

## Analysing the Communication Hub:

A reflection on the successes and challenges of a project aimed at improving the experience of ANESB students at university.

Valerie Cleary & Michelle Broad



BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE  
[cqu.edu.au](http://cqu.edu.au)

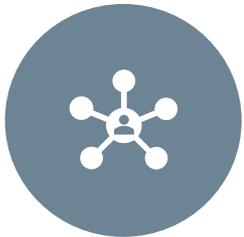
# This presentation will explore



Why many ANESB students need support with academic communication, and the difficulties of defining this group



The initial plan for intervention and subsequent course corrections



Student & staff perceptions of the problem, plan and outcomes of the Communication Hub project



The rationale behind the second, major course correction and the current iteration of the project

# CQUniversity: what we look like



# CQUniversity: what we look like



16 campuses,  
regional and metro



Largest  
geographical  
footprint of any  
university in  
Australia



<13,000 students  
studying via  
distance education



<16,000 students  
on campus

Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds (ANESB) as a broad category is difficult to define:



A permanent citizen who speaks another language at home

or



Those who have 'experiences, characteristics and educational experiences' as part of a continuum flanked by first and second generations of immigrants (generation 1.5) (Roberge 2002, pp. 107)

# Existing literature shows that...

Most research on NESB students has focussed on international cohorts

A limited body of Australian research is available, which focuses on the perceptions of local or domestic students from non-English speaking backgrounds

A targeted approach to academic language is most effective

ANESB students face multiple challenges

Further research is needed



# Student voices

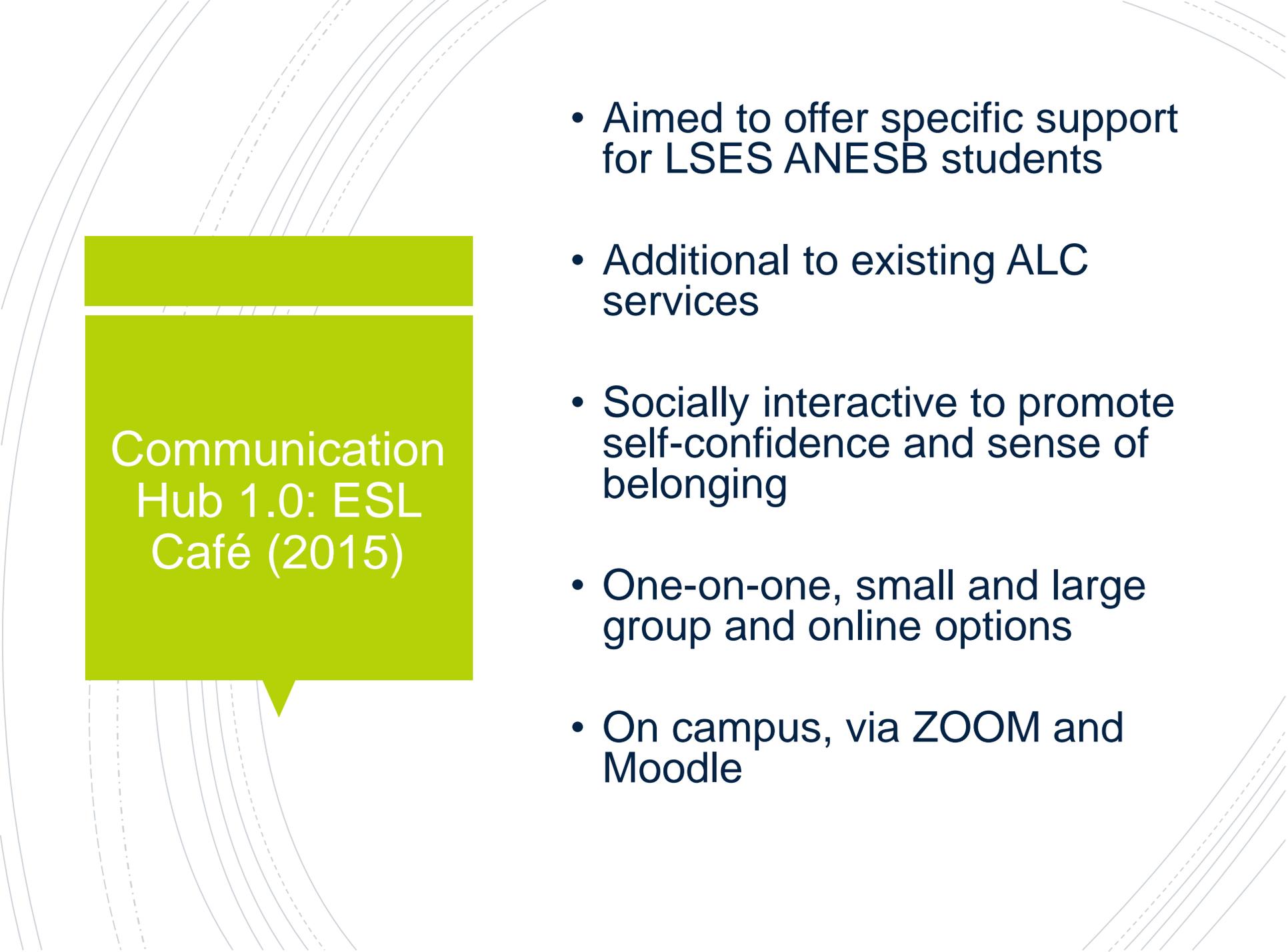
---

*I think that I am not the only one having difficulty with paragraphing, sentences, arrangement with the ideas, because some of my classmates are older students like me ...I don't think I am the only one or [it's just] people from a non-English background country. I think maybe we have more than them but they also having difficulty.*

---

*Yeah sometimes I do feel like I am a step behind the English-speaking students like Australians... I don't feel like I am disadvantaged because of it all the time; sometimes I do better than them so that makes me a bit more confident.*

---



Communication  
Hub 1.0: ESL  
Café (2015)

- Aimed to offer specific support for LSES ANESB students
- Additional to existing ALC services
- Socially interactive to promote self-confidence and sense of belonging
- One-on-one, small and large group and online options
- On campus, via ZOOM and Moodle

# Observations, promotion & course corrections

- Promotional materials for ESL Café were aimed at LSES ANESB students
- 94 ANESB students attended workshops
- 356 views of the ESL Café section of Moodle
- Upon reflection and further research, several issues were identified, including:
  - The labels 'ESL or NESB student represent a deficit model
  - Discourse around the service needed to change to 'normalise' support seeking



Name changed from ESL  
Café and promotional  
materials redeveloped



Communication  
Hub 2.0 (2016)

A phone survey developed  
aiming to:

Identify the  
needs of  
students

Increase  
attendance  
at workshops

Tell students  
about Comm  
Hub services

Open  
communicat-  
ion with  
students

# Communication Hub 2.0: phone survey

A few student  
made  
appointments

Many, including  
those with  
multiple fails said  
they did not need  
support with  
academic  
communication

Others made  
appointments but  
didn't attend

A program of  
workshops was  
developed  
according to the  
identified needs of  
students

# Communication Hub 2.0: Workshops

---



More students  
attended at the  
beginning of  
terms



An average of  
2.5 students  
attended each  
workshop



379 students  
attended 147  
workshops



During the  
same period  
302 ANESB  
students  
attended one-  
on-one  
appointments

# Analysing the Communication Hub



Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from ANESB students, lecturers and other academic staff



Of 1300 identified ANESB students, 200 accessed Communication Hub services



Surveys and focus groups

# ANESB students who responded

63% distance students

19 first languages

57% rarely or never speak English at home

43% learned English in primary school

20% learned English as adults (with no formal classes)

50% agreed that their English skills may affect their ability to succeed

Enrolled in 17 undergraduate courses

4 enrolled in postgraduate courses

2 enrolled in enabling courses



# Student voices

---

*... growing up and not speaking English is very tough for us to understand, for example when you have a question or an assignment to do you have to do and translate that in your head and write it out like that so it's very hard especially at home we don't speak any English....*

---

*...there is always that weakness because we can have perfect grammar in our language but in English we are different...*

---

# Challenges for ANESB students



High failure and attrition rates



Difficulty completing assignments due to grammar, structure and reading ability



Limited peer-to-peer contact



Frustration



Stigmatisation of seeking support



Difficulty understanding lectures



Limited academic support



# Student voices

---

*..I want to you know find people who I can speak with in English like because it's really hard to make a friend in Australian because they fluently can speak English and I'm a bit have a problem so I find when I communicate with them there is an awkward situation because they have to wait while I understand them, but if there's also another non English speaking background student we can speak with each other and if there is a problem... it's the same situation we can understand each other...*



# Student voices

---

*...on one of my recent assignments one of my marker gave me a comment...I think you are thinking in your own language and translating that into the English and writing into the paper, I said what that is really, really difficult comment to come across but you know that, that because of my English as a second language we do come across those kind of things, we think in our own language and then we translate.. but I think markers should understand where we come from but naturally they don't know what our backgrounds are...*

*(Student who has lived in Australia for over 21 years).*

---

# Academic staff perceptions

As with ALC staff, academic based their assumptions on interactions with international students

Staff have no way of identifying ANESB students

Staff are reliant on communication with students to try to understand levels of language skill

Staff supporting on-line students have limited opportunity for communication

Staff surveys and focus group discussions identified frustration and difficulty in meeting the needs of NESB students



# Staff voices

---

*Probably being aware of them at the start I guess, like we do with lots of other groups of people who we have to cater for slightly differently such as some students who are younger you know knowing they're in my program allows me to provide them with additional support.*

---

*Sometimes, I don't know like it depends because sometimes English can be their first language and, you know it doesn't seem like it, and then other people English is their second language and they have got brilliant English so it's sometimes hard to tell.*

---



# Staff voices

---

*[One of the] biggest problems that you have with having Australian non-English speaking backgrounds in your class there are students who come from these backgrounds who will require additional support especially in the larger courses where you can't drill through...it's easier if they are in your classroom I guess...but it's very difficult as distance lecturers.*

# Academic staff identified resources and strategies that are working



Encouraging students to draft assessments and providing feedback



Using face-to-face communication



Using direct contact via phone and video conferencing



Encouraging informal networks with peers



Using diverse teaching methods



Speaking slowly

# Academic staff frustrations



PERCEIVED  
INABILITY TO HELP  
STUDENTS



67% STAFF  
INDICATED THAT  
STAFF NEVER OR  
OCCASIONALLY  
SOUGHT  
ASSISTANCE



STUDENTS DO NOT  
ACCESS SERVICES  
AVAILABLE



# Staff voices

---

*...predominantly urging students to contact you and they don't. I don't know why. They get really angry with me, but they will not contact you even though I'm saying please go and speak to these guys they are trained for this they are going to be better than me, and they just are like why are you accusing me of being bad at this...*

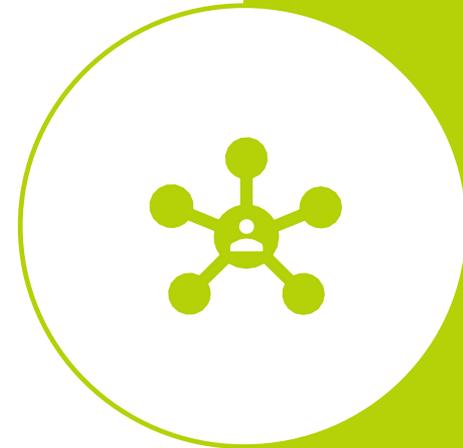
---

*They should be made feel more confident about asking help, as language related problems equally exist in English speaking Australians as well (e.g. poor grammar, a lack of communication and writing skills etc.)*

---

# Moving toward Communication Hub 3.0: The Embedded Project

- It is difficult to determine the needs of such a diverse group
- The results indicate that students did benefit from the Communication Hub
- Students see generic workshops as an add-on to workload
- Students may see workshops as remedial and feel frustrated and embarrassed



# A holistic approach is required

---

In collaboration with Schools, Unit Coordinators and other academic staff

---

Embedding academic literacy in classes allows specific focus on the formal curricula

---

ALC staff develop tutorials and learning modules that increase student engagement by linking them to the unit assessment

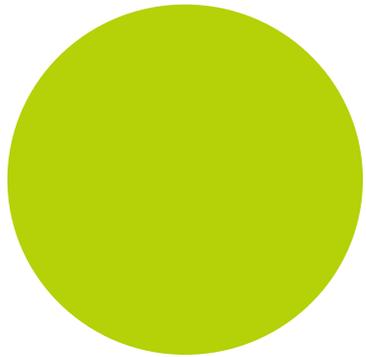
---

ANESB students benefit, as do other diverse groups

---

Students at risk can be identified and offered one-on-one support

---



Thank-you for  
your time | Any  
questions?