

BEING AND BECOMING: ADDRESSING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THROUGH A PROACTIVE LEARNER-DRIVEN AND INSTRUCTOR-FACILITATED SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

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Keywords

Cultural differences, international students, academic language, learner empowerment

Abstract

International students are greatly disadvantaged when there is a huge cultural difference between the academic integrity culture of their new academic environment and that of their previous educational system. Often overlooked in the cultural difference is the underlying linguistic factors and habitus for communication that impact how international students perceive expectations about communication of knowledge. Lack of English language skills among some international students were noted to be of concern as obstacles that prevented students from functioning effectively to meet their course needs, and thus more likely to engage in academic dishonesty (MacLeod & Eaton, 2020). Trauma of academic integrity proceedings, with risk of suicide (Gunnell et al., 2020; Pitt et al., 2021; Robinson & Openo, 2021) necessitates developing a more positive, compassionate and supportive means of addressing cultural differences and empowering English language learners to overcome their initial barriers. However, there is a scarcity of empirical research on such an approach.

This paper explores a proactive intervention using a learner-driven and instructor-facilitated socialization process aimed at helping students from diverse cultural backgrounds and low English Language proficiency to (a) gain a personally meaningful understanding of the institutional academic integrity expectations

that they can put into practice; (b) accelerate their linguistic competence to cope with the paraphrasing and summarizing skills needed in their course texts; and (c) develop their confidence to communicate their disciplinary knowledge to an instructor. To support English Language Learners who were in globally distributed locations and continued to be immersed in their respective cultures during the pandemic, this program was offered students a combination of asynchronous and synchronous connections with assigned writing instructors. Students engaged in asynchronous writing practice almost every day and received personalized written responses that addressed their unique learning needs related to academic integrity practices and discussion of their ideas two to three times per week from their instructors. During the one-month intervention, students had two 30-minute synchronous virtual meetings with their instructor. Quantitative data of learner engagement was downloaded from the learning management system and triangulated with (a) qualitative data sampled from students' journal reflections and (b) post-program anonymous survey data. Quantitative analysis suggest that this intervention may be a cost-effective model for supporting students with low English proficiency as the high volume of written output they produced during the one month helped them achieve positive experiences

communicating about course topics and engaging in Academic English usage, thereby giving them the opportunity of **being** an emergent language user capable of expressing their ideas in their own words instead of having to plagiarize. The stimulating and supportive exchange of ideas with their instructor helped socialize students to **becoming** the junior

scholar they are expected to be in higher education. Pedagogical insights gained about creating the conducive risk-free conditions for students' engagement and subsequent transformation will be shared, along with suggestions for applicability in a wider range of teaching contexts.

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