes: ③ Practical solutions ④ Student Engagement

Introduction

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International education at the tertiary level in Australia is at a critical juncture, primarily because of changes in Australia's immigration rules and the appreciation of the Australian dollar. The failing national economies of our competitor providers of tertiary education mean that we can expect them to offer very attractive deals for international students. These factors have effectively pushed Australia's offer of international tertiary education up-market in terms of cost to the student. It is almost inevitable that Australia will lose market share. We will also lose in terms of profitability unless we can learn how to provide a better service to our international students. We adopt the view that measures directed at providing a better service for international students are most likely to be effective if developed within the context of a holistic, view of higher education. This perspective has been put recently in the following terms: most important of all is that we need 'a comprehensive rationale for the role of languages in higher education; and in particular we need to put our efforts to develop a humanistic and intellectual legitimation for all education, which would inevitably contain a permanent and central role for languages. Care needs to be taken to devise new understandings of why languages are important for all learners that make cultural, intellectual and generally humanistic reasons central, with the practical application of language proficiency an accrued benefit' (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 59). Thus suggestions in this paper are intended to point a possible path in that direction.

Background

The difficulties experienced by international students in content-based courses or degree programs have been widely acknowledged (Maldoni, Kennely, & Davies, 2009; Rochecouste, Oliver, Mulligan, & Davies, 2010). As a result, many tertiary programs have incorporated adjunct courses whereby language is taught through content (Snow and Brinton 1988). However, these programs sit outside the main teaching within the discipline (Arkoudis, S., 2008; Wingate, 2006). Consequently, many international students do not access these services (O'Loughlin & Arkoudis, 2009) due to 'the high demands on time and emotional effort associated with core courses of study' (Hirsh, D., 2008, cited in Hirsh, 2007, p. 203). Gravatt, Richards and Lewis (1997) reported some research on program modifications in different disciplines. However, it was not clear what effect these modifications had on student learning. This paper argues that in the context of university courses or degree programs in the 21st century, English language support should be integrated within disciplines and should also involve program modifications negotiated with course lecturers and tutors. With advances in computer technology, a renewal of programs, their assessment regimes and assessment criteria can be beneficial to both domestic and international students. This renewal of our undergraduate programs is fast becoming an imperative for many tertiary institutions in this country.

In 2009, a study (Zhang, F. & Bryant, 2009) investigated 26 Mandarin-speaking students enrolled in a translation unit within the Chinese course at UC. The students' academic results were examined. The group had between them studied 86 different units. Several tentative conclusions were drawn from an analysis of the data:

- Many students were performing below a reasonable standard, particularly in Business and Management courses;
- Students who were granted Advanced Standing in their first year at the University of Canberra College (UCC) were more likely to fail in their following year at UC. These students were mostly in the Business and Management disciplines;
- Failure rates were highest for students undertaking Business and Management disciplines;
- After comparing the results of this group of students with the results of all students in the same units, it was found that in Business and Management units, international students failed more than domestic students at the rate of 2 to 1; and
- There was a positive correlation between the students' Universities Admissions Index (UAI) or ATAR scores and their rates of passing and obtaining higher grades.

These conclusions were based on the academic results of a small group of students in 2008. The failure rates of domestic students as compared to international students remained largely unchanged in 2009. Clearly, in order to understand why international students failed twice as often as domestic students, it is necessary to understand the difficulties international students face in their academic studies.

Previous research on challenges for international students in their academic studies

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded two important projects involving international students in tertiary education in Australia from 2008 to 2010. These two projects are: "Addressing the ongoing English language growth of International students" (Rochecouste, et al., 2010) and "Strategies and Approaches to Teaching and Learning Cross Cultures" (Lu, Yao, Chin, Xiao, & Xu, 2010).

Rochecouste et al's project encompassed five Australian universities: Monash University, Edith Cowan University, The University of Melbourne, Macquarie University and Deakin University. The project used an online survey which invited both qualitative and quantitative responses. Almost 800 international students provided a rich source of data. The ages of the students in the sample ranged from 21 to 30. More females than males responded to the survey; 52% of the respondents had a Chinese background; 37.6% were born in China; 47% were undergraduates; and 57% were enrolled in Commerce/Business Studies. 68% had been required to produce an IELTS score for visa entry to Australia but only 51% used it for course entry. Only 44% of the students provided their IELTS scores to the project; 62% were in their second or third year of study in Australia. The sample appears to have been representative of international students in Australia.

Rochecouste et al's (2010) project made sixteen recommendations on how universities can assist international students in their English language growth throughout their academic studies in Australia. The recommendations

were directed at lecturers, academic support staff, librarians, and teaching and learning support staff. The thrust of the recommendations endorses the central role of information provision as the core educational activity.

While we concur with the 16 recommendations, we cannot help but feel that staff are being asked to take on a lot in order to cater for international students' English language growth. Without knowing what responsibility students are able to accept for their own English language development, it is very easy to take the position that international students came to Australia to study and therefore they should come with adequate English to start with. So the onus should not be on academic staff to cater for these students

This position seems to come out of the ignorance that 'although new international students have technically achieved a level of English acceptable for entry into Australian universities, the levels set by universities are generally at the threshold level only, so that most students need to develop their academic English further after enrolment' (Coley 1999; Hawthorne et al 2004; Picard 2007; Bretag 2007; Hirsh 2007). Many international students avoid or are unable to use language and learning support services that have been established within universities (Hirsh, D, 2007; Ransom & Greig, 2007; Wingate, 2006) despite the time and effort that has been invested in providing them (see Arkoudis & Starfield 2007 for a recent review). Nevertheless, there is a need for international students to develop their own strategies to achieve the English knowledge and skills required. However, in our opinion, this cannot be done without guidance or assistance.

Lu et al's project "Strategies and Approaches to Teaching and Learning Cross Cultures" was similar in scope to Rochecouste, et al's (2010). 1026 students completed questionnaires. 37.7% of the students were domestic Australian students and 62.3% were international students from 56 overseas countries. This project found that students experience cross-cultural learning difficulties and culture shocks socially and academically, especially in the first year of their study. Academically, they are used to the transmission model of learning; they do not like to offer their own opinions and they tend to rely on rote learning and memorization. In terms of group work, they tend to work in groups with students from their own culture and they tend to have underdeveloped interpersonal communication skills.

On a social level, international students can find living in a new and unfamiliar society very stressful. Perhaps in order to feel safe or less isolated psychologically, some students both study and live with students from their own culture. This kind of lifestyle can result in some students speaking only one or two hours of English per day and only when they are on campus (Rochecouste, et al., 2010). Our experience of international students suggests that this might very well substantially overestimate actual English spoken by many international students.

Rochecouste et al's findings suggest that international students:

- tend to speak very little English at home and on weekends;
- when surrounded by English native speakers, seldom have the opportunity to speak any English at all;
- tended to interact with only a small group of peers with whom they are familiar.

International students who resort to what they are familiar with in learning and in their social lives do it in order to combat the acculturation stress they are under in a new and foreign environment (Berry, U. Kim, & Mok, 1987). Acculturative stress relates to stress generated from cross-cultural encounters. Yeh and Inose (2003) report that the lack of English language fluency as a significant predictor of acculturative stress (p.23), as were the lack of social connectedness and dissatisfaction with social support (p.23). While an Australian student enters a university course with five years of training in essay writing and with 20000 vocabulary families (Goulden, P. Nation, & Read, 1990), Chinese students tend to come with very little essay writing experience and perhaps a much smaller size of vocabulary. These factors are significant stressors.

While international students may arrive in Australia with the requisite IELTS scores, their ability to use English for interpersonal communication is often lacking. Some might never have been taught in English; Chinese was always used as the medium of instruction. Moreover, some English curricula in China do not require students to learn how to *speak* in English (Zhang, Y. & Mi, 2009). Anecdotal evidence suggests that international students who do not know how to talk to their lecturers and classmates in a culturally acceptable manner, even though they may have high IELTS scores, run the risk of offending Australians they meet, and giving them the false impression that Australians are racist. Furthermore, nowadays, because we tend to communicate with each other in emails, the international student's emails, if not written politely, can damage the relationship between lecturer and student (Aguilar-Roca, Williams, Warrior, & O'Dowd, 2009).

In this paper, we believe that it is essential to create a friendly social environment using social networking tools such as TencentQQ or Facebook before students arrive in Australia. We describe some concrete ways of operationalising some of the strategies suggested by the studies cited above. For instance, we will demonstrate how Rochecouste et al's recommendation 3- *The project team therefore recommends that tutorial classes are used to enhance communication between students, over and above the traditional format of discussing subject content*, can be operationalised and expanded to lectures and tutorials through a number of activities. We also indicate how computer technology can be utilised to implement some of the strategies so that so that international student can directly benefit from them. Specifically, we suggest a way of providing targeted feedback to international students which will not only save lecturers' and tutors' time in marking but also facilitate action by the students in response to the feedback.

Most important of all, our experience of running the Noodle Club at the University of Canberra suggests that strategies aimed at enriching international students' learning experiences need to be designed specifically to reach as many students as possible. For this to happen, teaching staff within different courses, students, learning and technology specialists should all be involved in creating an interactive learning environment where the **whole** student body's needs and actions become the drivers of learning. Furthermore, strategies need to be embedded within lectures and tutorials in order for them to be truly effective. This way, **all** students will reap the benefits of such strategies.

Context of the present project

This project was conducted through the establishment of a newly-formed social club called the 'UC Noodle Club'. The name is a multicultural pun intended to appeal to both Asian and domestic students. Noodles are a popular food throughout Asia. "Noodle" is a slang term in English for "brain", as in "use your noodle". The name is also intended to convey, in a light-hearted way, the academic focus of the club. The UC Noodle Club was founded in February 2011 by a linguist, Dr Felicia Zhang, and Dr Ian Maclean and Mr Mark Hughes. Ian and Mark are academics in the Discipline of Accounting, Banking and Finance at the University of Canberra. The aim of the Club is to provide a safe learning environment for enhancing the language skills of UC's international students to improve their performance in their academic studies and enrich their experience of student life in Australia. The Noodle Club is thus a place for both Australian and international Chinese students to socialise and practice speaking English and Chinese in a safe environment.

The Noodle Club differs from other student associations involving Chinese students. First of all, the Noodle Club's membership consists of both local Australian students and international students whereas the Chinese student association on the UC campus has a membership of mainly Chinese-speaking students from the People's Republic of China. The Noodle Club has a Facebook page called the UC Noodle Club which currently has 90 members.

The inspiration and energy for the Noodle Club, however, came from a group of students studying Chinese at UC whom Dr Zhang took to Taiwan in 2010 for six weeks. In Taiwan the students were paired with study "buddies" during their study at the National Chengkung University. These students came to appreciate the importance and benefit of locals who were willing to assist them in a foreign country. Upon their return, they were eager to assist UC's international students in the same way.

During first semester 2011, in response to student demand, the club met three times a week, each time for approximately two hours. The meetings focussed on different activities. Many of these activities were based on information from international students participating in the club.

Student characteristics

Fourteen international students participated in the Noodle Club at the beginning of semester 1, 2011. All students came from mainland China. Questionnaires were distributed to the students. The questionnaire contained nine demographic questions and three open-ended questions. One question sought information about any difficulties they were encountering in the course of their study in Australia. This question was asked to compare each student's performance in their studies in Australia with their perceptions of themselves as students in China. Differences between students' self image in China and self image in Australia are likely to be highly stressful and de-motivating for students. Another question sought information on what they wished to gain from their participation in the Noodle Club. The third question sought students' perceptions of themselves as students in China. All students gave permission to use the information gathered for research purposes.

The characteristics of the fourteen students in the present study are similar to those in the studies of Rochecouste, et al (2010) and Lu et al (2010). Chinese international students in the Noodle Club were relatively young with an average age of 20 years old. They had spent an average of 19 months in Australia and yet their self-reported IELTS scores were, on average, 5.5 for speaking, 6.0 for listening and reading and 5.0 for writing. These scores are lower than the IELTS score of 6.5 required for entry to UC. Most of them gained entry through articulation pathways between UC and Chinese universities and almost all had spent at least one semester in the University of Canberra College (UCC). Like many similar colleges attached to universities in Australia, the University of Canberra College prepares both Australian and international students for tertiary study.

Results of the questionnaires: open-ended responses

In their responses to the open-ended questions, the students indicated that (i) they found reading academic papers and the texts difficult as it usually took them a long time; (ii) their vocabulary was poor; and (iii) they found it difficult to retain specialist vocabulary. One student's response to the question 'In your opinion, what do you find most difficult in your present units of study?' was typical:

In my opinion, I found it was really hard for me to reading (sic) and understanding (sic) the books. For example, each chapter always has its learning check, problems and practice, I couldn't find the answer (sic) sometimes. Moreover, I have very poor vocabulary that make (sic) me confused.

Despite having difficulties with reading and poor vocabulary, this student had applied herself to her academic studies. She was familiar with the structure of the textbook and had tried to do the problems in the textbook. However, she was not sure whether she was going in the right direction. Typically, each student completes four units per semester. The extent of the difficulties experienced by international students can be appreciated by considering that business units at the University of Canberra nominally require ten hours of study per week. This study includes the review of lectures, reading (on average) about 30 pages of text, preparing and subsequently reviewing tutorial questions, and working on assignments. The estimate of ten hours of study per week assumes the student is a competent reader of academic English. Students who experience difficulty reading academic English will need to spend much more than ten hours per week in order to engage effectively with the unit material. While we have not studied the amount of study required by some students, efforts in excess of 20-25 hours per week per unit would not surprise us for some students. Now multiply this challenge by four. Our anecdotal experience is that many students, domestic and international, do not engage as fully as we would wish.

The issues identified by students in the Noodle Club were similar to those identified in the Lu, et al and Rochecouste, et al studies (Lu, et al., 2010; Rochecouste, et al., 2010). Having identified the issues, the next step is to ask questions about how, practically, these issues can be addressed. This prompted the research team to ask the following questions:

1. How to enable students to establish and maintain productive and friendly relationships with academic staff?
2. What can be done to strengthen the retention of in-discipline vocabulary?
3. How can we provide feedback on assessment items to students, especially essays, so that they can improve in future assignments, especially in large units (number of students larger than 100)?
4. How can we reduce the burden of marking on tutors and lecturers in large units?

In the Noodle Club, we experimented with solutions to the four questions through the following activities.

Activity 1

'How to' sessions: Many international students are extremely reticent about approaching staff. As an example of a "how to" session, students were provided with examples of the language which can be used in seeking assistance and explanations from staff. International students practised and role-played the scenario of approaching staff by speaking to Australian students.

Another example of a "How to" session explained how to write polite emails to academic staff. In this session, we emphasised the importance of using correct grammar and salutations and provided students with examples of polite English language in emails. International students are often not aware that different registers of language need to be used when writing emails to lecturers. In particular, in writing emails to persons in authority, SMS or texting language should not be used as it may offend the recipient. This view was supported by a study conducted by Aguilar-Roca, Williams, Warrior and O'Dowd (2009). These authors also found that a simple two-

minute training session in class on how to write proper emails significantly increased the quality of student emails and that such training improved student-staff relations, especially when large student-to-staff ratios limit opportunities for one-on-one interactions.

Activity 2

In terms of question 2: we experimented with a word game in the unit Financial Institutions and Markets. We took the “Key Terms” in the chapter on equity markets in the textbook ‘Financial markets, Institutions & Money’ (Kidwell, Brimble, Basu, Lenten, & Thomson, 2011), and created a matching game called ‘Equity_market_1’ using the free software *Hot Potatoes* Version 6 from <http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>. The Hot Potatoes exercises ‘enables [the instructor] to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises for the World Wide Web and for learning management systems (LMSs).’ The game requires students to match the definitions in the right column with the key terms in the left column. Figure 1 shows Equity_market_1 as it appears to the instructor. Figure 2 shows the same game as it appears to students.

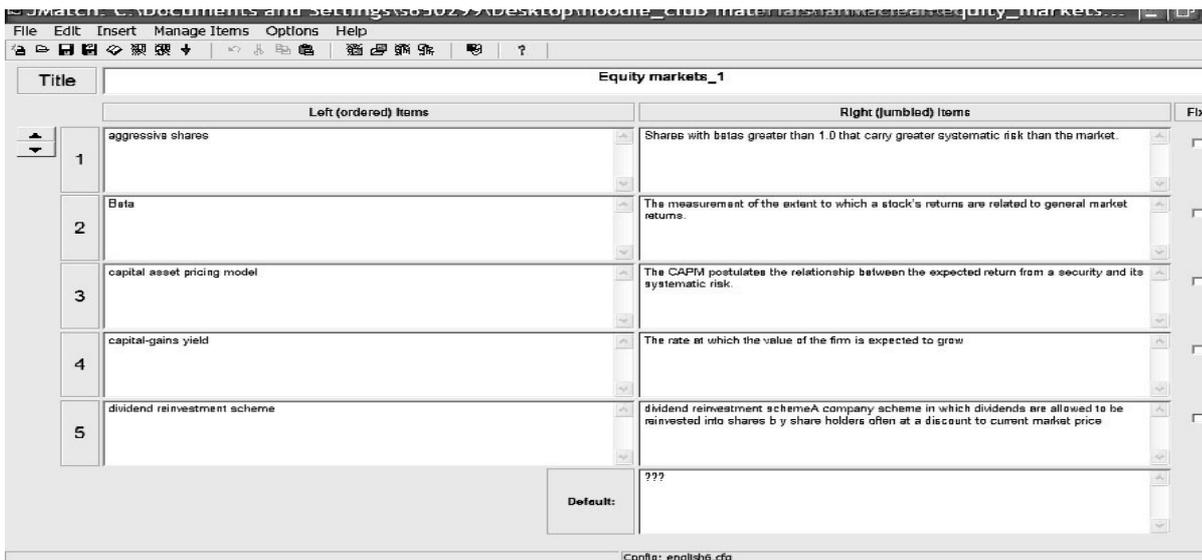


Figure 1 The Hot Potatoes matching game Equity_markets_1 – instructor view

The matching game is created by the instructor by typing in the list of terms in the left column and the corresponding definitions in the right column. The Hot Potatoes software, not the lecturer, jumbles the right column. After creating the exercise and saving it under a name, the exercise can be exported to a variety of formats, e.g. .html, printing or WebCT. Students can only view the .html version and do not have access to the instructor’s version.

Equity markets_1	
Matching exercise	
Match the items on the right to the items on the left by selecting the correct definition	
<input type="button" value="Check"/>	
aggressive shares	???
Beta	???
capital asset pricing model	???
capital-gains yield	???
dividend reinvestment scheme	???
dividend yield	???
dividends	???
franking credits	???
fully franked dividend	???
initial public	???

Figure 2 The Hot Potatoes matching game Equity_markets_1 – student view

Once the column with the question marks is clicked, students are to select the correct definition from options contained in the column. This exercise can be used in a variety of ways. In the Noodle Club session, each student was given one definition and a list of words on a task sheet. The definition given to each student matched only one word on the task list. The task was for them to speak to their fellow students and use English language to find all the definitions of the words on the task sheet. Once a definition was found, it was ticked off. The exercise finished when students had ticked off all of their definitions. This exercise created a lot of interaction between Chinese and Australian students. This exercise was a variation of the ‘Find the...’ exercise frequently used in language teaching.

Of course, since the exercise was created using Hot Potatoes version 6, the e-version of exercises created using Hot Potatoes Version 6 can be uploaded easily onto Moodle for further revision. As Moodle can automatically record marks allocated to Hot Potatoes exercises, these exercises can be used to promote vocabulary learning without burdening tutors and lecturers with large amounts of marking.

As for the questions 3 and 4 above, the project team examined a range of materials collected from another unit in the Business faculty in order to gain a better understanding of whether students (both international and domestic) thought feedback provided by lecturers and tutors was adequate and what could be done to enable staff to provide feedback that students are more likely to act on.

The project team obtained the unit outline, marking criteria for assignments, readings and PowerPoint slides for lectures for the unit. We obtained de-identified example of essays representing different grades. When we discussed the marking criteria in a Noodle Club session, students had problems with instructional words such as ‘applied’, ‘critically examine’ and ‘well structured and logical flow of the argument’. They also seemed not to understand what is meant by ‘criticism’. Moreover, our review of extracts from the essays indicated that many of the international students did not know how to use paragraphs to structure an essay, nor was their grammatical knowledge strong. No student attending the session (including Australian students) had heard of ‘coherence’ being applied to sentences and arguments. They did not know what the term meant, let alone how to make their sentences more coherent. At the grammar level, the international students did not know how to use articles and passive sentences. In the Noodle Club, we spent a considerable amount of time getting students in groups to mark de-identified extracts of essays according to the criteria and discuss what constitutes a HD, DI, CR and P in this unit. Both Australian and international students greatly appreciated these activities in the Noodle Club.

However, despite all the effort we made to address students’ difficulties in essay writing by showing them exemplars at each grade level, students still made grammatical mistakes when it came to their own writing. According to Liu and Jiang (2009) the difficulty international students encounter in mastering appropriate academic style can be attributed to their experiences of traditional grammar teaching, which focus on grammatical forms or grammatical correctness *within* sentences while paying little attention to their discourse contexts, thus failing to address adequately when and why a grammatical form is used in a given context. Both

Australian and Chinese international students in the Noodle Club repeatedly requested that tutors and lecturers pay more attention to providing feedback on grammatical mistakes as well as instructing them on how to improve their grammar on this level. International students in Arkoudis and Tran's recent study made the same request (Arkoudis, S & Tran, 2010).

However, to get markers to provide appropriate grammatical feedback is not an easy task. Anecdotal evidence suggests that markers (especially those who are relatively young) often lack the grammatical knowledge to provide such targeted feedback. This problem is compounded when the tutors or lecturers have to mark hundreds of essays two or three times per semester per subject. Moreover if detailed feedback on grammar and expression were to be provided, there will often be close to one hundred separate comments to be made on a 1500-word essay. Conscientious teachers are driven to exhaustion and end up resigning themselves to doing the best they can within the time available, which generally means reverting to broad statements of the kind found in rubrics, and which students find are of little assistance in improving their writing. This led us to look for alternatives which might improve the situation for both students and teachers.

We explored an e-marking assessment tool to assess its potential to address this problem. The e-marking assessment chosen for this exercise was the ReMarksPDF software (<http://www.ReMarksPdf.com>). Many of the features of this software can also be performed by the latest versions of PDF and Word. However, ReMarksPDF provides a few additional features. For the purpose of providing targeted grammatical feedback, the most important features are:

- Automatic insertion of text-based comments, known as Auto Text; and
- An easy-to-use English language style tool enabling English Style and Grammar comments to be inserted in student essays, with the ability to build discipline-specific comment libraries.

Auto Text allows a team of tutors to agree on a set of consistent comments over some aspects of an essay while the English style tool allows markers to provide consistent English grammatical feedback to students. Should students be required to follow specific styles in a particular discipline, consistent and agreed-upon advice can be built into the Auto Text and conveyed to students via the feedback process. If the English style on the ReMarkPDF tool is made available to students via the University's Learning Management System, in UC's case Moodle, it can also be used as a checklist to guide students' writing. Since lecturers, tutors and students would then share the same set of standards and meta-language in the English Style Library, comments provided by lecturers and tutors can more easily be correctly interpreted by students. During July to August 2011, a group of colleagues from science, creative writing and business disciplines worked on the relevant features of the English style library contained in the latest version of the ReMarksPDF software. This group sought to develop items in the English style library such that the same library can be shared across different disciplines as suggested by Arkoudis and Tran (2010). ReMarksPDF also has an interface which enables comments to be translated into simplified Chinese characters.

Discussion

This paper has described several strategies that could be used to assist international students in their academic studies. However, the Noodle Club sat outside the disciplines and therefore suffered from its ability to attract those students who needed assistance most. Of the 14 students who filled out the questionnaire, only three consistently attended Noodle Club activities. The problem was that even though the activities were perceived as worthwhile, students could not attend due to factors such as timetable clashes and other study and work commitments. In a sense, the UC Noodle Club has not yet achieved its promise of attracting enough international Chinese students in order to establish long term cross-cultural friendships. However, activities such as those in the Noodle Club are still important as they provide a safe environment in which to attempt to engage with Western-style learning processes such as critical analysis rather than rote-learning, and for building friendships - an important part of the socialization process.

A more pervasive approach to enrich the academic experience of international students in Australian universities might involve collaboration between English language specialists, in-discipline lecturers and tutors, students and teaching and learning specialists. In our view, a collaborative cross-disciplinary approach has the best chance of addressing the complex issues associated with enriching international student experience of academe in Australia. Approaches developed and implemented in this way, may well have the additional benefit of reaching many domestic students as well. A similar in-discipline model with collaborative features has been applied to first year

science units in five different universities (Zhang, F. et al., in press). A key factor in the success of this approach to Science education was that the strategies were easy for the in-discipline lecturers to learn and implement. However, with the greater emphasis on the English language skills of international students in business courses, we suggest additional strategies to be included within business-related units and courses.

Table 1: Useful strategies for an in-discipline approach to supporting international students' academic studies

No.	Strategies	Tasked by
1	Use alumni overseas to establish friendships in the students' countries of origin. This could be done by establishing a TencentQQ group ² . This would allow former students to share with prospective students their experiences of studying in Australia, at a particular university or in a particular unit.	University
2	Australian students (such as those learning Asian languages) to make friends with prospective Chinese students before their arrival in Australia. This way, upon arrival, new Chinese students would already have a local friend ("buddy") who is already interested in Chinese culture (Hirsh, D, 2007).	Chinese language lecturers, discipline staff and students and Student services
3	Provide guidance on the style of language which should be used to write emails when approaching lecturers and tutors online in the first lecture of a unit (Aguilar-Roca, et al., 2009). Such provision of information can also be done on qq.	Discipline lecturers
4	Within lectures, use formative short questions via VotApedia (http://urvoting.com/) to promote engagement between students, staff and students. This method provides feedback to all students, thereby avoiding the problem of self-selection (Zhang, et al., in press);	Disciplinary staff and learning specialists
5	Introduce international students to the Livescribe Smart Pen. Entrust a responsible international student to take notes and record lectures using the Livescribe Smart Pen. Lecturers can then upload the recording and notes onto learning management systems such as Moodle or Blackboard (Zhang, F., in press).	Disciplinary staff, students and the University
6	Develop study guides for reading materials (Evans & Rigby, 2008; Falkner, 2011);	Disciplinary staff and learning specialists
7	Utilise learning management systems such as Moodle to re-purpose and re-present lecture and tutorial material online by creating matching exercises, crosswords, fill-in-blank exercises, and multiple choice questions. This way, students will be exposed to the same concepts in different ways and through different modalities throughout the semester (Zhang, F., et al., in press);	Disciplinary staff or the learning specialists
8	Provide targeted and useful feedback on their essays to of students using electronic marking tools such as ReMarksPDF, especially in units with large enrolments;	Disciplinary staff and the learning specialists
9	Use the same electronic marking tool to provide guidance to students on specific aspects of English grammar, including discipline-specific aspects, to enhance students' essay writing skills;	Disciplinary staff and learning specialists
10	Include in a unit's assessment regime an optional first task aimed at providing formative feedback to all students through the completion of smaller tasks.	Disciplinary staff

The ten strategies listed in Table1 involve many groups of people working together. The implementation of these strategies inevitably will involve a substantial sharing of knowledge, teaching techniques and technology. The first two strategies involve the use of social networking technology to connect Australian students, current

² A Chinese social media network.

international students and international graduates with prospective new students. The third strategy involves Australian students who are learning or will learn relevant Asian languages such as Mandarin Chinese as sympathetic native speakers to mentor new international students on their campuses.

These strategies are likely to improve learning outcomes because they involve crucial stakeholders (i.e. both domestic and international students, staff and the university) actively participating in the learning process. Such strategies convey to international students that staff and the university *care* about their learning and their welfare. Dr Zhang was an international student herself some 30 years ago; the following anecdote shows how a simple word of recognition can change an isolated international student's life direction:

When I was in an English boarding school as a Non-English speaking background student, I spent about 2 years not knowing whether I could ever amount to anything. The only life affirming thing I remember was from Mr Churchyard, my Chemistry master. He used to say to me 'you will break hearts when you grow up.' and of course, I did not know what that meant until 10 years later. It wasn't an idiom I was used to but I got the gist - it was a compliment. He also encouraged me to do Chemical Engineering even though I used to break or blow up test tubes in every lab lesson. I somehow regret I did not follow his advice but what stuck with me was the kind word he gave me knowing that, as an Asian girl (this is back in the early 80's), I must have felt very isolated. I still get emotional when I see a distressed student today at UC and remember that it is an easier thing to do to show kindness to another person if you can.

Epilogue

In this venture of catering for the needs of international students, there are two seemingly immovable mountains as in the famous Chinese fable of 'A foolish old man moves the mountain'. One "mountain" is the utilitarian/credentialist approach to Western education that many international students bring with them to Australia; the other "mountain" is the "publish or perish" syndrome which impacts greatly on the careers of staff. While in the Chinese fable their persistence persuaded the gods to move the mountains for the people, in this critical juncture in Australian education, we need the universities and the government to place greater emphasis on teaching and learning vis-à-vis research in order to move these two seemingly immovable mountains. Changes seem to be afoot with the proliferation of university colleges and TAFE-based pathways to tertiary study. However, more than structural change is needed if we are to improve the learning and life outcomes for our international students. In our view, successful change in these areas is highly likely to benefit domestic students as well. Such change is, in our view, fully aligned with the broader humanitarian aims of higher education. However, recognition and reward systems for staff who deliver innovative teaching practice need to be, in our view, more substantial, more transparent and more effectively communicated. Managing the balance between teaching and research in support of the broader humanitarian aims of higher education is going to be, as ever, an ongoing challenge for the university sector in Australia.

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