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The Journey of Chinese Students from Mainstream Composition Courses to the Writing Lab: A Needs Assessment

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Chinese Students’ Journey from Mainstream Composition Courses to the Writing Lab

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SLS/ESL Speaker Series
Dissertation Presentation
February 21, 2014
Overview

- Presentation Impetus
- Rationale
- Problem Statement
- Gap Statement
- Preliminary Exams
- Prospectus
- Dissertation Summary
- Discussion Session
A genre that is "out of sight" to "outsiders and apprentices"; occluded genres perform "essential waystage roles in the administrative and evaluative functioning of the research worlds."

(Swales, 2004, p. 18)

Why not bring them into sight then?
Influential Factors

Research universities lend themselves to research!

- Working in different educational contexts (ENGL106i, Writing Lab, OEPP)
- Working in social contexts (Friends of Europe, International Leaders Council)
- Undergraduate and graduate international students’ challenges:
  - varying levels of language proficiency
  - writing performance
  - lack of familiarity with Western rhetorical style
- TAs, professors and administrators’ challenges
Introductory Composition at Purdue

- **Effect 1**: Increasing in the no. of international students in mainstream composition courses
  - Undergrad enrollment: 4544
  - Total enrollment: 7934

- **Effect 2**: TAs frustrated, not knowing what to do

- **Effect 3**: Students facing challenges
Problem Statement

- ENGL106 curriculum and practices: the same
- No teacher training on ESL teaching
- Needs of international students: overlooked/not met
Gap Statement

- Ongoing collaborative work in the Purdue University Introductory Composition Program (ICAP)
- To date, no comprehensive research on the needs analysis of international students.
- Therefore, an exploratory needs analysis is a crucial step
Preliminary Exams

Paper 1
- English Language Support in Big Ten Research Universities
  Dr. Tony Silva

Paper 2
- A new syllabus approach in ENG 106 classes: ENGL-C (Coexist)
  Dr. Margie Berns

Paper 3
- Perceptions of ENGL106 instructors on the significant needs of international students
  Dr. Dwight Atkinson
Prelim 1 Findings

1. Emphasis on the kinds of academic skills and language difference

2. Academic skills rank of importance
   - 1st Writing
   - 2nd Reading
   - 3rd Speaking
   - 4th Listening

3. Intensive Writing Courses: all

4. Writing Labs: all

5. Intensive Language support: 6 universities

6. Language support: all but differing degree
   - Ohio State: integrates some cultural base
   - Purdue: designated an alternative course to mainstream composition courses
Prelim 2 Findings

ENGL 106C: English Coexist

- Collaboration between “American” students and international students to assist understanding various cultures, traditions, and practices
- Uses ethnographic studies as a foundation
- Focuses on writing, presentation, and working in groups
- Helped envision an ICaP program that includes an language proficiency entry exam for students
Prelim 3 Findings
Directly Stated Needs:

- More participation in class discussions and group work which would help international students engage in the learning process actively by expressing their own opinions as well as getting more exposure to authentic English use while talking to peers in class.
- Becoming more involved in group work.
- Understanding and following instructor’s instructions.
- More time with assignments as it takes more time to process writing in a foreign language and work with multiple drafts.
- More language support in terms of grammar (e.g. problems with articles, subject verb agreement, verb tenses) which would help them with their academic skills, mainly writing at university level.
- Affective needs such as social, emotional, cognitive and cultural needs.
Indirectly Stated Needs:

- International students’ need for more drafting in writing
- More guidance in following assignment and classroom instructions
- More directive guidance from the professor
- Being exposed to more reading texts and syllabus material that are not only American culture
Prospectus Process

Submit the Prospectus

Defend the Prospectus

Become “All But Dissertation”

Apply for Purdue Research Foundation (PRF) Grant

Receiver of Knowledge

Producer of Knowledge
Dissertation Topic

- A needs assessment on the writing needs of Chinese students in mainstream composition courses at Purdue University
- Clark & Gieve (2006): many empirical studies share a common failure of overgeneralization and stereotyping with regard to a very large nation
- Contextualize the setting: Purdue Introductory Composition Program and the Writing Lab
- To avoid stereotyping: accessing individual voices of tutors/instructors students
Research Questions

1. What are the writing needs of Chinese students according to instructors?
2. What are the writing needs of Chinese students according to themselves?
3. Do the opinions match up?
Cultures of Learning

- **Culture of Learning**: cultural transmission, is how a group of people learn and pass on information to each other.

- While each student is unique, students from the same country most probably share a similar culture of learning influenced by their educational background.

- This educational background is mostly built upon the cultural and educational policies of the country of education.
Writing Needs

- Writing Lab: 2992/5804
- Rhetorical: style, voice, directness
- Linguistic: negative transfer, grammar
- Strategic: organizing, cohesive, genre awareness, planning, evaluating and monitoring
Triangulation Method
Findings: Tutor Perceptions

- **Rhetorical:** good at summarizing, reporting, beautiful expression
  - challenge: argumentation, assessment, direct expression
- **Linguistic:** grammar, mechanics
  - grammar anxiety
- **Strategic:** not many self mechanisms
  - good at getting outside help
“Well, I think it’s funny that Purdue doesn’t offer any elementary language class. Other universities have that for non-native speakers. I’m surprised that we don’t offer anything like that. Maybe I would offer a supplemental course to ENGL106, like an elementary class like sort of an English language class. Students would first take that and then ENGL106.

“I think ENG106i can meet academic needs but ENGL106 can be a challenge for meeting their needs.”

“Purdue needs to offer a broader range of language courses. Right now, the Writing Lab is wearing thin because we become the catch all for international students.”
Findings: Student Perceptions

- Rhetoric: audience, organization, examplifying, concluding
- Linguistic: grammar, tenses (past tense), spelling,
- Strategic: think in my head, what’s strategy?
  spontaneous writing
  write on computer, delete and add easily
I won’t get an A. I will get a B. We’re not like a domestic student who is much more good at writing English compositions than international students. So when we’re expressing our opinions, might be misspelling, or the structure or the sentences are not perfect”

“English is not my mother tongue. When writing, it’s surely that you feel sometimes you don’t know how to go on. You just stop there. You don’t know which word to use or you don’t know if the sentence right. Microsoft gives you blue underlines. That’s telling you the sentences revised. And it came out of your own mind, you don’t know how to revise it. So yeah, sometimes you can doubt yourself. Do I really need to change that but the computer is telling you to change that”
Research Directions

Benech (1996): Role of Needs Assessments
- Provide a description of a context?
  or
- Prescription of a situation?

- Data from two distinct groups of informants
- Comparisons of data
- A more rounded view of the specific academic context
- Allows for critical examination of the contexts and data
Implications

- Pedagogical Implications
  Cai (1993)
  Chinese students need the schemata shared by English academic community
  - Discourse strategies of the target language
  - English rhetorical conventions and writing skills not enough skills but disciplinary
    ideologies pertaining to academic discourse
  - Explicit teaching of writing patterns and expectations of a writer responsible writing
  - Direct approach leading to intellectual understanding and thinking
  - Free expression of personal understanding and thinking

  You (2004)
  - Process writing pedagogy: differences between cultures: linear thinking,
    multidimensional and critical thinking, conflicts caused by ‘paradigm shift’ and gap
    between theory and practice
  - Language support
  - Writing strategies
  - More time, effort, tolerance
References

Thank you!

谢谢

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