How Might We:

Make language(s) visible?

Contents

Overview

Language is everywhere in the university. Yet it is largely ignored and only becomes visible when it is seen as a problem.

As Turner suggests, there is an 'assumption that language gives immediate access to knowledge and must therefore be transparent' (2011: 29) but is also 'is often the catch-all term for problems with unmet standards, and the need for remediation' (Turner, 2004: 99).

Clarity, written expression and argument are all assessed in most modules; all of these involve linguistic expression; all of these are the 'polished prose', the 'taken for- granted "good" things' that are given no credit for being there but suggest intellectual deficit when the language draws attention to itself rather than the content' (Turner, 2018: 24).

For a student to be able to access, belong and achieve, they need to feel comfortable in the use and manipulation of English.

Furthermore, there needs to be greater tolerance for the use of any language, allowing students to bring their own languages into the learning environment and engage in code switching or translanguaging without feeling a sense of shame that they are not speaking in English at all times. Turner (2018: 14) has suggested that there needs to be an institutional wide ideological shift away from a 'linguistic conflation ideology' where 'problems with linguistic accuracy, as well as style, are seen to index intellectual deficit'. Language, therefore, needs to be viewed as part of the academic learning process.

Student voice

Without a focus on the language that we use and that we expect our students to use, students would not have a voice! How we communicate with students in order to hear their voices is part of this.

It is also important that all students on programmes including 'home' students are guided towards fostering a learning environment in which everyone can be listened to and heard. This is not always easy and may require dedicated classroom time to build connections and to raise awareness of the diverse linguistic and cultural capital that different students will have in a given learning context.

Language in its mechanical form is also currently high on the OfS agenda, with a focus on the need to assess spelling, punctuation and grammar (S,P&G). It is important that we find a way to push against this deficit approach to language use and instead support and enable students to see all of their languages as a resource. This should encompass all languages, not only English.

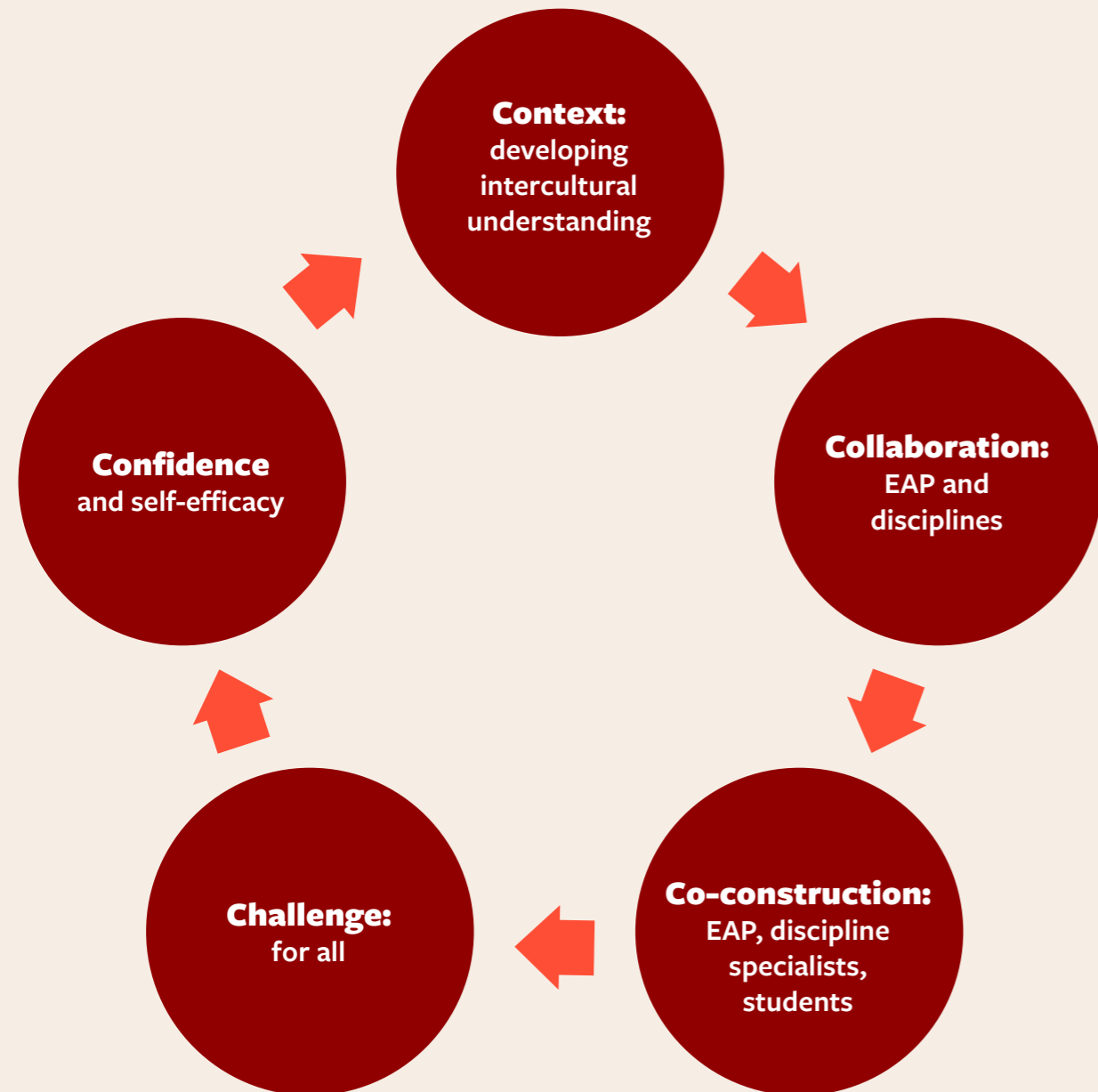Examples of student voices already raised on the issue include:

The International Student Advisory Board highlighted the importance of language in 2020/21 (see for example: **Intercultural Awareness on Campus**)

Data collected via Bee Bond's 2017 LITE project collected qualitative data from students who articulated the importance of language in enabling or disabling ALL (not only international) students.

How might we...

Practitioner-based tips

We suggest the following approach to embedding a focus on developing **students' ability to communicate effectively in English** for academic and professional purposes:

Circular diagram with five connected nodes:

- **Context:** developing intercultural understanding
- **Collaboration:** EAP and disciplines
- **Co-construction:** EAP, discipline specialists, students
- **Challenge:** for all
- **Confidence** and self-efficacy

Principles:

Academic language and literacies development

- Is offered to all students
- Values the diverse nature of the student cohort and works to be inclusive of all
- Is developed in partnership with disciplinary academic programmes
- Acknowledges disciplinary differences but builds on cross-disciplinary connections
- Is student-centred and driven by student need
- Is participatory, collaborative and co-constructed
- Is holistic and embodied, acknowledging cognitive, emotional and social factors of learning
- Is core to knowledge creation and communication

Aims:

- To enable students to take ownership of their own learning
- To make visible occluded cultural practices and processes and thereby reduce cultural and linguistic barriers to learning
- To enable students to develop their ability to achieve the 'appropriate arrangement of both content information and language in order to create extended spoken or written discourse' (Bruce, 2008: 4)
- To enable students 'to develop the means to negotiate and respond to the requirements of assignment genres' (Bruce, 2011: 67)

Also, for practical tips to build into pedagogies, see:

The long read: Inclusive teaching and learning for International students

More information

The Language Centre

Insessional website – most faculties and schools at the UoL have seconded Language Centre staff who can advise and support students and staff directly on the language of their disciplines. Through a principled and collaborative approach to understanding the genres and discourses of different subject areas, the hidden linguistic requirements of particular discipline domains can be made more transparent and accessible to all students ultimately leading to a more inclusive curriculum.

Please get in touch with your Language Centre contact or Bee Bond **B.Bond@leeds.ac.uk** if you would like more guidance or support.

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