

Research into practice: Engaging students in exploring English-in-the-Discipline

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Abstract

What does it mean to be literate within academic contexts? How do English teachers help students succeed as subject specialists? One challenging task university students confront is learning how to communicate effectively in the academic styles and voices of their disciplines.

In the new 4-year curriculum, HKU students will take discipline-specific courses developed in collaboration with their faculties. This paper reports on the pilot of the design, delivery and evaluation of a cross-cultural English-in-the-Discipline course developed for European Studies, American Studies and Asian Studies majors of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures in the Faculty of Arts. The course aims to make the uses of English in the discipline more visible to students by engaging them in critical analysis and scholarly research. Course design puts research into practice in helping students to explore the ways the discipline forms itself through its distinctive conventions.

This paper discusses the challenges of designing discipline-specific English language curricula. Key issues include: needs and expectations of faculty teachers and students, demands on English language teachers, challenges in curriculum development and materials design. The paper also investigates the evaluation of a pilot project with 80 students. Data collected from the end-of-course questionnaire and feedback from students and teachers will be presented to reflect on the development of the course.