

## Academic skills advising: Towards a discipline

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[Extracted by K. Chanock from the Editors' Introduction]: Language and academic skills (LAS) advising in Australia has grown around the explosion of mass higher education in this country.... Fee-paying international students .... now account for some 8% of the student population, while the number of local students of a non-English speaking background has risen to approximately one quarter of the student population. This large body of students whose intellectual traditions and learning styles derive from different sources from those we have been used to in Australia poses new challenges for university educators [:].... how to teach students of many different backgrounds both to nurture what they bring to the academy, and to produce texts which are acceptable and valued by it.

In Australia, there have arisen at least three different structural models of language and academic skills units.... [While] the fragmented flowering of such units in response to local institutional pressures has made them susceptible to withering at the rough touch of just such institutional pressures[,] ... this development has resulted in a freedom to develop programs based on multiple theoretical perspectives. These perspectives enable practitioners to attend to the realities of both first and second language speakers, and importantly, to context, understood as the nexus of institutional requirements, disciplinary discourse imperatives, and the task at hand.

.... [W]e believe that the practice of our [discipline] is formed by perspectives from a number of parent disciplines -- philosophy, applied linguistics, education, psychology. The core dilemma of our profession is expressed in the problem ...[of]the relationship between language and knowledge.... How should we deal with [students' difficulties with this relationship] at a textual and interpersonal level, at the level of pedagogy and at an institutional level? .... The contributors have approached the question from both ends, asking themselves both "What do I read that helps me in my teaching?" and "What do I do that reflects on what I read?" The result is a collection which encompasses surveys of the relevant literature and accounts of designing and teaching programs to help a wide variety of students towards better understanding of the nature of tertiary learning and the performance which it entails.

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