Making Connections:
Student investigations of their future disciplines
within a Direct Entry EAP course

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Our Context

UNSW Institute of Languages  Direct Entry Program
University English Entry Course (UEEC)
English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP)

Participants of our AR
36 students of various majors
CEFR B2
Issues and Rationale for our Research

Issues with EGAP courses
- Failure to transfer generic skills (Counsell, 2011; Ong 2014)
- Lack of discipline-specific language (Dooey, 2010)

Issues in our course
- Lack of basic content knowledge/language for their majors
- Failure to see connections between UEEC and future course
- Low motivation
Research Questions

- How can UEEC students make greater connections with their future university disciplines?

- What effects will these connections have on students?
Research Design

Students became researchers of their future disciplines. (ethnographic approach)

Investigated their fields using authentic course information, students and staff

Reflective Learning Journals

Formulate questions → Investigate → Record Discuss Reflect → Synthesise Evaluate
Cycle 1 (5 weeks)

9 x 2-hour slots
Discussion + Presentation class

Students worked in faculty groups.

Figure 1: Student Investigations-Overview- Cycle 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigation 1 (week 1)</th>
<th>‘What is my course? What will I study?’</th>
<th>UNSW Faculty website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigation 2 (week 2)</td>
<td>‘What assessments and tasks will I need to do?’</td>
<td>course outline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigation 3 (week 2-4)</td>
<td>‘Tasks/Assignments/Challenges and Strategies’</td>
<td>Interviews with former UEEC students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigation 4 (week 4)</td>
<td>‘Issues in my field’</td>
<td>media articles + UNSW website/links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation 5 (week 2-4)</td>
<td>‘Student spaces’ photo capture</td>
<td>UNSW campus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion class: Discuss the investigations/lead discussions

Presentation class: Learn/practise presentation skills and present investigations
Cycle 1 Presentations

Group Presentation

Poster Presentation
Cycle 2 (10 weeks)

Focus on field-related presentation and research project
+ two investigations

Cycle 2 Investigation Choice

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>UEEC Graduate Talks</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>UNSW Faculty Orientations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Making Connections videos</td>
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<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Lecture Attendance at UNSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Focus on Career Pathways and Job Qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>Create your own investigation</td>
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Data Collection

- Surveys
- Reflective Learning Journals
- Researcher reflective journals
- Focus groups
- Posters and presentations-analysed for content
Key Findings

- What effects did these connections have on students?

Cycle 1
- Increased knowledge
- Increased motivation and overall confidence
- Peer connections
- Improved skills
Increased knowledge

- future course structure
- required tasks and assignments
- issues and vocabulary
- career pathways
Confidence and Motivation

‘I know how the skills I learn from UEEC will be applied in UNSW courses. This would push me to study harder to prepare well for the UNSW courses.’

‘I think my poster speech is very successful, because I tried my best to explain our major and campus to students and teachers. Many students heard my explanation and got more understanding of the design major, which made me very proud.’
Increased knowledge of future courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Pre-cycle 1 Strongly Agree/Agree</th>
<th>Post cycle 1 Strongly Agree/Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I know the types of courses that I have to study for degree at UNSW.’</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I feel confident using academic language related to my major.’</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘I am familiar with some current issues and topics in my field’</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I am confident giving presentations about my field.’</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I am confident leading discussions about topics and issues from my field.’</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I am confident using English with students I do not know.’</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>86%</td>
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</table>
Connections with Peers

‘I'm very happy to learn my professional courses with other students later. I like my major and I find that my future classmates are very friendly.’
Skills Development

Q13 Which skills did you improve through this project? (Choose all that apply).

- reading
- listening
- discussion
- presentation
- research
- critical thinking
- IT
- Other (please specify)
Skills Development

‘I learned how to cooperate with others and how to organize a presentation in planning and designing the presentation. It helps me improve my speaking skills and makes me more brave than before.’
Cycle 2 Results

Increased knowledge and motivation

Transfer of skills and knowledge from UEEC 15 to UEEC 10

- Confidence to do more in-depth research
- Impact on topic choice for presentations
- Confidence in presentation skills
Cycle 2 Results

‘I appreciate my UEEC 15 presentation, the skills and the ability to find resources which helped me finish my PPT and presentation [in UEEC 10]. As a consequence, the semester presentation has a wonderful ending.’
Conclusion

- Various ways of making connections
- Increased autonomy, motivation, confidence, connections with peers, and skills development
- Awareness of the benefits of reflection
- Importance of relevance for student motivation
Our Reflections

- Valuable experience
- Increased our awareness of students’ needs and goals
- Capabilities of students

Demonstrated benefits have led to implementation of the Cycle 1 activities into the UEEC 15 curriculum.
References

Counsell, J. (2011). How effectively and consistently do international postgraduate students apply the writing strategies they have been taught in a generic skills-based course to their subsequent discipline-based studies? *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 5*(1). A1-A17.

