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Fundamentals for teaching English for Academic Purposes

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The book *Teaching English for Academic Purposes* is part of *The English Language Teacher Development* (ELTD) Series from TESOL Press and a valuable resource for any English for Academic Purposes (EAP) tutor involved in various academic settings. By treating language and consequently EAP as a set of skills, the authors present the reader with bullet points and practical advice on how to teach EAP. As defined in the book, EAP can be understood as the English that fulfills the needs of groups that circulate in academic contexts (HYLAND; HAMP-LYONS, 2002). The authors intend to discuss important aspects of EAP in order to help teachers guide their students towards a successful academic path. The book is organized in seven chapters, each one addressing relevant aspects of EAP teaching: *Introduction; Needs Assessment; Developing General Academic Skills and Independent Learners; Reading and Writing Academic Texts; Listening and Speaking; Grammar, Vocabulary and Blended Skills; and Closing Thoughts*.

Ilka Kostka and Susan Olmstead-Wang start the book by presenting some false beliefs concerning the topic at hand, with the objective of demystifying misconceptions people may have about EAP. The misconception to be highlighted here is related to the difficulty in mastering academic English. However, this is not completely unfounded, as academic English has its own peculiarities, such as formality (SCARCELLA, 2003), which is one of the aspects that makes academic language more difficult. Nonetheless, it is not a matter of difficulty, but simply of having different characteristics.

Throughout the book, there are "reflective breaks" designed for teachers to reflect on their previous knowledge regarding EAP, as well as on their teaching practices. Moreover, these reflective breaks contain suggestions and hypothetical situations on how to implement certain tasks that will develop students' academic English skills.

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The first topic discussed in the book is *needs analysis*, also known as *needs assessment* (BROWN, 2016). Knowing students' needs is definitely a crucial step to guarantee the alignment of both EAP instruction and stakeholders' expectations. Based on what needs to be taught, it is possible to set goals, plan instruction, and design curricula. However, it should be noted that sometimes students are not necessarily aware of what is actually required in academic settings. Hence, instructors and administrators have a key role in determining what students will need in particular areas. For instance, students might have a general idea that writing articles is the most important genre to be mastered. Nevertheless, depending on the specificities of a certain area of expertise, reports might be equally relevant. If this is the case, the language needed to both read and write this genre must be emphasized.

This discussion takes the reader to the chapter entitled "Developing General Academic Skills and Independent Learners", in which the authors mention the importance of focusing on the skills students have to master so that they can succeed in academic contexts. In order to develop independent learners, the following general academic skills - which are further described in separate chapters - are approached: reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary and grammar. By forming independent learners, the authors understand students who are aware of the space they occupy, as well as the skills required in the context they are inserted. Thus, a valid contribution given by the authors is that teachers must encourage their students to understand their own learning styles and strategies. With that in mind, more than just having teachers explaining all the existing learning styles and strategies, students must be part of their learning process by discussing their preferences.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the discussion of reading and writing skills that, despite being separate, must be seen as interconnected processes, especially in an EAP teaching context. A piece of advice provided in the book relates to knowing students' previous experiences with reading and their strategies adopted regarding academic texts. Besides, *before* reading is a crucial step, as the students can learn vocabulary and skim the text to have a general idea of its structure. The *during* part of the reading has to do with showing students that reading always happens for a reason. In the authors' words, "The main point is that students learn to read for a purpose" (p. 17).

The same logic applies to the writing skill. As pointed out by the authors, different areas of expertise may have their own way of writing academic texts. However, some principles are common to all students. For instance, the authors advise teachers to provide a

model academic text, i.e. if a certain group of students must write an essay, the first step teachers must take is to provide examples of essays so that students can start having a general idea of the structure, the language used, and the intended audience. After becoming aware of the main characteristics of the genre being produced, an interesting suggestion is to use templates for practicing writing, from the beginner levels up to more advanced ones.

Furthermore, the authors give a short yet extremely relevant explanation on how to assess students' writing. This is an issue of great concern for many scholars, as assessment is a complex task (WEIGLE, 2002), and the act of grading cannot be understood as a simple number at the end of a course, for instance. On the contrary, although most of the times grading take a summative character, it is desirable to assess students' writing formatively. This means that students are assessed throughout the writing process (LEA, 2004). Thus, guided by clear instructions on how to give feedback and constructive comments, students can also assess their colleagues' written assignments, since they must take a leading role in their own language learning process.

At the end of the fifth chapter, the authors discuss a topic of broad and current issue, which is plagiarism. In academic contexts, it is known that it is mandatory to use references to support our ideas. Nonetheless, the limits between borrowing or copying ideas and plagiarizing may not be very clear. Thus, this specific part of the book deserves a special attention, since EAP tutors must teach their students how to use the source text, rather than showing ways of detecting plagiarism. In other words, from the very first levels, students must be aware of the strategies to properly use references of the source texts without plagiarizing them. (SHI, 2018).

"Listening and Speaking" focuses on these skills as intertwined processes, just as in the previous chapter about reading and writing. Therefore, the authors understand listening and speaking as active skills that must be practiced in class or outside in various academic settings where they are needed. Moreover, it is the role of EAP tutors to provide authentic materials so that students are ready to face academic discourses they will encounter in university. Inside the classroom, it is possible to practice oral presentations, which is a required genre to be mastered in conferences, for instance. Outside the classroom, the authors suggest that students have continued access to opportunities to use academic English, attending lectures, and talking to faculty administrators, for instance. Hence, both inside and outside classroom environments are connected through meaningful language instruction.

Grammar and vocabulary are addressed as integrated with the four skills, rather than "stand-alone issues". Therefore, grammar cannot be seen as a set or rules to be memorized, but as a phenomenon of *doing* grammar, also known as grammaring (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003). In this way, it is preferred to know how to use grammar meaningfully and appropriately instead of having only explicit grammar knowledge. Vocabulary is also a fundamental aspect of EAP. Even though there might be authors who believe that knowing a language is directly proportional to mastering the words of that language (NATION, 2006), others claim that knowing a language has to do with using it in the appropriate context (LEWIS, 1993). Students may learn vocabulary through explicit teaching or incidental learning. In an EAP context, however, it is important to teach vocabulary explicitly, as students may have limited time to learn. Some strategies given by the authors are teaching high-frequency academic words, most of the times gathered in ready-made lists such as the Academic Word List (COXHEAD, 2000), or using Academic English corpora available online.[2]

Another topic addressed in this book are the so-called "blended skills", which are skills needed at the same time to perform a certain task. For instance, the authors' examples are related to note-taking and writing an e-mail. In these particular cases, the first example combines listening/reading and writing. The latter combines writing and other pragmatic skills which involve knowing how to use the language for particular functions (making requests, asking for information, to name a few).

The authors finish the book by highlighting that mastering academic English skills is an urgent need nowadays. Considering that English is the language used for knowledge production and dissemination (ALTBACH; KNIGHT, 2007; AMMON, 2006; BAUMVOL, 2018), EAP cannot be neglected, mainly because publications which are not written in English reach fewer readers. Moreover, as academic English is no one's first language (HYLAND, 2015, 2016), a good starting point is reading *Teaching English for Academic Purposes*, the book being reviewed. Undoubtedly, it is among the "must-read books" for EAP tutors at the beginning of career up to more experienced ones for whom continuous

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[2] The authors suggest Bennett (2010) to teach English through corpora. A further pedagogical resource could be the academic section of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/) in which authentic language used in academic domains is available.

professional development is encouraged. In brief, this book can both inform and inspire EAP tutors in any academic teaching context.

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