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ENGLISH IN THE DISCIPLINES: ARGUMENTS FOR SPECIFICITY¹

Abstract

In 2012 Hong Kong totally reformed its educational system by removing a year from students' school experience and adding it to their time at university. For those of us responsible for English language provision it presented an opportunity to reconsider the kind of English that we should be teaching and how we might create courses which best prepared students for their studies. At Hong Kong University (HKU) we decided to redesign our courses to focus on "English in the Discipline". This recognizes that because the conventions of academic communication differ considerably across disciplines, identifying the particular language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of target groups becomes central to teaching English in universities. Teachers therefore had to devise courses around the principle of 'specificity'. In this paper I will discuss something of this process, but mainly focus on evidence supporting the idea of specificity, exploring the ways that genre features, personal bio claims, assignment types and tutor expectations differ across fields.

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Key words

specific EAP, genre, assignment types, tutor expectations.

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