Kingston University London

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EAP and skills in a climate of change & innovation:

"Where's the HEness?"

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1. Who should establish the relevance of things learned in an EAP/ support class to students' main courses?

2. How far does providing 'correct' answers, even after discussion, help to prepare students for the (often new) teaching, learning and assessment environment they're now in?

What does EAP teaching aim to do?

- Help students develop from *apprentice academics* to *expert academics* which involves their acquisition of:
  - (subject) and epistemological knowledge
  - the skills to encode and decode the textual conventions which communicate that knowledge (Swales 1990).

Or more pragmatically
- Develop students' ability to produce appropriate, high quality work.

In either case

it involves building language and academic skills; awareness of disciplinary knowledge construction and academic conventions.

Doing this in a student-centred way is
- easiest in contexts where students share the same discipline, and ideally already have experience.
- hardest when they don't.

The ideal context for student centred EAP teaching

- Regular classes which are embedded into courses giving time for students to develop.
- Classes which are composed of subject/ course specific student cohorts to allow focus on the specifics of the genres they engage with/ produce.
- Access to, and time to establish key features of those genres *(i.e. to know most of the answers so we can guide students towards them).*

Limiting factors

1. Difficulty accessing specific cohorts of students

A changing HE context- reduced relevance:

2. Increasing diversity of assessments
3. Increased innovation in teaching, learning and assessment, and focus on development of employability skills
4. Changing student identities

Specific contexts at Kingston

Just a handful:

- Academic English modules for MA ELT, MA Marketing with English
- 'Support' academic writing/ skills classes for BArch, BA Social Work, LLM, Level 4 Art History modules for studio based BA art and design students

More general contexts at Kingston
(all usually accessed by new students)

- EGAP courses
  - Academic English 'for credit' modules open to all non-native speaking undergraduates.
  - 'English Language Development' (ELD) classes open to all Kingston NNS students e.g. How to write a great essay; Using sources; Critical reading (and writing) etc.
- Supposedly ESAP courses
  - Faculty specific ELD classes

Faculties at Kingston in which ESAP sort of works

- Business and Law (KBS/ KLS)
- Computing, Information Systems and Mathematics (CISM)
- Engineering
- Science

Faculties where it doesn't

- Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)
- Art, Design and Architecture (FADA)

Why?

The range of assessment types

28 different summative assessments (11 FASS BAs*)

essays, reports, project proposals, project reports, presentations, unseen and open book exams, dissertations, on-line tests, multiple choice tests, class tests, critical book review, critical bibliography, *literature search, primary source document analysis, exhibitions, portfolios, briefing papers, field journals, crime audit, critiques, learning diaries and logs, library workbook, reflective commentaries, scripts, pitches, workshop exercises and newspaper articles*

*Economics; Applied Economics; Business Economics; History; Criminology ;English Language &Communication; Film Studies; Human Rights; Media & Cultural Studies; Music; Politics

Each of these FASS students must produce 5 -14 forms *(more if they're combining fields)*

- For Economics related degrees (5):
  - essays, reports, dissertations, unseen exams and online tests
- For Criminology (14):
  - essays, reports, presentations, multiple choice tests, unseen exams, open book exams, dissertations, project reports, *critical book reviews, exhibitions, written portfolios, briefing papers, field journals and crime audits*

14+ different summative assessments across 7 FASS MAs*

Each student will encounter 3-8 different forms.

Shared:

essays, reports, presentations and some form of dissertation/ master's project (and proposal)

Unique to specific FASS MAs:

- critiques, case studies, *briefing papers, learning diaries and logs, reflective commentaries, citation/ referencing assessments, scripts, newspaper articles and professional writing of various other kinds*

15 different summative assessments (8 FADA BAs*)

ignoring those purely assessing visual or technical aspects of art/ design skills

- Essays, essay plans, presentations, unseen exams, critical book reviews, case studies, *exhibitions (with documentation), written components of portfolios, learning diaries / logs, reflective commentaries, comparative reviews, visual/ film analyses, practice problems and website creation*

*Photography; Art, Performance and Digital Media; Foundation Art and Design; Art and Design History; Arts Market Appraisal, Residential Property; Architecture; Landscape

20 different summative assessments (15 FADA MAs*)

Each student will encounter 3-9 different forms.

The *only* shared assessments are:

- Dissertations or master's projects and some form of presentation

*Art and Space; European Art Practice; Art and Design History; Curating; Fashion; Design and Teaching and Learning; Design for Development; Digital Set Design; Set Design; European Real Estate; Surveying; Architecture; Landscape and Urbanism; Design for Sustainability; Design for Health and Wellbeing

Other assessments vary according to MA

- essays, reports, case studies, presentations of seminar papers, unseen exams, project/ dissertation proposals, critical book/ lit reviews, *exhibitions (documentation), written aspects of portfolios, briefing papers, critiques, learning diaries/logs, reflective commentaries/ blogs, scenographies, student led projects (i.e. anything), conference papers, practice problems, strategic propositions, primers*

Variety in expectations of FADA schools, disciplines, courses, (& tutors)

- in what is meant by many assessment types.

- in the norms surrounding academic practice e.g. what counts as research, how sources should be used, style etc.

Why so much variety?

- Encouragement of innovative and evidence-based teaching and learning strategies (Academic Development Centre, Kingston University *b*, no date*).*
  - *There are increasing numbers of reflective tasks, student designed (and therefore not very conventionalised) projects, and linkages being made across modules.*

Why so much variety?

- Increased focus on developing students' key skills and employability at Kingston (Academic Development Centre, Kingston University , no date*)*
  - *Assessments are increasingly drawing on professional genres e.g. briefing papers or developing students' awareness of their own skills development e.g. learning logs.*
  - *Degrees are increasingly vocational in focus.*
    - Kingston's ex-Vice Chancellor views vocational courses as an increasing part of HE in all universities, particularly at PG level (Scott, 2008).

Impact on student identities

A general shift from apprentice academic to apprentice professional?

- The emphasis on employability skills may be attracting students for whom professional skills development is more important than academic skills development.
  - students no longer aim to become experts in their fields, but to acquire just enough knowledge to gain the qualifications they need (Graddol, 2004).
  - HE in general is valued for the access it provides to "core employment with prospects of permanency and progression" (Ainley et al. 2002:103).

If this is the case,

- might students' willingness to conform to academic norms diminish?

My previous response

- Get MORE specific- design shorter courses with tighter remits: but
    - this never automatically results in the 'right' students joining the courses.
    - this always makes the courses *less* relevant for some students.
    - needs more time promoting new courses to staff and students (change overload).
    - needs a big 'development' time investment.

Arguments against EAP as the default model of support

1. Aspects of EGAP are becoming less relevant to some of the assignments students produce.
2. Even where focus on one genre is possible (students on different courses share similar assessment types) different timetabling of assessments means EAP classes are not timetabled to be relevant to all.
3. If a student is only producing a single genre once or twice during their degree, an EAP course focused on that genre becomes a relatively poor investment of the student's time.

The danger of prescriptive support

Focusing on the normative aspects of academia may have negative consequences:

- Encouraging passive acceptance, reinforcing learning habits that are not necessarily helpful in academic contexts (McArthur, 2008).
- Discouraging what McArthur (2008: 119) calls authentic learning; students "being true to themselves while taking part".
- Too much focus on compliance is boring, students shouldn't have to "efface" themselves to fit in (Mann 2008, p130).

Observations from my experience

- Across ALL the student writing I have seen, there are common barriers to 'academic success':
  - Misunderstanding the importance of an assignment brief
  - Including content that doesn't help to 'answer the question'- often too much description
  - Unhelpful structure- at whole text or paragraph level
  - Knowledge= truth
    - Difficulties with source use: over or under dependence, misunderstanding of what they are for (and problems with referencing- for many reasons)
  - First draft = final draft/ last minute work- *which subject tutors often interpret as 'English problems'*

Students need to:

- develop an authentic voice (Ryan and Viete 2009, McArthur 2008).
- be 'active agents' rather than 'passive recipients' of education in order to cope with changes (Barnett and Hallam 1999 as cited in Walker 2006).
- be able to participate in dialogic learning (Holmes 2004 as cited in Robson and Turner 2008) *with their peers and tutors* and
- find strategies to uncover implicit norms, expectations etc (Ryan and Viete 2009).

Building more HEness into non-ESAP classes.

- Possibilities:
  - Focusing on core areas of difficulty rather than automatically focusing on genres
  - Teaching students to "look through" EAP at their own disciplines: teaching some of our discourse analysis skills which students can apply to any context to help uncover expectations and norms (including briefs)
  - Teaching 'educational vocabulary'
  - Including many more genuine, open questions in classes
  - Validating confusion (Francis and Hallam 2000) as a normal part of everyone's learning: encouraging students to ask subject tutors

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