

Enhancing Students' Professional Competence and Generic Qualities  
through Writing in English across the Curriculum

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This book reports on a research project, *Enhancing Students' Professional Competence and Generic Qualities through Writing in English Across the Curriculum*, carried out by a team of researchers from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) from 2012 - 2014. The project attempted to address the issue of improving the writing ability of PolyU undergraduates by embedding writing activities into the courses that they were already taking within their own discipline. Hence, the term 'writing across curriculum' (WAC). Such a 'writing-to-learn' approach is intended to help students develop a deeper understanding of what they have learnt in their ESP classes by asking them to put their knowledge into practice, while at the same time, being prepared for writing within their discipline or for future professions.

This pedagogical approach calls for a collaboration between language experts (in this case the research team) and lecturers from the various academic departments. The two parties had to work together to design and implement scaffolding or support activities for their courses. The activities developed were centered on five major areas that students need reinforcement in: 1) identifying and structuring supporting ideas to form a thesis 2) avoiding plagiarism 3) strengthening effective reading skills 4) enhancing vocabulary for better writing, and 5) making oral presentation. An assessment of the impact of these activities were also carried out.

This 'innovation' is not a particularly novel one and has been suggested by various ESP experts such as Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), Dudley-Evans (2001), Wingate, Andon and Cogo (2011) and Wingate (2012). However, this project is noteworthy because of its sustainability since it used existing resource. In addition empowering the discipline lecturers to use writing as both a teaching and learning tool was creative.

The book consists of six chapters arranged sequentially which explain the development of the project, its implementation and the evaluation process. A brief summary of each of these chapters is provided below.

Chapter 1 presents the background to the project, its aims and the theoretical framework used. It explains how it is imperative for undergraduates at PolyU, who are mostly L2 learners of English, to acquire strategies that could assist them to use English fluently and effectively in both the academic and workplace contexts by drawing on past studies.

Chapter 2 outlines the implementation of the project. It discusses its conception, the needs analysis process and how its results shaped the design of the project. It concludes with a description of its implementation.

Chapter 3 provides details of the implementation phase that involved the collaboration between the research team and the discipline lecturers. A representation of the various activity-types used at this phase were included to show the type of scaffolding that has been prepared for student writing and also illustrates how various skills (reading, writing and speaking) have been incorporated into the scaffolding.

Chapter 4 is divided into two parts. The first part provides an overview of the writing genres used in the various activities. The second part explains how the implementation was evaluated, describes the instruments, analysis procedures and results of the analysis in great detail.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the additional resources and ideas collected from the participants that were found to be valuable to the project. Among the resources were activities that had already been used prior to the project. Also included are ideas and tips for giving effective feedback to student writing, and rubrics or scoring guides for assessing student assignments. Those who are interested in material development would find Chapters 3 and 5 particularly useful simply because of the varied samples of WAC activities that could be used as templates for designing similar WAC supports.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 6, sums up the project achievements as well as suggests recommendations for the possible implementation of WAC in other tertiary education contexts.

What is particularly interesting and useful for those interested in exploring WAC research is the inclusion of reflection questions at various points throughout the book that encourage readers to reflect on the issues that are being discussed and relate them to their own setting, thus making the research more relevant to the readers.

The main strength of this book is its detailed explanation of the different phases of the project and the inclusion of the various research tools and instruments that makes it easy for readers to replicate the study, or explore a similar research topic. Another is its abundant sample WAC tasks and teaching strategies and tips. This makes it a practical resource book for practitioners who wish to explore the ‘writing through learning’ approach in their classroom.

I would therefore strongly recommend this book to not only ESL practitioners who are teaching English for academic/professional related courses at institutions of higher learning but also to lecturers who want to foster better writing among undergraduates within their disciplines.

The only gripe that I have with the book is that I found the title and cover rather dull and uninspiring and the typeface unappealing.

#### REFERENCES

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