

Doing, Embedding and Allowing Criticality in English for Academic Purposes

Nafisa Baba-Ahmed

Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, n.baba-ahmed@lancaster.ac.uk

Abstract

Courses in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are now offered globally across Higher Education institutions and institutions providing pathways onto degree programmes where the medium of teaching is English. As Hlengwa notes, Higher Education is a mode of responding ‘to multiple, complex, and urgent transformation imperatives such as making higher education institutions spaces that are democratic and inclusive promoting belonging and a social justice agenda’ (Badat, 2016; CHE, 2016). This inevitably requires deep levels of criticality from both a teaching but more arguably learning perspectives if such educational spaces are to be fertile grounds for invoking social justice transformative practices. As EAP is a crucial Higher Education channel for ‘allowing’ or facilitating internationalisation of education and in particular in my own teaching experience, what I would put down to the inclusion of ‘others’ who differ both culturally and linguistically to students from Western universities, critical thinking becomes even more of an imperative embeddable skill. While both critical thinking and critical pedagogy invoke the term ‘critical’ as a pivotal point of reference in promoting scepticism in students of commonly accepted values and more importantly the role of teachers in facilitating and encouraging this practice to take place in spaces of teaching and learning (Popkewitz and Fendler, 1999), the question is, to what extent do we as EAP facilitators do this, embedding it as a skill and allow students to demonstrate it?

This presentation will focus on the conceptual issue exploring the meaning of ‘critical’ and ‘criticality’ within a higher education context; the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) particularly in UK universities – its role and purpose and the challenge of essentially how much criticality is allowed within this field. Moreover, this presentation will consider the perceived norms of writing in EAP have been shaped by the dominance of the English language across a wide range of different sectors including business, economics, finance, media and most notably education (McIntosh, Connor and Gokpinar, 2017).

I will also consider the issue of writers and an audience that are becoming increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse which raises questions regarding the adequacy of more suitable theoretical frameworks that are required in order to cater to the reality of teaching academic and professional writing practices. These insights will facilitate further critical discussions on importance of the role EAP plays in the internationalisation of education as well as channelling what are considered as appropriate academic conventions acceptable by the standards of powerful Western universities.

Keywords

English for Academic Purposes, EAP, Higher Education, International Education, teaching critical thinking, embedding critical thinking skills