

BOOK REVIEWS

English for Academic Study: Extended Writing and Research Skills

Joan McCormack and John Slaght, 2005

Garnet, Reading

ISBN 978-1-85964-980-0

137 pp.

EAP Essentials: A teacher's guide to principles and practice

Olwyn Alexander, Sue Argent and Jenifer Spencer, 2008

Garnet, Reading

ISBN 978-1-85964-419-5

379 pp. + compact disc

Current Developments in English for Academic, Specific and Occupational Purposes

Mark Krzanowski, editor, 2008

Garnet, Reading

ISBN 978-1-95964-439-3

353 pp.

These three Garnet publications are each focussed on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), each for a slightly different audience: the first is a reprint of a popular course book for students; the second is aimed at instructors wishing to develop proficiency in EAP; and the third is a series of essays for the qualified and experienced EAP practitioner.

Published in conjunction with the University of Reading, *Extended Writing and Research Skills* has been a popular generalist course book for proficient NESB students about to embark on tertiary studies. While many British course materials suffer from assuming that English is only spoken north of Land's End, *Extended Writing and Research Skills* employs international contexts to develop universal themes. Its focus enables it to unpack several important writing skills: developing ideas, structuring an argument, what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. There are also some useful exercises aimed at developing oral skills presentations; anyone who has sat through what passes for oral presentations will understand that most students need to develop their competencies in this area.

As a course book, however, *Extended Writing and Research Skills* is limited and old-fashioned. Its limitations are clear and well understood: the authors have focussed on the skill of writing, and to that end it is a good book. Unfortunately, this focus falsely separates writing and reading to the detriment of both. Good writing and good reading go together because the synthesis required in critical reading – the close analysis of textual material – is precisely the same process which is key to the development of an argument. It is by deciphering the point of view of the written, spoken, televisual material under scrutiny, and appreciating the devices used in the construction of that point of view, that successful students bring to their writing. By moving away from the assumptions inherent in language learning, EAP practitioners could focus more on the “hidden curriculum” of tertiary studies: absorbing information; developing and testing ideas; focussing deeply on the responses of others and seeking to understand the assumptions behind them; articulating one's own response in the light of newly developed knowledge; acknowledging the ideas of others; developing objectivity and theoretical sophistication.

My other concern is the apparent (and rather quaint) assumption that students do most of their assignment research via books. Search engines, databases, e-journals, podcasts and blogs have proliferated in the last decade. One of the requirements of a course book is to familiarise students with research techniques and platforms. In my experience, the skills for deciphering on-line material are much the same as for older media – notwithstanding a lot more chaff for the same amount of wheat – but it is essential that students gain familiarity with on-line materials beyond computer games and Facebook. Nowadays course books should consider an on-line element as an indispensable part of the format, while remaining practical, grounded, realistic and skills-based.

Those laudable aims – that resources be practical, grounded, realistic and skills-based – are achieved handsomely in *EAP Essentials: A teacher's guide to principles and practice*. As a 'how to' manual, *EAP Essentials* identifies some key concepts: course design, building specific skills for an academic context, and pathways toward student autonomy. What is especially encouraging in this book is its clear, focussed and thorough explication of the many skills required for the successful student at a tertiary level; even practitioners of study skills for native English speakers would find much of this material useful. Each chapter includes reflexive questions on relevant topics which require the reader to engage fully in the learning process and to develop his or her own skills base. The book includes a CD of classroom materials which are suitable for adaptation to a range of contexts. As a grounding in the skills needed to teach EAP, this book indeed covers the *EAP Essentials*.

Current Developments in English for Academic, Specific and Occupational Purposes is a collection of essays is for those who are already experienced in the field. Academic in focus and method, these essays will interest professionals seeking to keep abreast of the study and pedagogies in their area. Most of the essays include a practical consideration of, and strategies for, the EAP context. The broad range of subject material – from the results of studies into assignment assessment to the cultural howlers in language teaching videos – means that no one will find all these essays relevant to them; on the other hand, there is something here for almost everyone. A great test for a piece of writing is to ask the "so what?" question at the end, and some of the more arcane essays are found wanting. However, as a text for a learning centre, where teachers can select one or two essays of interest, this is an up-to-date and well-edited contribution to professional development.

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