Corpus tools to support embedding literacy development work

The case for embedding literacy development work within disciplinary curricula has repeatedly been made (Lea & Street, 2006, Jacobs, 2007, and Wingate & Tribble, 2013). This integration of writing development has several implications for EAP teaching staff, requiring them to cross disciplinary barriers to find ways to integrate language and disciplinary content and establishing a shared language with faculty colleagues.

Presenting locally owned corpus data for discussion and analysis can support the use of appreciative enquiry approaches (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001) to create genuinely collaborative, rather than merely cooperative cross dialogue (Spencer, 2016). This presentation presents a case study involving analysis of a small, subject specific corpus constructed from module material from a first-year undergraduate social science course at a post 1992 university. This "quick and dirty" analysis (Tribble 1997) was driven by a desire to clarify the linguistic demands of the course, and to create an evidence base to provoke discussion as to how to best support all students engage. The results of frequency driven analysis (frequency counts, keyword analysis, analysis of discourse and text types) prompted a shared discussion around challenge, difficulty, strategies and approaches. The findings of this were used to better align coursework with teaching objectives.

Corpus construction and analysis here provided a novel lens with which to view the course. It was effective in “creating new discursive spaces that allowed for collaborations that transgress narrow disciplinary boundaries” (Jacobs 2015: 133). The course in question was subsequently nominated for a national Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (HEA 2017).

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