



UNIVERSITY OF  
TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

**Reading in the margins: EAP reading  
pedagogies and their critical, postcritical  
potential**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

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## Glossary

ANESB	Australian non-English speaking background
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ESB	English-speaking background
ESL	English as a Second Language
GPA	Grade Point Average
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	First language
L2	Second language
SFG	Systemic-Functional Grammar
SFL	Systemic-Functional Linguistics
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication
NESB	Non-English speaking background
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

## **Certificate of authorship/originality**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

International students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) commonly undertake preparatory classes in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), delivered in language institutes which exist as independent commercial colleges on the margins of the university. EAP has been criticized for taking a purely pragmatic approach of ‘skilling up’ students rather than taking a critical, ‘literacies’ approach appropriate to the rapidly globalising, ‘liquid’ contexts of the twenty-first century (Doherty & Singh, 2005; Lea & Street, 2006; Luke, 2002b). In this thesis, I explore the ways in which EAP reading pedagogies in Australian universities are responding to this call for a more critical approach, asking the question: **Do learning environments in EAP support the development of critical reading practices, and if so, how?**

In seeking answers to this question, I used an ethnographic-ecological methodology (van Lier, 2004b) to gain an understanding of reading pedagogy in three EAP learning environments. The study inevitably generated vast amounts of ‘messy’ data, including transcriptions of classes, observation notes, interviews and examples of students’ written work. Using Christie’s tools of Classroom Discourse Analysis (Christie, 2002) in combination with Engeström’s third generation Activity Theory (Engeström, 1999; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) it was possible to generate a holistic analysis of the interaction between the multiple, intersecting elements of each environment.

I argue that more attention needs to be paid to ‘critical engagement’ in EAP pedagogy. The data suggest that conditions for such a pedagogy entail a negotiation of goals; texts and tasks which present high challenge as well as high support (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005); and a positive and productive classroom community (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). The study challenges teachers to see their role not as

‘arbiters of meaning’, mediating texts FOR students, but as setting up learning environments which scaffold students’ direct engagement and dialogue WITH texts, so that they themselves can experience legitimate participation in constructing meaning, and develop an emerging identity as critical readers.

Finally, I argue that the constraints of EAP in its marginalised position on the periphery of increasingly commercialised universities militate against the possibility of a richly critical, postcritical pedagogy. EAP can, however, begin to sow the seeds of critical reading practices, orienting students towards an active, dialogic engagement with the texts they will meet in the coming years at university.