

Supporting diverse first year  
undergraduates to develop  
academic writing practices:  
Starting at the end with critical  
thinking

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# Aims of the presentation

- Sketch out our strategies for developing embedded academic writing strategies across a faculty – ongoing and provisional
- Ask for your input - sharing experiences and strategies



# Why worry about academic writing development ?



- What actually constitutes 'good' writing is notoriously difficult to define (Lillis 2001, Leas and Street 1998)
- However, the power of the concept of 'good academic writing' is all pervasive in the academy (Lillis and Thomas 2003; Ivanic and Romy, 1994).

# Academic writing development as a socially situated practice.

- Street's 'ideological' view of literacy argues writing has many different forms, and a variety of purposes (1984).
- Individuals are always active transformers of the literacies that they employ, not just passive recipients (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).
- Lecturers and students are engaged in an inherently dialectical relationship around writing in which both parties actively produce, consume and transform each others' writing (and that of others) (Maclure, 2006).



# Setting the scene with student support around academic writing

- English context
- HEI traditions of support for academic writing
- BCU
- Faculty issues
- Student body/students needs in BCU



# Making the transition to holistic/embedded academic writing development in higher education: our aims



To highlight academic writing and feedback strategies making them explicit to staff and first and year students

To move beyond the technical aspects of support to look at the whole academic writing process for first year students

To shift support into subject specialisms and

- out of deficit
- out of generic support strategies

# Why is there a problem with first year academic writing ?

- We ask first year students to engage with
- new kinds of writing
- We are aware that first year students often need support with their writing
- We set assignments that assume students understand how we want them to write



# Staff Issues



- Often not clear who should take responsibility for developing students' academic writing
- Lack of training and confidence
- The lecturers on the ground faced are with heavy workload
- How does one find the time to support students within subject specialist teaching
- Easier to pass students on to franchised/generic support





# Institutional issues

- Senior managers need to think more critically about supporting teaching staff to support first year students' transitions into academic writing in higher education
- The institution needs to think critically about creating a new cross university environment for support for first years students ( and all students) which is :
  - Dialogic
  - Non-judgemental
  - enabling



# Our model of academic writing support



## Collaborative approach

Student and staff dialogue needs to be facilitated around

Academic writing

- Drafting
- Assessment criteria
- Marking
- Feedback

Subject teaching teams need to have ownership of the whole process

Whole faculty approach – students need to have parity of experiences

- BUT HOW TO MAKE IT WORK !!



“ Edyucation is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world ”

# 3 Initiatives for 2014/15

- Feedback questionnaire
- **Formative feedback project**
- Embedding academic writing Away days



# Issues for discussion



- Does our setting raise issues similar to those you have experienced in your own institution ?
- What strategies have you used to up the status and usefulness of a holistic/embedded approach to managing students' transitions into higher education
- How important is the language we use
- around academic writing ?
- Formative feedback?



# References

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