Linguistically responsive instruction: A way forward for linguistically diverse classes

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INTO NA Academic Conference, INTO Marshall, 20 June 2018
### International students at USF: Some statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total student body</th>
<th>International students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009 USF System</td>
<td>46,174</td>
<td>1,343</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USF Tampa</td>
<td>39,099</td>
<td>1,343</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018 USF System</td>
<td>50,577</td>
<td>4,946</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USF Tampa</td>
<td>43,542</td>
<td>4,852</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Benefits and challenges from faculty perspective**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Greater acceptance of diversity</td>
<td>• Lack of English proficiency skills means students struggle with assignments, class participation, comprehending lectures, communicating appropriately, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Curiosity about difference</td>
<td>• Different (academic) cultural norms</td>
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<td>• Higher interest in international activities</td>
<td>• Academic (dis)honesty issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning about own and other cultures</td>
<td>• Difficulty of addressing needs of international students and domestic students at the same time (e.g. grading, time for in-class and other exams, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Gaining cultural perspectives on academic topics</td>
<td>• Onus on faculty to make changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development of intercultural communication skills</td>
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</tbody>
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Gallagher & Haan, 2017; Peters & Anderson, 2017;
Wider impact of internationalization of campuses

(Higher) education “is increasingly ‘a shared transnational phenomenon’” (Meyers, 2014, 7)” (Fraiberg, Wang & You, 2017)

“Just as open admission policies in the 1960s changed the student body and its approaches to curriculum and instruction (Rose, 1985), so today internationalization efforts have implications for every aspect of the institution. This type of internationalization can be described as transformative in that it doesn’t simply measure the numbers of students or programs, but changes the character of the institution and the way the students, administration, and the institution as a whole view themselves” (Haan, Gallagher & Varandani, 2017)
**Assumption:** It is faculty’s responsibility to ensure international students’ academic success

“All while benefiting tremendously economically from increasing international students, the university has done little in the way of assuring that structures are in place for them to succeed. As the response has rolled out in the past couple of years, it seems that the burden for handling this will be shifted to faculty who will now be forced to undergo numerous trainings, alter their course materials and teaching styles, and the like. In other words, the university’s budget increases while faculty — who are not going to see a pay increase for the additional work associated with the internationalization of the university — bear the burden” (Faculty survey participant in Haan, Gallagher & Varandani, 2017, p.44)
Reality: Administration and faculty are jointly responsible for international students’ academic success

“These challenges can be met if the university fosters a paradigm of treating these students as part of the social and academic norm, rather than as problematic exceptions to that norm.” (Survey respondent in Peters & Anderson, 2017)

“If the goal of internationalization includes transformative learning, …there must be both engagement from faculty and support from the administration. Without both, international students will continue to be considered marginalized Others who require constant mediation, rather than as whole beings who bring a divers array of ideas, viewpoints, challenges, and questions. (Haan, Gallagher & Varandani, p. 47)
Assumption: International students’ language skills are solely the source of their difficulties in courses

Reality:
**Assumption:** It is the responsibility of units outside the course classroom to provide (ESL) language support for international students

“We really need full-time professionals to bring a lot of these students up to par. If the university is serious about educating foreign students they should invest in these resources.”

“Of course there are things that faculty can learn about working with international students. But the majority of support for these students needs to come from outside the classroom.”

“Not all faculty can or should become ESL experts.”

(Faculty survey participants in Gallagher & Haan, 2017)
Assumption: It is the responsibility of units outside the classroom to provide (ESL) language support for international students

Underlying beliefs:

- ESL programs can prepare international students so that they function exactly the same way as domestic students
- Faculty have little or no responsibility for the development of students' language skills
- The internationalization of the campus should not affect the way teaching is done in classrooms or “our” approach to higher education
Reality: Language development is a crucial component of any teaching and learning.
Linguistically responsive instruction as an institutional approach

1. Language development is a crucial component of any teaching and learning.
2. There is a difference between conversational fluency and academic literacy.
3. Students who have strong literacy skills (in their linguistic/cultural background) are more likely to succeed than those with weaker skills.
4. Students need opportunities for comprehending and internalizing input.
5. Interaction with peers and experts fosters the development of thought and language.
6. A safe, welcoming and supportive environment leads to low anxiety.
Language development is a crucial component of any teaching and learning.
“As Gee (1996) points out, part of mastering an academic discipline requires reading, writing, thinking, understanding and speaking like a member of that academic community, so inevitably a faculty member is concerned not only with disciplinary content but also with advanced literacy in the discipline, a concern evident in common instructional foci such as vocabulary, discipline-specific writing assignments, and oral presentations. Indeed, language is the vehicle for communicating information; helping students organize new information; and assessing whether students recall, comprehend and apply that information successfully. Language, then, is a central tool in teaching and learning (Halliday, 1993) and as such, even when unexamined or unacknowledged, all faculty become, to some extent, de facto language instructors.”

(Haan, Gallagher and Varandani, 2017, p. 47)
There is a difference between conversational fluency and academic literacy.
Students who have strong literacy skills (in their linguistic/cultural background) are more likely to succeed than those with weaker skills.

“There is a salient need for an interplay of the surface approach with a “deeper” approach of academic writing where priority is given to: 1) celebrating international students’ epistemological strengths which came with them from their prior experience in their home countries, 2) inspiring their conceptual investment in their writing, 3) encouraging a positive constitution of self in their writing, and 4) fostering individual agency to negotiate with the institutional and discursive confinements that are associated with academic writing.” (Zheng, 2011, p.47)
Students need opportunities for comprehending and internalizing input.

- As true for domestic students as for international students;
- Exercises, practice, application, analysis, etc.
Interaction with peers and experts fosters the development of thought and language.
A safe, welcoming and supportive environment leads to low anxiety.

Horowitz, Horowitz & Cope, 1986
“...the notion that language must be in place before disciplinary learning is contrary to social views (e.g., Gee, 2002) that understand language as an integral part of identify formation. For students to become members of the community of engineers, teachers, accountants, and so forth, they must engage with the community and enact its social practices, including language.” (Gallagher & Hahn, 2017, p. 22)
Ways forward

“…a working knowledge of instructional techniques beneficial for multilinguals can be helpful for teaching increasingly linguistically diverse classes. As student populations change, instructional practices must change as well to continue to meet the students’ needs. Moreover, just as student needs vary by group, individual needs vary as well. Using linguistically-responsive and supportive practices and responding flexibly to students’ varying needs promotes equitable educational outcomes for all students.” (Haan, Gallagher, & Varandani, 2017, p.48)


