Teaching the concept of 'voice' in writing

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Where I'm coming from

→ Language/EAP teacher since 2002

→ Pre-sessional courses since 2013

→ Foundation Year programmes since 2017

→ Senior Lecturer and Academic Lead for Research since 2021

Beglar and Hunt (2014) found that a group of participants who read easy materials improved their reading speed and comprehension more than a group of participants who read difficult materials, even though the two groups of participants received almost the same amount of English input. This finding indicates that reading extensively—regardless of whether or not the materials are easy—improves learners' reading speed and comprehension, but that exposure to reading materials within their reading capacity tends to be more effective than reading difficult materials in terms of improving reading skills. Nuttall (2005) has also highlighted that readers read faster and develop interest in what they read if the materials are slightly below their proficiency level.

(Aka, 2019, p. 3)

→ 400 students
→ Age 15 and 16
→ Early engineering
→ Japan
→ Grammar, vocab and reading test
→ 1 year

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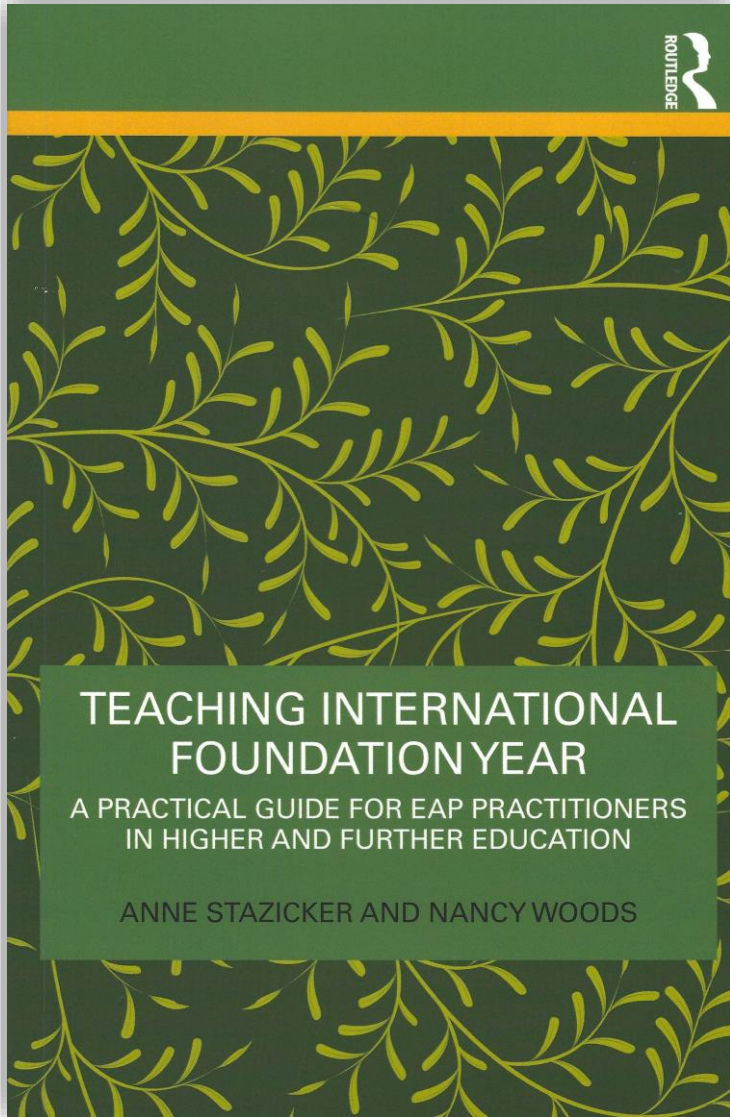Beglar and Hunt (2014) found that a group of participants who read easy materials improved their reading speed and

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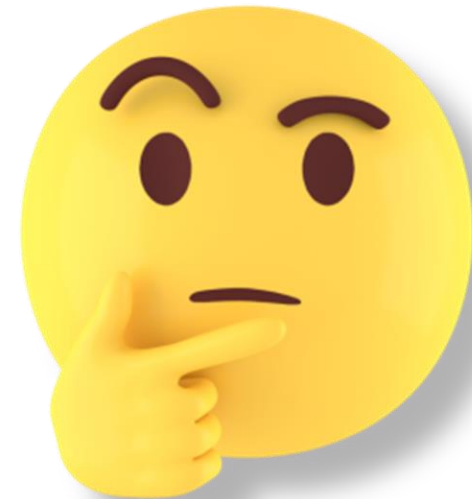
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→ "students looking at academic journal articles and seeing that all academics seem to do is quote each other with very little original input" (Stazicker & Woods, 2022, p. 16)

→ "the concept of 'voice' in writing . . . can be introduced" (Stazicker & Woods, 2022, p. 16)

4 stages of competence (De Phillips et al., 1960, p. 69)

Unconscious incompetence → Conscious incompetence → Conscious competence → Unconscious competence
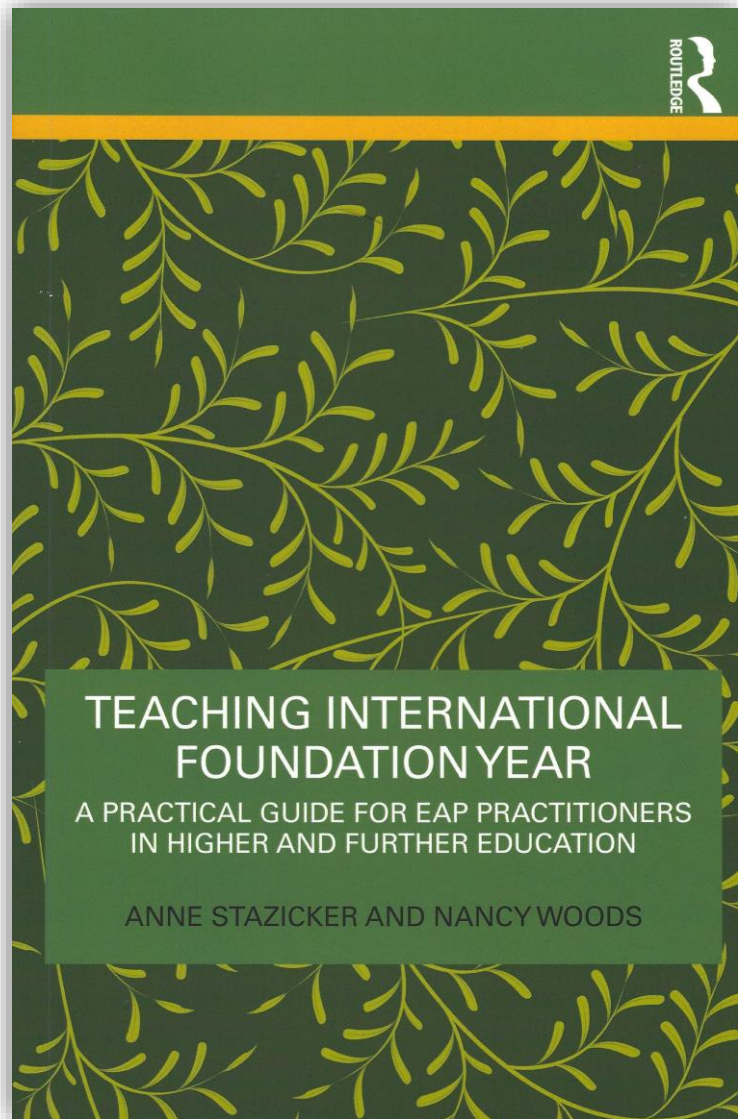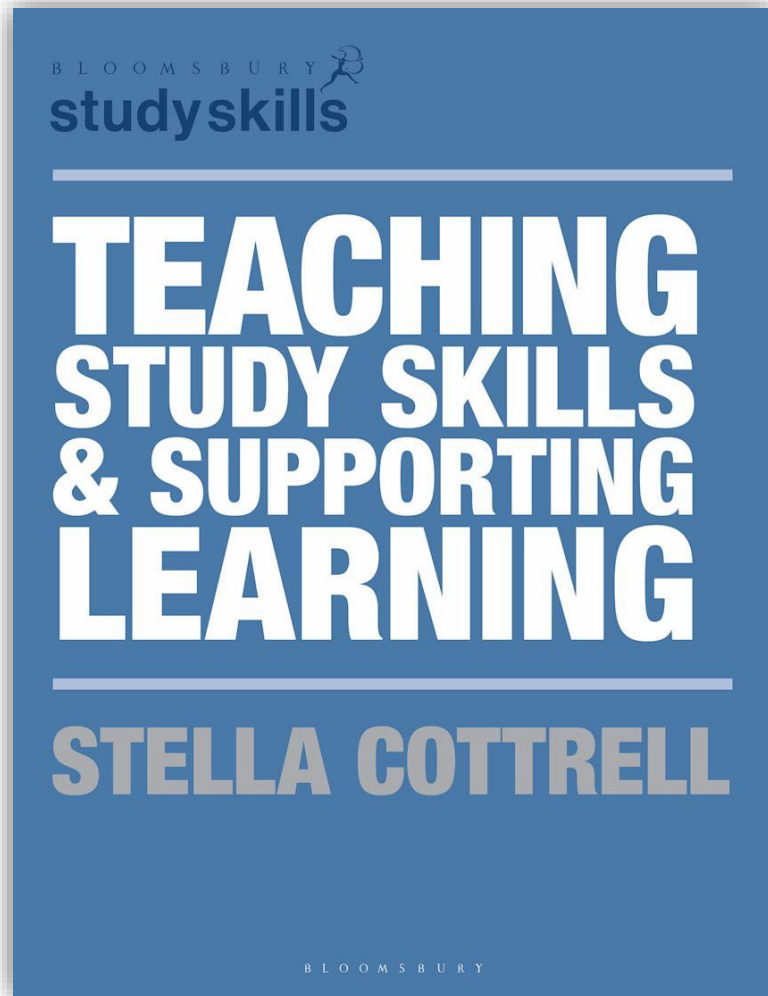
Expert blind spots

Proposed action

→ Notice blind spots

→ "students looking at academic journal articles and seeing that all academics seem to do is quote each other with very little original input" (Stazicker & Woods, 2022, p. 16)

→ "the concept of 'voice' in writing . . . can be introduced" (Stazicker & Woods, 2022, p. 16)

→ "Academic writing can feel like a strait-jacket. Walking the line between writing from opinion and building on previous research in the field is like walking a tightrope: it is easy for students to fall into either pure opinion or mere regurgitation." (Cottrell, 2001, p. 120)

→ "to help graduate students become good thinkers so that they can produce first rate work that is not just a simple recombination of other people's ideas, but that is the kind of combination that actually produces a significant intellectual intervention" (Worsham & Olson, 1999, p. 11)

Bloom's Taxonomy – revised version (Anderson et al., 2001)

1. Remember	2. Understand	3. Apply	4. Analyze	5. Evaluate	6. Create
→ Recognising → Recalling					→draw upon elements from many sources and put them together into a novel structure or pattern, relative to [one's] own prior knowledge (p. 85)

Writer's voice is demonstrated through

→ Reporting verbs, showing writer's attitude, e.g. suggest, point out

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→ Reporting verbs, showing writer's attitude, e.g. suggest, point out

→ Linking words/discourse markers, indicating comparing, contrasting, synthesising

→ Summarising, paraphrasing and skilful use of direct quotes

→ First-person pronouns

In selecting these swear words, I made several considerations, based on the lack of a consensus within the research community about what 'counts' as swearing, the result of which, as Beers Fägersten (2012: 4) points out, is that "the category of swear words remains open ended". Likewise, Drummond (2020: 6) states that, "[g]iven the vagaries surrounding the definitions of swearing […], it is quite difficult to systematically justify including or excluding particular words". Accepting these limitations, in selecting these swear words, I focussed on words derived from sexual taboos, excretory/scatological taboos and profanity (Stapleton 2010). Also, based on my specific interest in conducting a wholesale analysis of forms, I sought to isolate words that were likely to be almost always used to refer to something taboo (regardless of literal or figurative usage) in casual conversation.

(Love, 2021, p. 747)

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→ Summarising, paraphrasing and skilful use of direct quotes

→ First-person pronouns

→ Possible to understand the author's stance

Module assignment

20 questions

Reflect on your experiences of doing this assignment. What did you find easy and difficult about the tasks? What have you learnt from preparing for these tasks?

The written assignment covered many points in Business. Some of them, such as Businesses' structures and the rationale behind business' CSR were studied last year, when we even did presentations as part of last module's assessment. In that way, I was able to better answer question 1 and part of Task 2 using the textbook from 'Introduction to Business'. However, I found the aspects about green business in the UK (question 3) new and relevant. In general, I wrote in a way that, although I would exceed the word count, I would understand better each subject.

To some extent, I found challenging to understand what was being asked by a few questions, especially 1a, 1b, 3c, 4b. Some of them seem to make sense from the point of view of who writes, but not very clear for who will answer them. I counted on my interpretation skill and [my tutor's] explanation to answer them adequately.

On the course of AS1, I aimed to reference the module's textbook or credible websites as much as I found it possible. On the other hand, I felt need to rely on general websites because there were 20 questions to complete, which did not link to each other directly. In other words, the assessment required a lot of research, but I would have extracted more knowledge if it had required deeper research on essential aspects of Business environment.

Engaging in the A1 assignment provided valuable insights into diverse aspects. The quiz offered a dynamic platform to test theoretical knowledge, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the topics. Responding to short answer questions demanded succinct articulation of concepts, reinforcing clarity. Tackling tabled questions, particularly in Section B, involved applying theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, mirroring real-world problem-solving.

Navigating the assignment unveiled challenges in concisely fitting within specified word limits, emphasizing the need for precision. The process highlighted the significance of scholarly sources, ensuring credibility and depth in responses. Balancing theoretical foundations with practical relevance became a crucial skill, demanding a thoughtful blend of academic knowledge and real-world applications.

Overall, this assignment facilitated the development of analytical and communicative skills, emphasizing the practical implications of theoretical concepts. It reinforced the importance of aligning academic understanding with practical scenarios, fostering a holistic approach to problem-solving.

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Proposed action

→ Notice blind spots

→ AI detector

→ AI deterrent

How the concept of writer's voice is taught

→ Explicitly: 2 classes in a 10-week pre-sessional programme

→ Explaining the concept, example sentences and short extracts, drawing attention to phrases signalling voice

→ Identifying claim, interpretation, counter-claim, rebuttal in a paragraph; writing a paragraph from a given opening sentence

→ Implicitly: critical thinking

Proposed action

→ Notice blind spots

→ AI detector

→ AI deterrent

→ Microlearning (Carpenter et al., 2016)

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   → Explaining the concept, example sentences and short extracts, drawing attention to phrases signalling voice

   → Identifying claim, interpretation, counter-claim, rebuttal in a paragraph; writing a paragraph from a given opening sentence

→ Implicitly: critical thinking

→ Support courses vs degree programme

→ Writing a Literature Review, reflect on methods

Proposed action

→ Notice blind spots

→ AI detector

→ AI deterrent

→ Microlearning

→ Research findings + methods used

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