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## **ENGLISH ACROSS ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES**

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There is no denying that the use of English over the past twenty-five years has expanded all around the world as an international language, the language of higher education and of business, and with this the expansion of the teaching/learning profession in both pre-university and university settings. Both native and non-native speakers of English sit in classrooms, whether it be in England, the USA, Canada, Australia or any other place in the world and through various methods attempt to acquire the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing at different proficiency levels and often for different purposes.

Although not entirely a new field, but new in the sense that it is gaining in importance, is the teaching/learning of English in pre-university and university settings for Academic and Professional (EAP and EPP). Special

English programs have been set up in Australia, the UK and the US with other countries following suite to cater to the students' needs to cope with their academic course work and their professional work in the job market once they complete their education. In Britain, the first meeting of EAP teachers took place at Birmingham University in 1972 and since then more than 200 universities are developing such programs. Australia, Canada, the US have comparable numbers and more in the latter. This has led to national and international organizations and associations that hold regular meetings and annual or biannual conferences in the exchange of research and practice.

What is EAP and EPP ? English for Academic Purposes (or EAP) has grown out a broader field of English instruction called English for Specific Purposes (ESP), one that tailors its instruction to fields like engineering, medicine, business and so forth and focuses on the learner acquiring the skills and tasks necessary to cope with their course work either at school or at the university. Although students learn the language skills, there is more attention to those tasks needed for other subjects. For example, in a typical EAP classroom, a learner would be taught the specific genres needed in the different disciplines in the school or university context; for example, reports, oral presentations, research papers, lectures, textbook and internet. At the same time, learners would also be guided in acquiring the skills of oral presentations, research and reports, use of the relevant technology in the community in preparation for their future jobs. Thus, these approaches focus on the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups and also help the learner develop the cognitive, social and linguistic demands of these contexts. In other words, more and more the English classroom is including, in addition to general English, specific English that empowers students to cope to be more successful in both their studies and future jobs. Of course, this approach has its controversy. Some researchers and practitioners believe that the English classroom should be a place where only general English is taught and that the content and tasks of the university and professional communities left to those who have the expertise. However, the counter-argument is that motivation levels have been found to be higher when English instruction is learned with an academic and/or professional purpose and results have indicated significant differences when compared to those situations in which a more general English approach has been adopted. Consider our classrooms. Although students see the importance of learning English, it is often their major course of study which is of priority, and perhaps quite rightly so as English, or any language for that fact, is a means

or tool towards an end. It is left up to us practitioners to sharpen that tool according to the needs of the learner and their need these days is not as much to use English for the sake of English, as it is for academic and professional settings.

Thus, EAP and EPP Programs have a responsibility of initiating students into the academic and professional community. English programs and their curricular can no longer remain as « ivory towers » divorced from the academic milieu or professional world in a global society.

How do these programs find out what the specific needs of their students are. In Britain, the US, Canada and Australia, one way is to carry out a needs analysis through surveys, interviews and observation in obtaining data on what students, faculty and personnel in the workplace consider important skills and tasks in order for students to perform successfully in English in the relevant context. Often as a consequence to these needs analysis, in Australia, and the same goes for other English speaking countries, specific programs are set up in the schools and the university, more so in the latter, in which often team teaching is carried out between the English program and the subject courses. More recently writing across the Curriculum (WAC) programs have been set up as part of the EAP approach. Teachers thus collaborate in teaching courses, the discipline teacher the content and the English teacher, the needed language skills and tasks.

I will discuss a few needs analysis projects carried out in England and Australia at the university level (which could also apply to pre-university levels) and then illustrate a few that were done at the Lebanese American University.

At Cambridge University, England, a survey carried out on 555 students and 65 interviews indicated that participating in seminars and academic writing posed the most difficulty for the students and thus the need to concentrate on these areas.

Another survey carried out at Manchester University, England indicated that foreign students had problems in knowing what to read and how to read for the subject courses and also expected more help especially in the correction of their writing. This emphasized the difference in academic cultures stressing the need that students need to be initiated into the system of learning in a country not their own.

In Australia, at the University of Canberra in 1992, a survey given to 500 faculty in the various disciplines indicated that of nine writing features, the ability to argue on an issue, to organize and coherently communicate these ideas were of a significant higher priority than the mechanical skills of spelling and grammar. A similar study carried out in Australia at Mcquarie University, Sydney in 1996 on faculty in the various disciplines indicated comparable results. These findings were then incorporated as tasks in the texts designed by the faculty at the institutions to be used in the respective English (EAP) programs.

Two similar studies were carried out at the Lebanese American University. The first, 2000, was done at the Byblos Branch along similar lines as those in the Australian context. It was found that the various disciplines, 74 faculty responded, require different language skills and tasks and often writing is not required in the more scientifically oriented disciplines. The results further indicated that the « top down » skills of content, argument, use of readings are significantly more needed in most disciplines than the « bottom up » skills of grammar and mechanics although the English teachers were stricter when considering the latter.

Main findings on one other needs analysis study done at certain intervals over two years at LAU, 1999-2001, on both students (1055) and faculty (78) indicated :

1. a need for both general and specific English,
2. faculty consider reading significantly the most important skill, while students consider speaking in the EAP context,
3. faculty find significant importance for article writing in EPP contexts, while students find specific technical and scientific report writing more significant,
4. and both students and faculty find the role of the English program essential in helping to improve students' general language acquisition, EAP and EPP with the faculty giving more importance than students to the role of the English program. The data obtained from such studies would greatly help in curriculum improvement in catering to the needs of the students.

To sum up, EAP and EPP is much wider and involves a much more complex interrelation of teacher, student, methodologies and context than a paper such as today's can possibly show. However, it is hoped that today's

presentation has raised some awareness of one important direction that English teaching and learning is developing in Australia, Britain, Canada and the US and perhaps to reinforce and remind many of us teachers and administrators in our every day taxing jobs that the students' needs are paramount. English programs face a challenge today more so than in the past in that they must continually revisit their curriculums in light of these needs not only at the university level, but more so specially at the pre-university levels where perhaps our learners are the most impressionable and perhaps where our help can be benefited from the most.

English programs must reach out from their 'ivory towers' and help the learner in their academic and professional work.

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