

Teachers in Transition: The Road to EAP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter explores the development of the identity of English teachers who have moved from General English teaching into the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Many general TEFL teachers move into EAP as their teaching careers develop; however, contemporary TEFL initiation training courses, such as the CELTA, do not as a matter of course provide any sort of grounding for the shift in linguistic knowledge and classroom management skills required to successfully adapt to the requirements of the EAP classroom and its students. Since such initiation training courses often leave an indelible mark on the teaching styles of most practitioners (Alwright & Hanks, 2009), even teachers who go on to become fully TEFL qualified via a DELTA or Master's route may find the new demands of the EAP environment sometimes leave them reliant upon TEFL-orientated classroom protocols, only to find such approaches wholly inappropriate or ineffective on a skills-based syllabus.

INTRODUCTION

Although there has been a great deal of research into the nature of EAP, including the needs of students and course and materials design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001), there is clearly a transitional process which needs to be undertaken by the teacher in terms of how he or she adapts their role in the classroom and their teaching methods, and takes account of highly specific student needs and expectations. This chapter, therefore, will look at

individual cases of teachers who have made the transition, and the challenges that were faced and overcome, and how their own perception of themselves as teachers has changed in the process.

The study is a narrative research project, which gathers qualitative data on the questions above from EAP practitioners who trained as general TEFL teachers. Data come via semi-structured interviews of participants from a pool of candidates currently working at the University of East Anglia's INTO London campus. Participants inform on topics of professional identity, how they perceive their role in an EAP environment, how that role has changed, if at all, since their time teaching general English, and to what extent they see the development of their new identity as being complete. From the discussion of these topics, we can draw out emotions, aspirations and evaluations which can shed light on the process of transition to EAP instruction. The data gleaned provides a foundation for further discussions on teacher development, with potential implications for higher education institutions running EAP courses.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide insights from EAP practitioners on challenges and transitions that they faced when moving from a pedagogical environment of general English into the complex world of teaching in higher education. I will first present an exploration the background of EAP in the United Kingdom, and offer some definitions of and distinctions between the fields of general English teaching and English for academic purposes. I will then move on to look at narratives from EAP professionals currently working in the field.

Hopefully, the insights provided by the narratives of the informants will be at the very least thought provoking for stakeholders both current and future in the EAP industry, and most relevant for other teachers in transition. Those who are facing transition may find narratives from peers useful when managing similar shifts in role and identity. For those who are already experienced EAP practitioners, the texts will provide a chance to reflect on how their own role has developed.

BACKGROUND: DEFINING EAP

EAP has traditionally been seen as a division within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which is in itself a branch within English Language Teaching (ELT). Dudley-Evans and St John (2009, p. 6) provide some useful definitions and distinctions in this somewhat acronym rich field. ESP, they point out, is ELT with a clearer focus on the specific needs of the learners. ESP is further broken down into two main categories: English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes. EAP itself is further subdivided into English for General

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