

# 'Put on the Spot'



## **EXPLORING COLLABORATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE EAP POST-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE (POC)**

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# Outline



- Background to the study
- What?
- Themes:
  - Discourse and structure
  - 'Put on the spot'
  - Development
- Learning theory
- Conclusions and recommendations

# Background



- Increase in the numbers of international students

EAP...

- generates considerable income for universities
- is a high-stakes environment for all concerned
- is intensive

but....

EAP training is 'largely ad hoc and informal'

(Alexander, 2010:3)

# Research



- Identifying a gap
- Bridging the development gap
- Context
  - Student numbers peak in the summer term
  - Dyadic event 2-3 days after the observation
  - Observation protocol
  - Reflection box

# Sample



## *Novice* EAP tutors

<b>Tutor</b>	<b>EAP experience (years)</b>	<b>Employment status (N/NNEST)</b>
<b>Rachel</b>	3	Year-round (NEST)
<b>Sarah</b>	3.5	Year-round (NEST)
<b>Louise</b>	3.5*	Summer (NEST)
<b>Andrew</b>	4*	Summer (NEST)
<b>Becky</b>	4	Summer (NNEST)
<b>Tom</b>	3* approx	Summer (NEST)

\* = intermittent contracts

NEST = Native English speaking teachers/NNEST = Non-native English speaking teachers

# What?



- What makes up a **typical POC** for you?
- What is the **function** of a POC?
- What **language choices** do we use to discuss teaching?
- What do we know about current **teaching and learning theory**?

# Learning theory



- **Systemic thinking – co-constructive model**
  - Minimising power differences
  - Observer as co-learner
  
- **Constructivist theory**
  - Personal theories evolve through interaction
  - External input is key in knowledge construction

# Discourse and structure



- *Feedback?*

*Talk me through a typical EAP observation session for you*

*It gives you chance to defend yourself, you know, we've all got reasons for doing things.*

*I tend to start by saying the things that I think didn't go so well and then talking about the things I think went well. Whereas the person giving the feedback tends to do it the other way round.*



# Recognise it?



*So usually the tutor has started off by asking me how I felt that the lesson went, and then just giving me a chance to say what I thought the strengths and weaknesses were before giving any feedback themselves.*

# 'Feedback' sandwich?





*I tend to start by saying the things that I think didn't go so well and then talking about the things I think went well*

*So usually the tutor has started off by asking me how I felt that the lesson went*

- Well intentioned
- Reflection
- Affects discourse and structure?
- Counterproductive?

# How do you feel the lesson went?



*"Oh, **what did you think of how the lesson went?**" It's very vaguely worded and so you can say a certain amount but I think a more structured piece of paper asking you some specific things that you could perhaps think about before doing the observation feedback, then you'd actually be able to say more and then it could be more constructive from both sides.*

# 'Put on the spot'



*I think I would possibly like to know some of the things I'm going to be asked about beforehand just because I think it's useful rather than being **put on the spot**.*



# Development



How have EAP feedback sessions helped you develop as a teacher?

*I don't know if I've ever come out with anything like, "Wow, that's a brilliant idea. I've never thought of it."*

# Development



*Any feedback is always useful, to a certain point. You take away with it what you will. And you might not take onboard everything because you might not agree [...] and you might both just say, "Well, okay, what we're both doing is EAP but we're just not meeting in the middle." And so you've got to come to some sort of compromise and hope it works.*

# Autonomy



*We're encouraging students in EAP to go and do things on their own so I think it's good if we can, after observations, be encouraged to go and do the same thing actually, to go and improve the areas that we need to work on.*



# Learning theory



- Learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are interdependent

(Sinclair, McGrath and Lamb, 2000)

Professional development requires the support of others:

'No one else can do it for us, though other people can be indispensable in helping us do that'.

(Underhill, 1992:79)

# Development



*Even though I've been teaching for a few years now, I still feel I can develop, I still think that I'm in the early stage, and so I actually like the feedback sessions that I receive from observations.*

- Alternative terminology?

# Responsibility for development



- Collective - managers/teacher educators and tutors
- Tutor responsibility has been described in the literature on EAP as 'crucial' (Sharpling, 2002:89)
- But.....
  - part-time or temporary contracts and very often hourly paid
  - lack of appropriate conditions in which self-directed development can occur: resources and time
  - ongoing intensification of teachers' lives

(Gray, 2012)

# Conclusions



- Discourse choices to describe the POC reflect its evaluative function more strongly than the developmental function
- Positive/negative pattern
- *How do you think it went?*
- POC as a development tool

# Recommendations



- Refresh the process
  - Consider discourse choices
  - Acknowledge learning theory to encourage change and development
  - Consider pre-arranged discourse rules/language boundaries
- Pre-arranged discourse rules/language boundaries
  
- Change the opening question
  - ~~How do you think it went?~~
  - *Would you say that [the class that I observed] was a fairly typical class?*  
(Vásquez , 2004:43)

# Recommendations



- Opportunities for tutors to ask questions and contribute to the agenda
- Exploratory and dialogic approach to learning
- Negotiated observation focus
- Join the dots

# Final thoughts



- Reflective model
- Is it fair to 'judge' teaching within an observation framework which can be static and prescriptive and discourages the dialogue which can lead to change and professional development?
- Observer development - tutor development

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