

Exploring teacher beliefs about teaching English for Academic Purposes at low proficiency levels.

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the global forum for EAP professionals

Overview of the presentation

- Impetus to study teacher beliefs about EAP
- Exploring teacher beliefs
- Piloting *Access EAP: Foundations*, for low level EAP learners
- Reflecting on your approach
- Potential barriers and success factors
- Changes the teachers still need to make
- Orientation to teaching needed for EAP

Impetus to study beliefs about EAP

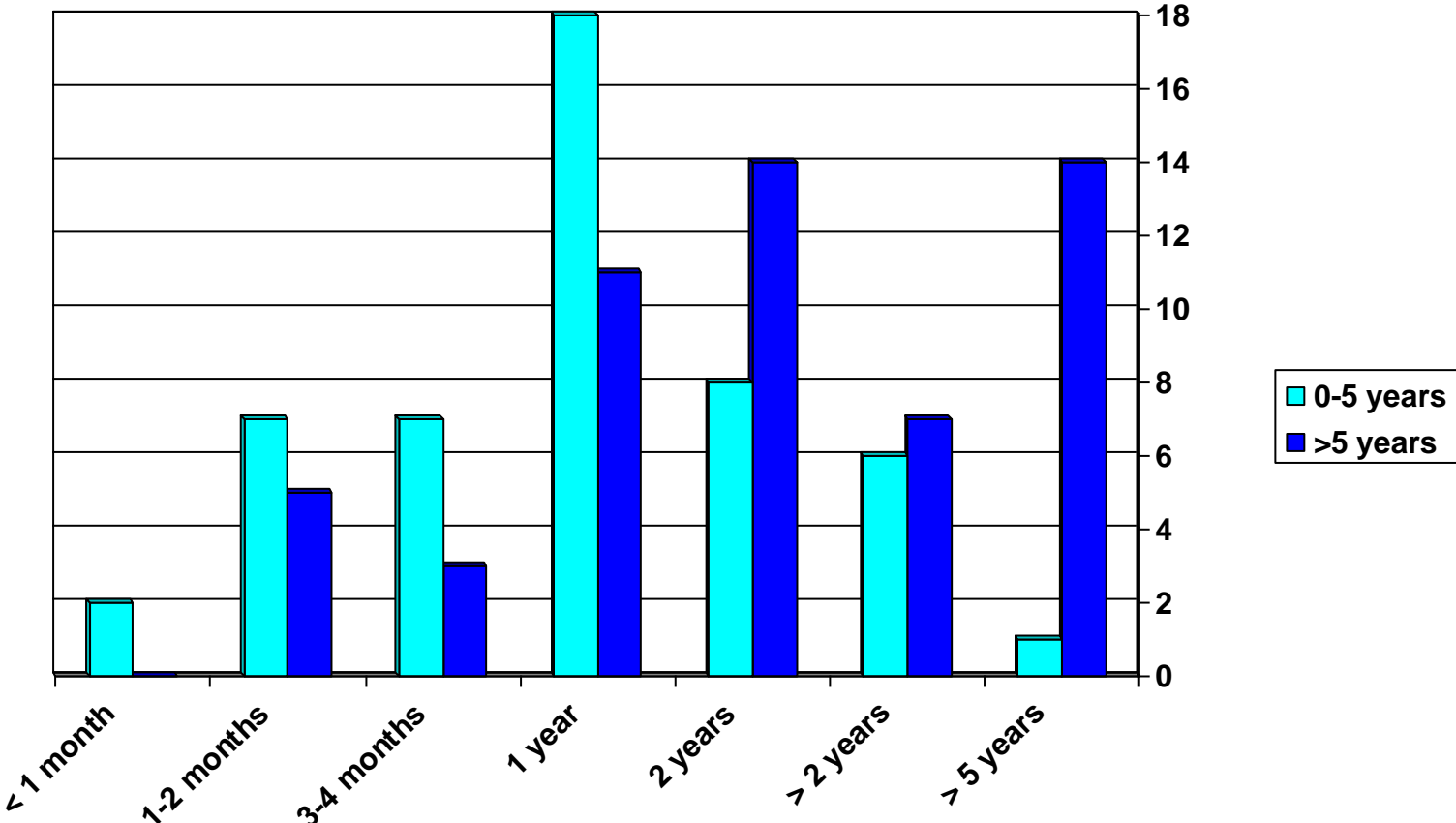
- Survey: *Routes into teaching EAP* – 2006 on BALEAP discussion list
- Questions about training, experience and challenges
- Responses grouped in categories based on experience
 - new EAP teachers (up to 5 years)
 - experienced EAP teachers (more than 5 years)

Summary of challenges

- Both initial training and continuing professional development are mainly through informal routes
- Most teachers have to find out for themselves what is appropriate for their context
- The challenges they face concern understanding
 - discipline-specific materials and student needs
 - what EAP involves and how it differs from CLT
- One question elicited a surprising response

How long has it taken you to feel confident teaching EAP?

Time taken to feel confident teaching EAP



Beliefs about learning to teach EAP

I truly believe that EAP can be picked up with practice, and support, and that there is really no need for a distinct qualification in this field. As long as the teacher is experienced and is given a thorough induction and on-going support the need to pay to study for such an EAP certificate/diploma can be avoided.

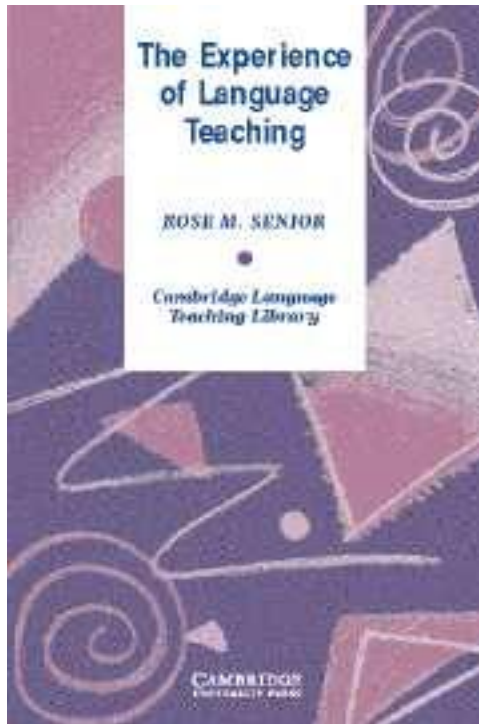
Beliefs about learning to teach EAP

This claim underplays the challenge of changing from a communicative orientation to an academic orientation towards teaching.

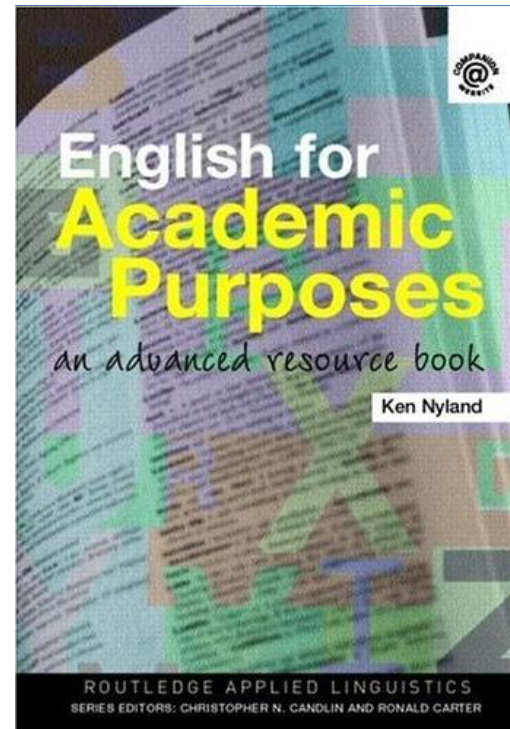
EAP involves more than applying current CLT expertise to new materials and contexts.

Teachers who are unaware of the need for a fundamental change in approach may create barriers to learning for their students.

How is the CLT approach different from EAP?



Focus on delivery



Focus on content

The Experience of Language Teaching

Prioritises delivery over content

- Using a teacher-generated framework it covers a range of aspects of classroom life: how teachers create environments suitable for language practice, how they get students 'on-side', how they manage tricky students, how they enhance the learning experience, how they develop and maintain a spirit of community. The book demonstrates how paying attention to both the learning and social needs of their class groups enables language teachers to behave in flexible ways that promote learning.

(Cambridge English Language Teaching online)

English for Academic Purposes an advanced resource book

Prioritises content over delivery

- The book provides a platform for readers to engage with the main issues of the field through a series of chapters discussing the main terms and ideas, extracts from key readings and numerous research tasks. (p xv)
- 'Wider understandings are developed... *by studying texts* in a comparative and questioning way which explores the relationship between disciplinary practices, institutional contexts and rhetorical practices.' (p 31).
(*my italics*)

Implications for novice EAP teachers

- In EAP content is the priority
 - ability to create communicative environment is assumed
 - student needs relate to performance in the target context rather than knowledge of a context-free language system
- CLT teachers may not have acquired the ability
 - to understand text processing and production in the disciplines
 - to create materials appropriate for these contexts
- CLT teachers report feeling deskilled when teaching EAP
- Can lead to teacher resistance to EAP approaches

Teacher beliefs

- Teachers' beliefs
 - personal constructs – guide decisions and actions
 - derive from teachers' own experiences of learning
 - evolve as teachers gain knowledge and experience
 - influenced by theories underlying training courses
- Impact of teachers' beliefs
 - part of 'culture of learning' in classroom (Cortazzi and Jin)
 - influence interaction, curriculum design, learning content
 - Inappropriate beliefs can create barriers to effective learning on high stakes EAP courses

Anecdotal teacher beliefs about low level EAP students

- They need general English before they do EAP
- They need to master the language system and then do study skills
- They need to be taught at their level of competence
- Academic concepts are too difficult at this level
- They cannot cope with authentic academic texts
- They need to meet a variety of texts and tasks to maintain interest

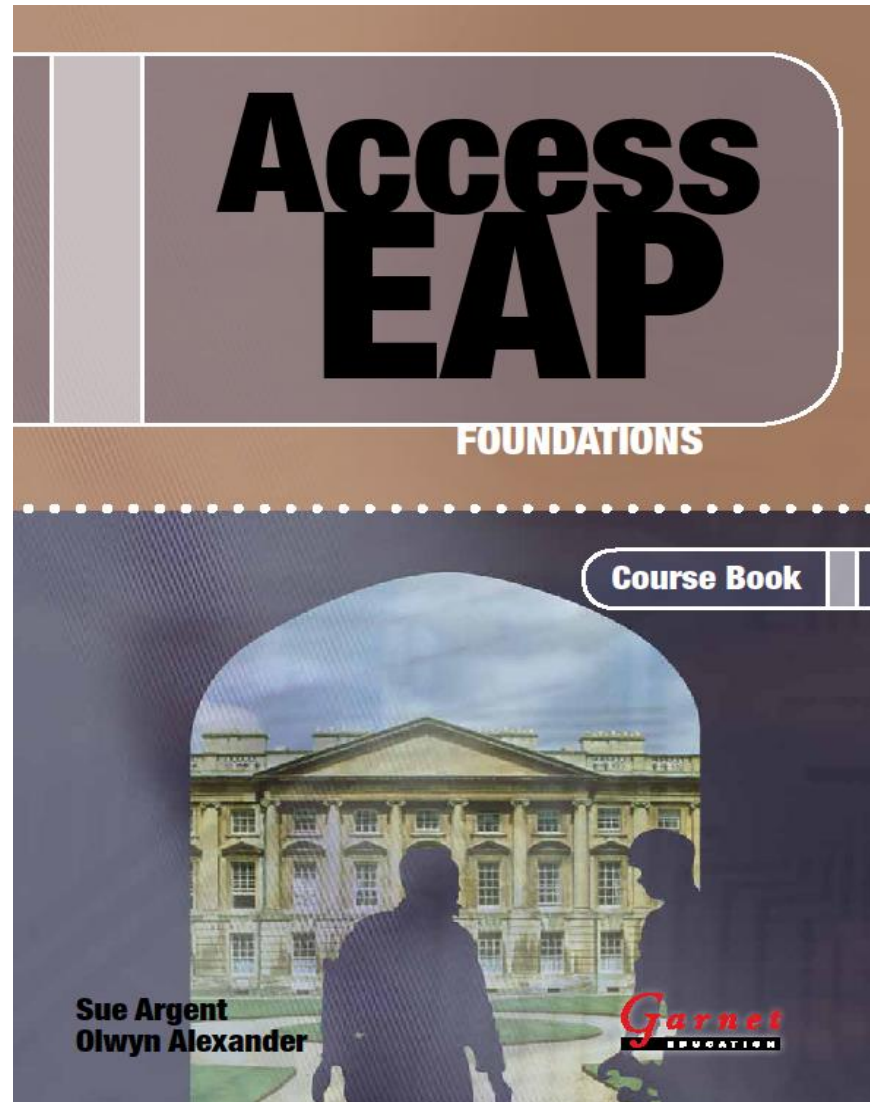
Methodology for exploring EAP teachers' beliefs

- Teachers' beliefs explored using stimulated recall
 - eliciting comments on use of new coursebook & lessons
 - eliciting narratives of teaching sequences
- Teachers make sense of their experiences through narrative
 - talk their lessons into meaningfulness by retelling them, enabling interpretation of events in lessons
 - make emotional and moral judgements about events
 - fit teaching sequences into personal construct of teaching and beliefs about teaching
 - position themselves in relation to others

Context for exploring teachers' beliefs

- One semester course in HE institution
- Two teachers shared one class, using *Access EAP: foundations* as the main input for the class.
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers held prior to semester and weekly during the course.
- Students in the class gave their views in open discussion at the end of the semester.
- Major changes were made to the book as a result of valuable feedback from the teachers and students.
- The interviews were transcribed and analysed for evidence of teacher beliefs that could be potential barriers or success factors in using the materials.

EAP materials for pre-intermediate students (CEFR A2/B1)



The book involves the reader in an academic context

Three students are shown studying in the first semester at Gateway University.

The reader follows them as they go about the university listening to lectures, reading texts and doing typical tasks.

They face challenges and find solutions.





Maysoun worries about hazards on a field trip and does some risk assessment

Guy plagiarises in his essay but sees the error of his ways and eventually gets an 'A'



Chen hates speaking in public but takes part in a student association meeting.

Functions → language

expressing purpose

*Maysoun chose this course **to** learn about environmental issues in developing countries*

showing and supporting a viewpoint

*Computer based learning is **more convenient than** classroom learning **because** you can study at any time.*

taking a stance in data commentary

***Almost** one half of Gateway University students come from outside the UK, **but less than** one fifth from regions outside Europe.*

Noun phrase grammar and function

Naming places and subjects

*Environmental Science, Running Track, Central Square
Open-access Computer Laboratory.*

Summarizing ideas

the use of computers → using computers → computer use

Text cohesion

*The bacteria do not spread from the tick into the bite until the end of a blood feed. **This delay** means that **the infection** can be avoided if the tick is removed early.*

How is *Access EAP* different from CLT materials?

Pre-intermediate CLT (A2/B1)

- Discrete units can usually be studied in any order
- Text selection, usually journalistic based on topics, to cater for a wide range of interests
- Syllabus is driven by grammar structures
- The language determines the choice of context and tasks
- Grammar prioritises verb phrase
- Provides practice at or just above the current level of the students

Access EAP: Foundations

- Incremental development – each unit building on what went before
- Text selection based on typical genres in authentic academic contexts
- Syllabus is driven by rhetorical functions and academic genres
- Academic context and tasks determine the language
- Grammar prioritises noun phrase
- Provides practice near the target level and requires scaffolding to support performance

The implications of these differences

Access EAP: Foundations

- Assumes students are adults: aims are shared; tasks are justified; context is demonstrated.
- Assumes students have important prior experience: as adults, as academically motivated people, as bilinguals
- Deals with the jagged profile by teaching towards the target
- Teacher needs to scaffold / supplement in response

Low level CLT material

- Infantilizes students by assuming 'teacher knows best'
- Assumes 'low level' applies to other aspects of student competence
- Deals with the jagged profile by dividing into levels (even though level can never be accurately or consistently measured anyway)

Primary data analysis

- Interviews transcribed and analysed for evidence of teacher beliefs that could be potential barriers or success factors in using *Access EAP: foundations* with low level learners.
- Beliefs uncovered in
 - explicit statements about lessons or teaching in general
 - statements about beliefs other CLT teachers would hold but which these teachers did not hold themselves
 - short narrative descriptions of classroom episodes, containing evaluations of the students, the materials or the lessons.
- These were analysed to uncover presuppositions and interpret evaluative comments, indicating underlying beliefs.

Primary data analysis

- *I'm not very good at drilling. I think it's worthwhile doing. It's not something I do religiously. I'm not coming from the point of view of having done a lot of drills. They do need it because I know they're not always getting their patterns right.*
- Teacher evaluates her own teaching technique, drilling, in response to a task in the materials.
- She acknowledges that the task does not match her teaching style but is prepared to adjust this.

Belief: A teacher needs to adjust her style in order to follow the specified approach to the materials in a coursebook.

Primary data analysis

- *I spent some of the class doing grammar... I did a little kind of quick thing to satisfy them... something on the passive which is useful for academic writing... and they took it and ran and sort of an hour and a half later we were still doing it and it was incredible... they were so reluctant to let it go.*
- *doing grammar... something on the passive*
focus on language system (form) not performance (function)
- *a little kind of quick thing to satisfy them*
students at this level are like children – need to be satisfied

Belief: A lesson is successful if students liked it and want to do the same activities again.

Secondary data analysis

- Arranged the belief statements in opposing pairs to constitute extreme ends of a cline
- Compiled the pairs of statements into a reflective questionnaire
- Respondents asked to choose only one statement – requires reflection on which belief is closest to their own.
- Trialled online with teachers on pre-sessional courses 2010
- These teachers should be teaching EAP (assumption about the approach on pre-sessional courses)
- 124 complete responses

Secondary data analysis

Which is closest to your belief about students at A2/B1 level?

Students should be divided into levels and taught at the correct level in order to make progress.

It is not necessary to put students into classes according to their level for them to make progress.

Students should study the language system before they study academic English.
Students can study the language system at the same time as they study academic English.

Students should be challenged with new and unfamiliar material and difficult tasks.

Students should not be challenged with material and tasks which might be too difficult for them.

Secondary data analysis

Which is closest to your belief about students at A2/B1 level?

It is not necessary to relate tasks and activities in the classroom to a university context.

The teacher should relate tasks and activities in the classroom to a university context.

A lesson is successful if the students liked it and want to do the same activities again.

A lesson is successful if the students struggled but progressed in their learning.

Students need to build up topic based vocabulary, related to their discipline.
Students need to build up functional vocabulary for comparing, defining or discussing problems.

Secondary data analysis

Which is closest to your belief about students at A2/B1 level?

Students need to learn verb tenses and sentence linking words.

Students need to learn noun phrases and meaning relations between sentences.

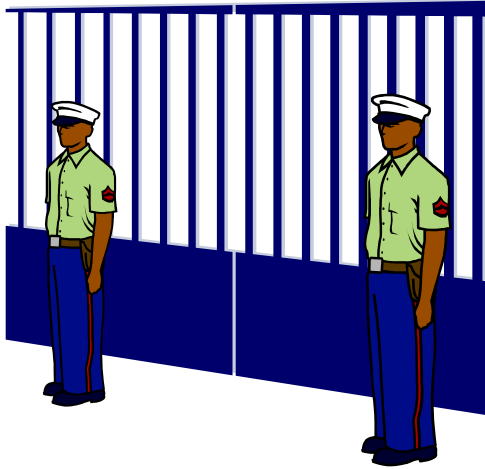
Students should practise reading, writing, listening and speaking at their level of competence.

Students should be supported to read, write, listen and speak beyond their level of competence.

It is the students' responsibility to develop as independent learners.

It is the teacher's responsibility to develop students as independent learners.

Potential barriers and success factors



Beliefs about

- low level learners
- teaching low level learners
- teaching EAP to low level learners

Beliefs about low level learners

Potential barriers to EAP	%	Success factors for EAP	%
Students learning a second language are similar to children learning their first language.	8	Students learning a second language are adults with experience of learning their first language.	92
Students should be divided into levels and taught at the correct level in order to make progress.	73	It is not necessary to put students into classes according to their level for them to make progress.	27
Students should study the language system before they study academic English.	32	Students should study the language system at the same time as they study academic English.	68

Beliefs about low level learners

Potential barriers to EAP	%	Success factors for EAP	%
Students should follow the natural order of acquisition: listening / speaking before reading / writing.	8	Students should learn language skills in the order that suits their needs and abilities.	92
Students should not be challenged with material and tasks which might be too difficult for them.	20	Students should be challenged with new and unfamiliar material and difficult tasks.	80
Students at this level are not able to study independently.	7	Students at this level are able to study independently.	93

Beliefs about teaching low level learners

Potential barriers to EAP	%	Success factors for EAP	%
A teacher need not explain the aims of a lesson because reflection is not important at this level.	2	A teacher should explain the aims of a lesson to help students to reflect on their learning.	98
A lesson is successful if the students liked it and want to do the same activities again.	19	A lesson is successful if the students struggled but progressed in their learning.	81
It is important at low levels to correct all the mistakes in students' writing or speaking.	6	It is important at low levels to correct only mistakes relating to the focus of the lesson.	94

Beliefs about teaching low level learners

Potential barriers to EAP	%	Success factors for EAP	%
It is the students' responsibility to develop as independent learners.	25	It is the teacher's responsibility to develop students as independent learners.	75
If students are working towards an exam, lessons should focus on exam tasks in past exam papers.	10	If students are working towards an exam, lessons should focus on the skills and language tested.	90

Beliefs about teaching EAP to low level learners

Potential barriers to EAP	%	Success factors for EAP	%
It is not necessary to relate tasks and activities in the classroom to a university context.	18	The teacher should relate tasks and activities in the classroom to a university context.	82
Students need to build up topic based vocabulary, related to their discipline.	20	Students need to build up functional vocabulary for comparing, defining or discussing problems.	80
Students need to learn verb tenses and sentence linking words.	32	Students need to learn noun phrases and meaning relations between sentences.	68

Beliefs about teaching EAP to low level learners

Potential barriers to EAP	%	Success factors for EAP	%
Newspapers and magazines are a good source of texts for this level.	26	Academic texts from textbooks can be adapted for this level.	74
Students at this level cannot understand and discuss academic concepts even in their first language.	10	Students at this level can understand and discuss academic concepts in their first language.	90
Students should practise reading, writing, listening and speaking at their level of competence.	34	Students should be supported to read, write, listen and speak beyond their level of competence.	66

Beliefs which create barriers to efficient learning

Students should be divided into levels and taught at the correct level in order to make progress.

Students should study the language system before they study academic English.

A lesson is successful if the students liked it and want to do the same activities again.

Students should not be challenged with material and tasks which might be too difficult for them.

Students need to build up topic based vocabulary, related to their discipline.

Students need to learn verb tenses and sentence linking words.

Students should practise reading, writing, listening and speaking at their level of competence.

It is the students' responsibility to develop as independent learners.

Challenge for CLT teachers

The main challenge is the teachers themselves – their willingness to engage with new context

‘An EAP teacher will recognize the importance of applying to his/her own practice the standards expected of students and other academic staff.’
(BALEAP Competency Framework)

Challenge for CLT teachers & EAP managers

Border crossing (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000)

- Teachers need to accept they are entering new teaching space
- identity as a teacher reconstructed to some extent
- threats to personal construct of teaching results in confusion, strangeness and conflict

Loss of expertise (Golombek and Johnson, 2004)

- lose expert frame of reference
- perceive self as novice

CLT teachers need thorough induction and on-going support to function effectively in the new context.

Orientation required to teach EAP

Positive restlessness (Kuh et al. 2005)

- restless in a positive way
- never quite satisfied with performance
- oriented towards continuing professional development

Graduate attributes (Enhancement Themes, 2010)

- able to critically evaluate existing understandings and recognise limitations of own knowledge
- intellectually curious and open to new ways of thinking
- able to respond effectively to unfamiliar problems in unfamiliar contexts

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