

Leading EAP: tales from the wild frontier of UK Higher Education...

By Louise Greener

What's informing my take on things?

- My own EAP career has taken place against the growth and development of EAP (2002- now)
- My current leadership role includes EAP (Pre-sessional, In-sessional), academic skills, home student Foundation, MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics...
- I'm working on an EdD that focuses on EAP leadership and includes a narrative inquiry with 10 UK SLEAPs (Senior Leaders in EAP)...
- **These things combined have shaped the reflection I am about to offer on what it means to lead in the third space of HE...**

I think EAP (has been?) something of a wild frontier in UK HE...



Because...

Rapid growth

Shifting/Unstable
Borders

Lawlessness?

Profit

With this in mind...

- How has the wild frontier nature of EAP and the 'third spaces' it occupies impacted my own leadership experiences and the **10 EAP Leaders from across the UK sector** who participated in my study?

“You’re doing the role but...what is the role?”

- The ‘third space’ offers both frustrations and opportunities...
- SLEAPs describe different combinations of frustration and opportunity...
- ...which impacts the provision they lead...

Frustrations created by:

- Management or structural changes
- The need to re-explain the purpose and value of EAP
- The persistence of the deficit model
- A lack of structural influence/access to hierarchy
- Categorisation of roles/provision

Opportunities created by:

- Income generation
- The affordances to evolve and occupy new spaces
- Access to institutional hierarchy/decision-making
- Opportunities for scholarship
- Informal relationships

Opportunity: affordances to occupy new spaces

“...and having had seven line managers, I have had a **huge amount of freedom. [...] So, I've kind of taken the opportunity to do what I want. [...]**...we started off with international students. We now deal with all students, so home and international as well...”

(Participant 2, Interview 1)

Frustration: re-explaining the purpose and value of EAP

“...it's very hard. People either don't know you exist, or if they know you exist, **they think you do grammar or, I don't know, English language helpful teaching...**”

(Participant 2, interview 2).

Frustration: Unstable positioning

“...But then at some point [...] there was also a sort of a **land grab by the income generating area of the university**...So, they spotted how much money the pre-sessional was making and also our short courses so those got sort of sucked up [into a different department]...”

(Participant 8, Interview 1)

Frustration: access to hierarchy

“...it's good to be within the [academic department] in terms of the academic profile, opportunity, support for scholarship research, that sort of thing. But it's got its drawbacks as well, **because you're several layers down from the senior management group who are responding to things that are changing quickly...**”

(Participant 1, Interview 2)

Frustration: problematic status

“ ...if there’s a [training] session on, I don't know, it’s something teaching-related ...like, you know, “*how to use your voice when you're teaching*” and **I couldn't sign up for it because I wasn't a teacher.**”

(Participant 6, interview 2)

So...

- The wild frontier has created different third spaces across the sector that require different kinds of leadership...
- The SLEAPs in my study (and I) are all finding ways to navigate different kinds of 'third spaces' in their institutions... the search for leverage and agency is ongoing...

In Conclusion: EAP has always been a dynamic, responsive, ongoing project?

"...normally when you get in an aeroplane you can take it as a given that it's been constructed, you know. I think in EAP that's not a given. You think, right, one wing...that's why I'm going around in circles. Right. Stick another one over there..."

(Participant 1, interview 3).

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