

Conference Abstract

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How can I help?: Reflections on best practice versus time and resource constraints in 1:1 responses to International students' university writing.

John Wyatt, Student Services, Massey University

j.f.wyatt@massey.ac.nz

This paper examines the current 1:1 teaching and learning situations encountered with International students at the Student Learning Centre (SLC) at Turitea Campus (Palmerston North) at Massey University.

From its original inception (1996) the SLC at Turitea Campus has grown to be an integral part of the Student Services offered by the University. It is centrally funded and continues to be subject to resource pressures in terms of staffing. The recent rises in the numbers of Asian fee-paying students, where English is their second language, has seen the client base of the Centre shift towards, predominantly, Chinese students. Concurrent to this the focus of our responses to student writing has altered; the diagnostic patterns have moved away from matters of assignment interpretation and critical assessment of theoretical arguments, on to areas best described as lexical errors and grammatical checking of sentence construction and the like. For International students with non-English speaking backgrounds, such 'surface' matters are seen by them to be of critical importance.

The implication of this change is the focus of this paper. Best practice in academic skills advising is hard to define since there can be no evaluation of a set curriculum, for example, as might be found in teaching standard modules in education. The eclectic nature of a 1:1 student encounter at university defies standardisation, and the twin restraints of allocated time and availability of suitably trained personnel remains problematic. How to be most effective given these resource restraints remains a quandary not easily resolved without a comprehensive discussion about what practice should take place at the 'coal-face' of 1:1 advising. This presentation draws on previously published work, and wishes to argue for a more open exchange of ideas and discussion of effective practice in shifting conditions at university student learning centres.