SELF/PEER/TUTOR Evaluation of Writing Assignments
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Within the founding idea of free movement of member-state nationals of European countries lies the aim of providing mutually approved of and trustworthy access programmes to higher education institutions of the Union for underrepresented adults. Besides mutual recognition of attained qualifications and employment rights becoming a possibility and so supporting mobility, the administration, conduct and implementation of preparation courses for such students, as well as those for students with other learning backgrounds, whether traditional in route or not, should give the sense to all involved that participating adults are of the required standard, and that this standard can be seen as allowing entry to higher education in institutes throughout Europe, thereby further strengthening the belief that all European inhabitants should be able to mix with and learn about each other. The CHAGAL set-up focuses on the ease of integration into the education system of the host country, and hopefully, by extension, into those of other European countries, of adults from different underrepresented groups who had not had the opportunity or encouragement to follow the traditional routes towards higher education. Learning the language(s) of instruction or that of the host country, as well as reaching a sufficient level of knowledge of the content of the subjects involved in such a route contributes to this process.   The content and methods of instruction used for such adults have to be adapted to take into account the special features these learners carry given their ages and backgrounds.

The extent to which this integration presents difficulties varies from country to country and depends on factors such as the consequences of the policies of the relevant government authorities, the degree to which it is genuinely required and desired, the learning backgrounds and expectations of the students, the purposes of the receiving institutions when searching out enrollment of underrepresented adults and the teaching employed when dealing with them. The form its implementation takes also depends on these factors, and further to that the extent to which any learning change that is perceived to be necessary is accepted is of vital importance and must be given due attention. It is clear, then, that questions have to be asked about the organization of the institutions, but also about the curriculum adopted when looking for success with such students. As far as the latter is concerned, the results of work carried out by the CHAGAL team suggests that a student-centred approach to the curriculum is the best to deal with all the different factors and student types involved. This approach and the effects that may be the result of learning change are what allow the inclusion of this contribution as part of the formation of a more complete picture of what is happening throughout Europe with CHAGAL-like situations.

There are primary schools in eastern Thrace for the children of the Greek Muslim population of that region and a few state–run multicultural schools that direct the children of underrepresented adults towards basic vocational employment that in the process adjust their curriculum to include a degree of the cultural background of the pupils. There are lots of private institutes that run courses for Greek students preparing for access to UK universities, some of which do the same for transient Chinese students. This Chinese connection is about as near as Greece gets to the issues of this workshop. It is apparent that, while there is no intention to ignore the encroaching new situations as the population of Greece changes, the problems created by CHAGAL-like students are not of immediate concern to Greek authorities yet. Routes to tertiary education are traditional in teaching and administration. School pupils, but also adults, who live in Greece, including non-Greeks, follow traditional courses at school and/or at private crammers after school and sit entrance examinations in June. Pupils of Greek extraction living overseas return and follow similar lessons at private institutes throughout the summer, sitting similar examinations in September. Non-Greeks who are not living in Greece gain matriculation if they have the qualifications needed to enter universities of their own countries, but they as well as those of Greek extraction must hold certification in Modern Greek language to the level of C1, and often follow summer language courses in Greece, most of which are traditional in nature.

Therefore there is little awareness of CHAGAL, university preparation learning is not particularly student-centred, and certainly does not concern itself with cultural difference or diversity of learning styles. However, once matriculation has been achieved, a feeling exists on the part of lecturers and students that it would be valuable to introduce student-centredness. This is especially so in the School of English, Department of Theoretical & Applied Linguistics, even though some students from large urban centers are likely to have already encountered a smidgen of it. The entry point is the point to spark change, and this decision carries with it problems of a CHAGAL nature. In fact the student-centredness is more a kind of

orientation that helps students begin to develop a sense of their own life-long learning. They are encouraged to construct and work with their own scaffolding, and sense their learning proximities at least as far as English language lessons are concerned, and in this sense the diversity of individual learners enters the picture. The acquisition of study-skills is emphasized. The onus is slowly put on the students to want to take the initiatives and responsibility for their own development. The word 'slowly' is important here, as most learners experience problems with the change, and this is what I will illustrate through the use of an example of the construction and running of a 12 week writing course for 1st year students. The problems encountered impinge on CHAGAL. At the end of the 36 hours of lessons, the students are expected to have become better writers of argumentative and persuasive texts, see how this fits with the need to write for the rest of their studies and be in a position to judge their own performance.

I will present what happens on the course in the established order of course design, course implementation and student evaluation, although the latter is the core of this paper, and relate it to the CHAGAL curriculum guidelines where relevant. The approx 400-student B2-C1 level entry is broken into 10 groups. They are mainly female and Greek, there being just a few Erasmus exchange students in the whole intake. The 10 different teachers each have their own teaching style, diversity being in the air here, but the agreement is to instigate learning change and student-centredness and this is brought about initially by an agreed upon course construction. The fifth guideline is encompassed here. The belief in student-centredness comes, not so much from the idea that it is the best way to handle any latent student diversity, but because there is a need to encourage students to take the initiative for their own learning and progress as they move through the eight semesters that demands choices to be made from the many subjects they can study.

Each week of the course construction deals with a specific area of what is required in order to produce good texts, and students are made aware of how they should view their learning of this area. The first week, for example, deals with the need to express thoughts well and succinctly when writing, the fifth the idea of the kinds of support to include when making various kinds of claims, the seventh the avoidance of what teachers term language fallacies. For each of these examples, students are asked to embellish basic sentences by making feelings and thoughts more explicit, to match statements of claim that may exist in texts to sentences of support, spot fallacies and learn how to re-express the text areas that contain them. Besides the presentation of this course procedure to the students, teachers and students work with a set of 'can do' statements that outline expected exit competences. For example, students would be expected to be able to give clarifications and explanations, and produce interesting texts that appeal to the perceived audience. The list is not exhaustive or prescriptive. The order in which they are taught is according to the needs of the class and diverse learning styles, and the teaching of them may also vary accordingly. Teachers and students keep a checklist of what they have covered, how and with what purpose.

This coverage of CHAGAL curriculum guidelines 2, 3, 7 & 8 draws on previous teacher experience of what is needed, but has the additional element of being negotiated with the students, guideline 5. This causes confusion as it goes against the grain of what they have been used to, and time and patience must be found to help overcome this. It is not a once-and-for-all learning of change. It needs to continue, and apart from learning what negotiation entails, students have to be taught to assess the value of the content of what they learn along with the outcomes of this. They have to learn to construct and apply criteria that don't simply indicate the degree of externally assessed success of learning the content, but also judge help given to their own learning processes. It is essential that time is given over to this at the beginning of the course. Tasks may be used that help structure the unfolding of the enlightenment this process entails to help students see the value of this process and act to restore otherwise lost confidence through linking the disturbing new with the comforting old, guideline 3. However, spending time is not wasting time, as what results are students who in later stages of the course quickly take up and integrate the continuous prompts about their own learning processes that are fed to them, finally resulting in students who take their own initiatives and become independent.

The areas of the course and the competences used are illustrated through the use of a variety of texts that carry these features that then can be pointed out and worked on, but in which the topics are of value to students learning about themselves. In this sense a loop is at work. As an aim of the semester is to make students aware of themselves as learners, their learning styles and their progress, and feed confidence to overcome the effects of learning change, it seems pertinent to include text topics and content that help students to learn about and discuss this. For illustrative purposes some of the texts dealt with passive behaviour and assertiveness training, while others focused on the need to have respect and self-respect in order to become better communicators, while providing students with information about some guidelines to employ to establish good situations for exchange of ideas. Such texts act as prompts for essays that students

have to produce as part of the assessment procedures of the course. Other topics offered are with titles such as, 'Learning is a personal thing', 'Creating the well-rounded person', 'Each person is responsible for his/her own happiness,' and so on, and producing 'good' essays involves drawing on information and ideas contained in various texts where there is an overlap. The topics are interrelated, as are the texts.

Problems with this area of guideline 2 crop up not because of the topics, but because of the use the texts are put to. Students are not used to the kinds of tasks that accompany the texts, or the classroom arrangements employed to circulate the information elicited from the texts, offshoots of student-centredness, guideline 4. They are also not used to examining texts, taken from various sources, from the point of view of text structure and information content, their own expectations being couched in terms of improvement judged by comprehending more difficult texts with more difficult vocabulary and grammar/structures. These problems are slowly overcome with experience and practice as the value of the use of texts for such purposes becomes apparent and students feel more confident. Teacher/tutor explanations are of paramount importance in persuading students of the benefits of this aspect of student-centredness, as is the feedback provided when the students later produce essays based on the text content. They must develop an open attitude to text analysis, and one that encourages students to explore texts, ask questions about the text construction and lexicogrammatical choices the writer makes, and interact with the texts, their purposes and content. They must also identify the text features; it is not enough to leave this to implicit, incidental learning. Explicit focus must exist for retention to occur, but this focus is not on forms alone, and explanations should not be of this nature. They should be more progressive and encourage continuing personal research into language and the learning of it.

The next area to delve into in the work of this semester concerns the evaluation procedures. The title indicates that these differ from those usually conducted. In fact they are so extremely important as they set the scene for the course, determine its student-centred nature and also create the greatest problems for our students that they could have been dealt with earlier in this text. Their inclusion at this point is purely because of the accepted order in which language professionals present course descriptions. A consequence of their student-centredness is that problems occur for the students in the implementation of them, because they are required to be involved in their grading. It has already been mentioned that students must write essays. The point of concern is how to assess successful writing in the framework being used. The first point worth mentioning is that from the list of topics, usually about ten in number, each student chooses to write on four to be graded as part of the assessment. Remember that there had already been some negotiation about what to include on the course. This extra responsibility of choice is a further move in this direction, and there is evidence that students produce better texts when they choose the topics. Guideline 1 comes into this as in a sense diversity is catered for. However, for the present semester a discussion was held about the topics, what would be read in the relevant texts and which ideas could be included in essays, leading to an agreement of the four essay titles everyone would produce from.

It was also agreed that students would assess themselves and each other, as well as take account of the tutor's judgments. This view of the ninth guideline contains the belief that as students assess a series of essays, they become better assessors and more aware of the criteria of good writing, hence slowly becoming more confident about taking initiatives and making choices when writing. In order for students to participate in this process, they need the criteria. These are given to them and time is spent discussing them. It is important that they realize that using these is subjective and that their individual inputs carried through their interpretations into them play a role. They have to learn to be responsible in their use of them. Students need support here as the tradition they had been immersed in led them to simply accept grades they received and examine feedback that concentrated on structures and vocabulary. Then their responsibility was limited to simply gaining hopefully better marks next time. What was to be in force from now on for them would demand greater involvement and sensibly used responsibility.

Students were asked to mark on a scale of 1 (Weak) to 5 (Strong). The criteria made little reference to structures and vocabulary. They fitted more the purposes of the course determined by its construction and 'can do' statements. For example, a strong student would have met the task requirements, organized well, given appropriate support and examples for any statements of claim, used effective techniques to keep readers' interest, taken account of readers' perceived interest and knowledge, used language in a highly effective way and been efficacious. An average (3) student would have not provided suitable content, made the sequence of ideas difficult to understand, not fitted is/her ideas to the topic or the reader and in general been off the task. Weak students' writing makes it difficult to discern what (s)he wants to convey. Lack of focus, bad organization, disjointed ideas and weak language use may all contribute to this judgment.

As you might imagine, besides finding the idea of being graders novel, students initially experience difficulty with interpretation of the criteria and with identifying the writing features to be looked for. Help is provided, however, by transforming the criteria paragraphs into statements, each carrying a feature that has to be judged on a scale of 1 to 10. Each statement would have the scale below it, and students would circle the number they feel represents the degree of success of that feature the writing displays.

e.gs.

12.   The organization is clear and easy to follow.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

16.   The student adds appropriate support using his/her own words.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

18.   The student draws on various sources to complete a picture of his/her viewpoint.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Altogether there are 25 such statements on a scoring sheet, giving a possible maximum score of 250. However, as the writing of such statements reflects an expression of a degree of subjectivity, not all the statements are relevant to a particular piece of writing and students are told to learn to use their own judgment as to which statements they feel contribute to a fair assessment. This in itself also helps the process of students adopting the new responsibility. An essay may be marked out of 180 by one student and out of 210 by another, but in all cases the score is converted into a percentage.

The procedure used was that the tutor collected completed written assignments on a set date and redistributed them randomly to other classmates/peers who used the statement-scoring sheet to award a mark. The markers were told to quickly read the text and indicate scores on statements they felt were to do with focus, purpose and organization. They than read it quickly again looking for claims, support, evidence and content related statements. Finally they awarded marks for statements to do with good language use. Students would not write anything on the essays and each would hand the essay and completed statement-scoring sheet with its percentage score and author name to the teacher, who would keep it. The essays were then returned to their owners with a new, blank scoring sheet for them to self evaluate using the same procedure. This time, after collecting them along with the percentage scores, the tutor marked each essay and calculated a score from the aggregate of all scores. All the scoring sheets were handed back with the essay to each student, and this time teacher comments were added, comments that were again in line with the course aims. The tutor kept a record of all marking for the four assignments.

As the semester's work proceeded, students became more aware of their own learning processes, became better, more consistent markers of their work, were able to judge their own process, hopefully deciding where and how they needed to improve, and their marking converged with that of the tutor, which meant that, assuming the tutor was a good, fair marker, the students became more accurate assessors and producers of the kind of writing. All this has implications for the students' other contributions that make up their final degree mark after four years. Exam questions are likely to be written in an improved way, and the desire to do this will force students to carry out research and reading in order to find good support for what they write. Other assignments are likely to be more focused, indirectly leading to higher marks. Projects and presentations will be improved, and even when examinations do not contain a long writing element, studying for them is likely to benefit from better study and reading skills acquired through this peer/self/tutor evaluation process.

A holistic approach to student-centredness results from this process as, as is apparent from what I have written, working on guideline 9 in this way forces other guidelines, especially guideline 8, to be brought into the picture in a similar light. A final point to make that comes out of this is that this approach also ensures the active participation of all staff involved, but further to this sets the basis for work on guideline 10, staff-training and development, and 11, institutional support. It may seem a roundabout way of going about achieving the adoption of student-centred systems, but often working from the practical aspect of classroom forces the institutions to change as it provides tangible evidence for them to draw on, so allowing them to accept something they may not do so easily if the idea that they should take the initiative to change is rooted in academically produced learning theories. Evidence from self/peer/tutor evaluation supports this practical aspect.