

EAP and the skills agenda in a climate of change and innovation

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) departments now exist within contexts of increasing innovation in teaching, learning and assessment; development of identified key skills (Academic Development Centre, Kingston University, no date).

These changes result in ever more diverse teaching and learning strategies and a proliferation in the genres students are expected to produce. This is particularly the case in Art and Design Faculties, since many courses have a vocational or professional focus. While genres within some fields are clearly defined by academics, in others students' creativity is prioritised. Therefore, some discourse communities within this faculty do not require the same degree of conformity to norms as many in academia (Hyland 2004). The divergency of this context may be extreme, but I would argue it is becoming increasingly normal. It is therefore increasingly challenging to design in-session EAP courses.

One solution to this problem is to continue to 'pin down' each genre, delivering ever more focused courses. Another might be to teach English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP). However, each carries its own disadvantages. A more promising option is to develop university valued key skills alongside EAP skills by developing students' ability to unpack texts, recognise differences, identify and articulate preferences; and therefore teaching them our skills along with our knowledge. This would help sensitise them to the creativity of choice in communication. I am therefore proposing that we view students less as apprentice academics and more as researchers in order to develop their literacies (Bhatia, 2002) in the broadest sense.

This move involves shifting more responsibility for learning onto students, but this in mimics the general university environment. Furthermore, including more open-ended tasks in classes may prove more engaging. Though this shift may not necessarily be universally valued, it arguably equips students with the skills to deal with the contemporary shift in higher education.

References

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