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LEARNING TO TEACH ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: SOME CURRENT TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

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English for academic purposes: a growing discipline

In recent years, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has become an expanding discipline within universities and further education institutions, both in Britain and worldwide. This expansion is confirmed by the number of recruitment advertisements to be found in the press at the present time. This availability of jobs in this field seems to contrast directly with shrinkages in more traditional recruitment areas such as modern languages and the Humanities, and is to be welcomed by recently qualified English language tutors seeking employment. However, the growth of EAP raises the accompanying issue of what forms of training are needed to meet the increasing numbers of international students. A reappraisal of the issue of training and development in EAP seems to be crucial since the EAP practitioner's role is a highly complex one, for which no preparation seems to be wholly adequate.

The role of the EAP tutor transcends the limited framework of language teaching, to involve institutional awareness and a detailed knowledge of specialised discourse. An EAP tutor needs to research and assist students in understanding and constructing texts in their disciplines and to actively 'engage with the disciplines' (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998). An understanding of the complex workings of the institution must also be gained, to provide meaningful advice and assistance to students in terms of their applications, conditional offers and test strategies. As I will argue in this paper, 'training' EAP tutors to operate effectively, or assisting them to develop within an EAP teaching context, is far from being a straightforward process, and indeed, it raises many challenges that need to be considered both at a departmental and institutional level.

The primary focus of this paper is on British Higher Education institutions, many of the training needs I outline will be recognisable in other EAP (and indeed, ELT) contexts. They may be more acutely felt still in countries such as the Republic of China and Taiwan, where teacher training struggles to keep pace with the unprecedented expansion in English language teaching.

Some recent models of language teacher development

Prior to investigating the EAP teaching and training context in Britain more specifically, it is useful to consider briefly some current perspectives within language teacher training in general. One of the most effective current approaches to training is to encourage self-assessment and self-evaluation among new and more experienced teachers (Bowen and Marks 1994: 40-41). This seems eminently suited to the EAP context, given the complexity and specialisation of the EAP tutor's role. It is recognised that many issues in EAP lie beyond the remit of pre-service training courses. Thus, a crucial aspect of ELT training might be to develop an appropriate professional disposition, rather than to concentrate specifically on levels of knowledge within the teacher. This might allow relatively inexperienced teachers to adapt as necessary to their new working environment.

Recent literature regarding teacher development makes pertinent comments regarding self-assessment and self-evaluation. Richards (1998: xiv), for instance, notes the distinction between teacher training and teacher development. He emphasises the need to reorient training away from the mere imparting of skills towards the notion of the teacher as a 'critical and reflective thinker'. Richards advocates an investigation of the beliefs that underlie successful classroom practice, a lengthy process to which training programs can only establish a starting point. Richards's view may be extended to the EAP tutor, for whom there is a persistent sense of discovery and challenge. Roberts (1998) confirms the view outlined by Richards. Rather than seeing the preparation of teachers for professional life as a straightforward process of imparting basic teaching skills, teacher development is seen as tantamount to personal development.

In adopting a social constructionist viewpoint, Roberts argues that teaching is closely entwined with the personal and social circumstances in which one finds oneself, a realisation that is of importance within universities, which have a specific ethos and culture. As has already been mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the EAP tutor's work cannot be neatly divorced from the academic and political context in which he or she is operating. Thus, in order to assist in dealing with specific social circumstances, one might adopt Roberts's priority given to training as an 'inclusive process' in terms of time and coverage. There is a need, Roberts argues, to consider the whole lifespan and learning of teachers, not simply whether they can be

effectively deployed at the outset of their careers. There is a hint here at the notion of lifelong education, where individuals become permanently learning subjects throughout their lives (Field 2000: 35). Richards and Nunan (1994) offer further reflections on the need for self-evaluation and self-assessment within a teaching setting, and contextualise this need within practical tasks and activities such as classroom observation.

The importance of lifelong learning

The disadvantage of the research on second language teacher education detailed above, however, may be its reliance on how the training course is constructed in terms of its 'product' (the syllabus) rather than on the skills that are needed in a varying, unstable context such as higher education. Priority is given in such investigations to classroom practice, but development outside of the classroom leading to the development of transferable skills seems to require equal development. Here, the issue of lifelong education and its implications for teachers of EAP becomes pertinent. As Edwards (1997: 149) notes, one desired outcome of lifelong learning is the development of the notion of a 'reflective practitioner'. Based on the ideas of Schön (1983), this concept has become commonplace in the area of professional development. Its background lies in Schön's contention that the workplace is inherently unstable and unpredictable. A reflective practitioner, Edwards observes, may respond to such unpredictability as someone who is 'able to cope with and shape change and uncertainty by interpreting and responding to the particularities and circumstances they find.' The less predictable these circumstances are, the less useful rule-bound behaviour and rational approaches will be in addressing them. In a teacher training context, this means that it might be more useful for teachers to reflect on the transferable skill of problem solving techniques strategies rather than on pre-ordained aspects of classroom management such as pacing, timing and the varying of patterns of interaction. In short, there is a need to move away from activity-based teaching.

This kind of approach is supported by the Vygotskyan, social constructionist view that that education requires an exploratory approach, in which negotiation and collaboration are required in order to allow for the co-existence of both 'aimed for' and 'emergent' outcomes (Wells n.d.). As Wells contends, the exploratory dimension of the Vygotskyan approach challenges the meaning of knowledge itself. Knowledge

is, he argues, neither self-evident nor natural, but is established by the collaborative interaction between knowing and acting. 'Knowledge is created and recreated between people, as they bring their personal experience and information derived from other sources to bear on solving some particular problem.'

The recognised EAP qualifications

To turn now to the EAP teaching context itself, the career structure of ELT as a whole may be described as qualifications driven. Little mention is made in accreditation documentation, for example, of notions such as Schön's idea of 'reflective practitioner' or, indeed, of important aspects of equal opportunities such as the accreditation of prior work experience and the valuing of life experience. In most English language teaching contexts, a recognised English language teaching qualification is seen as a sufficient, administrative prerequisite, as well as a gate-keeping device for keeping out unqualified (and therefore unwanted) 'infiltrators'. For instance, in the BALEAP (British Association for Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes) accreditation scheme handbook for English Language and Study Skills Courses in Universities (1998, 5.2.1), which governs the assessment of pre-sessional and other EAP courses, a list is provided of a range of approved qualifications. Those who are teaching English for Academic Purposes are expected to possess at least one of these. These qualifications are the MA in Applied Linguistics or ELT, a PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) with TEFL/TEFL specialisation; a Postgraduate Diploma in TEFL or a 4 year B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) with QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) in language teaching. Conversely, other useful qualifications which might be possessed by potential EAP tutors (for instance, Ph.Ds in subject areas other than ELT, giving tutors direct access to specialised discourse) are marginalised and go unrecognised by accreditation bodies.

This list of qualifications is sympathetically broad and wide-ranging, but parity between cannot always be established. One problem is that some courses involve more practical teaching and classroom observation than others, and some may include no practical component at all. The MA in Applied Linguistics or ELT may include an element of professional practice, but there is generally little substantial classroom experience or observation. This is not, of course, to deny the value of the MA qualification. MA students will usually already have significant classroom expertise,

and it is not the brief of an MA course to teach basic classroom management skills. At Oxford Brookes University, an MA in TEAP/TESP is offered which seems more genuinely designed to enhance career prospects for EAP teachers. In this course, two crucial issues are tackled, amongst others intercultural issues in EAP and the textual and rhetorical features common to a range of academic genres. Pre-service courses diplomas such as the Trinity Diploma and the UCLES DELTA (Cambridge Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults) involve the greatest practical element, and also scope for self-reflexivity. In section 6.3 of the current DELTA syllabus, for instance, teachers are expected to demonstrate an ability to 'undertake a conscious analysis of their own strengths and weaknesses and to plan for their further professional development in the light of this' (UCLES 2001). Meanwhile, the DELTA familiarises teachers with the nature and aims of support systems such as publications, groups and associations.

Institutional knowledge and its importance

The problem with the above courses when seen in the light of EAP teaching is that EAP teachers are required to gain a large amount of knowledge which is not immediately available from training courses. This knowledge takes a considerable time to acquire, often through a series of steep learning curves. The EAP workplace, as others (cf. Schön 1983), is unpredictable and unstable. Environmental knowledge may thus not be 'teachable', but is more liable to be gained through hard experience and a process of continuous reflection. This is because EAP teaching is geared specifically to the learning needs of particular students within an institution, following courses that require a specialised mode of discourse. The requirements of departments and their assessment procedures are highly sedimented, so that tutors may remain bewildered by anomalies between different departments and the best way of preparing their students for the challenges they will face there. As Brookes and Grundy (1991: 36) remark, departmental culture within universities constitutes a game of 'insiders, outsiders and power relations', in which a cultural mismatch can frequently occur, sometimes with severe consequences.

The anomalies between departments in terms of language support practice are all too obvious. Some departments, for instance, encourage students to have their essays proofread prior to submission, creating a certain dependency culture whereby

students adopt the right to expect full proof-reading of their work each time from hard-pressed EAP tutors. Other departments, sensibly perhaps, proscribe this strategy. Some departments may elect to employ their own language support staff for international students rather than avail themselves of existing EAP provision. Others may prefer to organise specialist English classes organised by ELT unit itself. In short, departments within universities have a free hand to approach the language support issue in any way they wish. As a result of this, inexperienced EAP tutors may simply flounder, becoming well-intentioned pawns in a wider game of 'language support politics' played out between power groups within institutions.

Understanding academic genre

A knowledge of specialist academic discourses within universities is a crucial tool in the EAP tutor's armoury. Here, it is essential that tutors are able to take time to research the discursive features of specific academic literacies. This connects with three necessary skills for EAP outlined by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 42-46): co-operation, collaboration and team teaching. Collaborative and co-operative knowledge cannot in itself be gained from a fixed-term training course alone. Rather, it is dispositional, involving a genuine desire to investigate the conceptual and discoursal framework of the subject students are studying, leading to 'a more systematic attempt to find out how a discipline works.'

In philosophical terms, EAP teaching necessitates the adoption of a Socratic rather than Cartesian form of truth: that is, the recognition that truth is attained through intellectual enquiry, rather than through conclusive proofs and demonstrations. Understanding disciplines is an integral component, for example, of the Oxford Brookes MA, already outlined. The challenge recognised by this kind of programme is that academic genres within postgraduate courses are diverse, and may extend beyond the immediate experiences of inexperienced tutors. For example, case studies and reports are frequently written in business schools, while law departments require presentation of work in a variety of non-essay formats and applied engineering students present their answers in more economical style. As Lea and Stierer (2000: 6) note, 'there is now an increasing recognition of fundamental differences between academic disciplines in terms of the written genres students are expected to master at university.' The development of academic literacies has brought

with it a corresponding demise in essay-based discourse. Faced with a plethora of academic literacies, an inexperienced tutor may adopt the approach of retreating behind a more general, all-encompassing approach which tends to reduce academic discourse to banalities such as avoidance of the first person and recommending using the passive voice at all times.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: a missing piece in the EAP training jigsaw?

While there is much that the EAP tutor needs to learn, most would agree that there is a 'training gap' between the need for development and the willingness of institutions to recognise their responsibilities in this regard, or the abilities of small departments with limited resources to invest in such developments. Could the complex needs of EAP tutors, for example, be addressed through the new postgraduate certificate in Higher Education, which is available throughout Higher Education institutions in Britain? This course was set in motion by the Dearing report of 1997 and the subsequent Booth report of 1998, both of which endorsed the development of a national system of accreditation of HE teachers (Staff Development Unit, University of Birmingham n.d.), of which EAP tutors clearly form part. The purpose of this scheme is to raise the quality and profile of teaching in Higher Education. New probationary lecturers are nearly always included in such courses, as well as existing ones, and there is generally a means of claiming course fees through the Local Education Authority. The course is of considerable political importance since it represents a first serious attempt at widespread teacher preparation for university staff. Its availability indicates that the skill of teaching within academic institutions is not 'given' or 'self-evident', and that such teaching skills can be enhanced through training and development. It also designates the skills required to teach in Higher Education as important and valuable in themselves.

In looking briefly at course outlines, the course would appear to address many of the requirements for developing autonomy and self-reflexion outlined above. At the University of Warwick, for example, one of the aims of the course is 'to develop skills in professional reflection and to evaluate practice'. For instance, reflective writing takes place in the form of journals, in a manner reminiscent of the reflective practitioner model. This practice 'encourages the writer to relate their practice to their

understanding of the teaching and learning process and the educational context in which it takes place'. The emphasis on local knowledge and institutional awareness would enhance the expertise of the EAP tutor. As the course information indicates, the lecturer's task transcends the use of competencies, and involves deeper reflection on intentions and actions. Equally, it is seen as crucial that those involved in lecturing practice take responsibility for their own learning. Despite the value of these intentions, however, the course remains little publicised, if at all, among EAP staff within institutions, and in any event, those who are part-time or hourly paid visiting lecturers would be unlikely to gain funding or support to participate in such a long-term and expensive venture. Thus, if EAP tutors are not directly excluded from courses such as this, they are, at least, not actively encouraged to follow them.

<u>Other modes of EAP training: discussions in progress</u>

Assuming for the sake of argument that there is a genuine desire on the part of institutions to take the EAP training issue seriously, questions still remain as to what form that training should take. Some aspects of EAP teaching would seem to be 'unteachable' to trainees, and there is a need to encourage a 'reflective practitioner' attitude with teachers acquiring skills through experience and evaluation. However, it seems necessary to reflect on the benefits that might be brought to the profession by a recognised entry qualification in EAP or a more developed in-service training component. The recognition of the need to devise some form of suitable training programme is by no means new, and has been widely debated in EAP circles. The most urgent questions, however, are who such a training course should be aimed at (pre-service or in-service) as well as what the duration and components of such a course should be. A questionnaire sent in 1997 to all BALEAP members, for instance, indicated that 85% of respondents were in favour of including EAP in TEFL training programmes at Diploma or MA level. The most frequently selected topics which required treating were teaching methods for academic reading, writing and study skills, a survey of EAP materials and an initiation into academic conventions and expectations in UK universities (Khidayir and du Boulay 1997).

Allwright (1997) has also drawn attention to the importance of initiation and training in EAP in the form of induction courses for newly recruited EAP tutors on pre-sessional courses (BALEAP 1998, 5.1.13). Such tutors may, typically, have little

or no EAP experience, and might be unaware of the institutional and political factors governing the department's approach to EAP provision, or the university's perspective on international students. They might also be newly qualified, or at a transition point in their careers and planning for their future professional lives. Allwright also emphasises the importance of in-course support for tutors, involving staff meetings, regular formal and informal opportunities for information flow and liaison with academic departments.

Towards a formalised in-service EAP teaching qualification

However, the existence of induction processes alone is unlikely, in itself, to lead to a re-assessment of training needs at the roots of EAP provision within universities, since pre-sessional courses are too short to have any significant bearing upon an institution's awareness of EAP and its plight. Most academic subject lecturers are on holiday when pre-sessionals take place and seem to have depressingly little interest in what happens on this type of course. The debate concerning the introduction of an EAP training course was renewed in June 2001 during a one-day Professional Issues Meeting at the University of Bath, at which a putative syllabus for a new EAP qualification was discussed. During this debate, a range of options was discussed for implementing a more formalised programme of development. It was noted, for example, that newly qualified EAP tutors holding the Trinity of UCLES DELTA qualification were fully aware of the discrepancies between their more general training and the specifics of EAP work.

Krzanowski (2001) found that tutors experience a 'shock factor' when moving from EFL to EAP teaching. He recounted tutors remarks about the fact that the level of the students was lower than expected, that materials were often boring or unsuitable, and that much time could be spent fruitlessly in attempts to prepare good lessons. There was a lack of direction in their teaching and a need for greater awareness of what was required in EAP provision. Most significantly, it was noted that in higher education institutions, there was often insufficient in-house development in EAP, compared to EFL, with few formal or informal meetings and little opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with others. A lengthy list of recommendations was produced by the respondents in terms of training requirements, including aspects as diverse as the need to teach EAP to home students, as well as

international students; the need for greater ability to motivate students and the need for an opportunity to analyse videoed or live EAP classes.

The findings in Krzanowski's paper confirm the general feeling within the EAP teaching community that more training is required at a pre-service, as well as an in-service stage. However, it is not clear whether adopting a pre-service training course would in itself help to improve the EAP teaching situation within universities. The reason for this may be, as has been mentioned before, that a large amount of local and specialised knowledge is required before a tutor can operate effectively. This difficulty may be lessened through formal and informal exchanges between experienced and less-experienced staff. (Allwright 1997). However, I want to argue that the limitations of training might arise more profoundly because of institutional aspects, such as employment conditions, over which individual departments have little control. The majority of EAP tutors in universities in Britain are employed by departments on part-time or temporary contracts. This allows them little access to training funds and provides little motivation for development. Whilst some universities now apply fractional contracts, which include an inbuilt element of sick pay and holiday pay, most EAP tutors remain hourly paid, and are referred to as 'casual', regardless of European directives to the contrary. Such a situation allows institutions to respond pragmatically and expediently by allowing a greater number of tutors to be recruited when demand is high and to operate on a reduced timetable when demand falls during the academic year. However, the practicalities of such a system are pernicious for effective development of EAP teaching profiles within universities. For one thing, visiting lecturers cannot be expected to have the level of commitment to their work that full time tutors possess. Moreover, the logistics of their timetables (often involving two or three different institutions) are such that it is virtually impossible to organise any staff development sessions to which all tutors can attend.

A further argument against devising and implementing a more formalised pre-service or in-service EAP course is the more practical dimension of whether the ends of such a course truly justify the means. An EAP training course may be worthwhile in so far as it can provide basic information (though not, of course of a very localised or very specific nature), and such a course would undoubtedly raise the status of EAP as a discipline in itself, regenerating it from a 'Cinderella' subject to one which is

fully worthy of consideration as an academic discipline. However, candidates may justifiably be reluctant to pay for a training course which is unlikely to lead directly to full-time employment, and which merely constitutes another expensive hurdle in an already qualifications-driven profession leading from Certificate to Diploma to MA. Here again, it can be seen that the possibility of providing suitable training to EAP tutors is closely connected to institutional factors such as conditions of work and employment and the likelihood that a living can be made from the profession the candidate has selected. As part of a more wide-ranging MA programme such as that offered at Oxford Brookes, an EAP training element may seem to be much more justifiable and palatable to students, since the overall qualification carries with it a certain prestige in itself and a notion of 'employability'. However, a self-contained programme a lower level which carries less prestige and brings with it fewer professional openings may be less appealing to financially hard-pressed students.

Formalised EAP training: a path for the future?

The above discussion must be seen as a starting point in considering training and development needs within EAP. However, from this debate, it may be concluded that there are both advantages and disadvantages in placing greater emphasis on training within an EAP context. Considerably more research needs to be done across a range of universities to ascertain the exact training provision at each institution, and to discern a general picture of where and how training needs to be implemented. However, given the evident complexity of the EAP tutor's role within the university, specific guidance would seem to be crucial, so as to facilitate this daunting role and make it more manageable. In order for such a procedure to be taken seriously by Universities, and to work to best advantage, it must be accompanied by a reappraisal of the EAP tutor's role within the university framework itself.

Staff development is as important to EAP practitioners as it is to any employee at any grade. At present, though, EAP provision is often piecemeal, because tutors are very often employed on a part-time basis, and have little time themselves for staff development activities. This situation is closely linked with an increased casualisation of academia. At the same time, a more formalised training initiative in EAP teaching would need to be conceived in a sensitive and caring manner. In a qualifications-driven profession, a dedicated EAP training course might appear to teachers to be

little more than another expensive and time-consuming hurdle designed to eliminate runners in the field, and which could not in itself be guaranteed to lead to full time employment. This perhaps explains why this paper argues broadly in favour of making EAP into an option within existing MA courses, rather than developing a completely new course infrastructure where the end may not justify the means.

I would like to end with a note of caution. There are still 'haves' and 'have nots' in the area of in-service training, just as there are those who have access to the knowledge and those who do not. Field (2000) has recently observed a change in the learning economy whereby a shift is occurring from fixed didactic structures and curricula to a concentration on the learning environment. In short, training is now less supply-driven, and is focussed more on the learner-centred fabric of institutions. Yet, as Field contends, this emergent learning society can create complex systems of exclusion and inequality which are fluid, and lack transparency or predictability (p. 131). Common patterns of exclusion are based on ethnicity, gender and perhaps most significantly, social background. Within an EAP setting, there is a very real urgency to instigate a structured and planned response to training needs if EAP tutors are not to become another excluded body in the drive towards the power of knowledge.

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