EAP at John Paul II High School

In 2014, John Paul II High School in Greymouth instituted English for Academic Purposes as a course alternative for Year 13 students. Over the preceding few years we had noticed that many Year 13 students were choosing the English Literature course, generally because they had run out of other English-rich options. Many of these students were not planning on moving on to tertiary study. Of those who were heading towards University, very few were intending to continue with English literature studies. This, of course, meant that subject results became worse each year. The students generally wanted to “do” English for reading and writing skills, not for literature analysis.

In 2010, five EAP standards were approved by NZQA. In 2012, the standards were moved from the ESOL domain to their own domain called English for Academic Purposes. This meant they were available to be used for all students, not just English Language Learners. The purpose of these standards is to assess a student’s readiness to study at undergraduate level (NZQA). After spending some time with another school in 2013, looking at their EAP programme, it was agreed that it would benefit JPII’s students to offer a similar programme. We are now near the end of our second year of this course.

This year’s class has 20 students – 2 ELLs and 1 from a Kura Kaupapa background. All students have chosen this course because they want to improve their reading and writing, and prepare for tertiary study. Eighteen of these students intend to undertake the first year of degree study in 2016.

One English Language Learner is originally from Honduras. She arrived to live in the Grey District in November 2012. In 2013, she began as a full-time Year 11 student at John Paul II High School with Foundation Stage English language skills. In her first year with us, we concentrated on increasing capacity in English language. By the end of the year, she had managed to achieve 51 NCEA Level 1 credits. In her second year, 2014, she finished NCEA Level 1 and completed NCEA Level 2. This year, she is working towards University Entrance.

This student chose 13EAP to “improve my English” and because she needs to achieve UE Literacy requirements. She wants to go to University next year to study Business Administration and Spanish. Yolita believes she has learnt a lot during this course, “summarising has helped in Social Studies, Religious Education and Spanish; analysing information at a
different level will help with University, for notes and essays.” She has found learning to use APA referencing challenging, but is on her way to mastering that skill, too.

Teaching EAP in a small, remote town also has its challenges. Finding useful material for listening assessments, both formative and summative, is difficult. Local experts in various areas of study have been approached, but finding time to collaborate on a scripted assessment has been impossible. Goodwill is abundant, time not so much! Because of this, I have resorted to the great World Wide Web and the fabulous resource of TEDtalks. The talks can be a bit lengthy at times for the purposes of the assessments, but the content engages the students and they get plenty of practice at note-taking. Another online resource I use is Open Content – University of Oxford Podcasts (https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/open). My students now know more about Virtue Ethics and Deontology than perhaps they wanted. Before listening or watching, I give the students guiding questions (the purpose) for listening. They have learnt to take clear notes because, after they have listened/watched, I expect them to write clear answers to those guiding questions, summarising key points and paraphrasing or quoting the speaker. A student who did the course at JPII in 2014, who is dyslexic, and who was recently home from UC on term break, was proud to tell me they had passed the Academic Writing Assessment at university without any trouble.

Another thing that has worked well is teaming up with the Religious Education department. Regardless of their other subjects, all students must do Year 13 RE. The standards and topics covered in that course, lend themselves to EAP. For example, students are currently working on an essay comparing and contrasting Secular Humanism with Catholicism. A reading assessment has been developed around this topic, and the essay can be used for the writing standard.

Our experience at John Paul II High School with English for Academic Purposes has been a positive one. The students see value in a skills-based course which will help them make the transition to tertiary study, and working with another department has raised student achievement in both curriculum areas.

Celia Costelloe
John Paul II High School