More than Language—Evaluating a Canadian University EAP Bridging Program

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This article highlights findings from evaluation of a bridging program for international students at a large Canadian university. Designed specifically for the postsecondary context, the program moved along the continuum from a general, skills-based approach to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching and learning, in which the focus may be on developing linguistic and communicative strategies common across academic subject areas, toward an approach that emphasizes context-specific, disciplinary uses of language. This shift from general to specific reflects the program's interest in cultivating a more embedded, discipline-specific model for language teaching and learning in higher education, toward an English for Specific Purposes (ESAP) framework. Understanding this approach from a disciplinary literacy lens, the article describes the program model and examines relations among students' language proficiency assessments, performance in the program, and subsequent performance in degree programs.

Le présent article illustre les conclusions de l'évaluation d'un programme de transition pour les étudiants internationaux d'une grande université canadienne. Conçu spécifiquement pour le contexte postsecondaire, le programme progressait le long du continuum à partir d'une approche générale fondée sur les compétences de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage de l'anglais académique (EAP), démarche pouvant mettre l'accent sur le développement de stratégies linguistiques et communicatives communes à toutes les matières académiques, pour passer ensuite à une approche qui met en relief un niveau de langue adapté à certains contextes et certaines disciplines. Ce passage du général au spécifique reflète l'intérêt du programme à cultiver un modèle d'enseignement et d'apprentissage des langues plus intégré et plus spécifique dans l'enseignement supérieur en préparation pour un cadre d'enseignement de l'anglais à des fins spécifiques (ESAP). Interprétant cette approche à la lumière de la littératie disciplinaire, l'article décrit le modèle du programme et examine les relations entre les évaluations de compétences linguistiques des étudiantes et étudiants, leurs résultats dans le cadre du programme et leurs résultats subséquents dans celui des programmes de grade universitaire.

Many Canadian postsecondary institutions have introduced English for Academic Purposes (EAP) bridging programs over the last 10 to 15 years, bringing attention to critical issues concerning EAP in higher education. EAP bridging programs typically provide a pathway for academically qualified

students to gain conditional admission to university degree studies, wherein successful completion of the program meets university admission language requirements. Although students may achieve these requirements, universities still need to support international students to perform well in their subsequent university courses and meet personal, academic, and professional learning goals. Minimally, this effort requires institutional commitment to systematic international student support, quality teaching and academic advising, and inclusive language policies, as well as opportunities for students' social and academic integration and participation in disciplinary learning communities. Engaging with these considerations, this article highlights findings from evaluation of a bridging program for international students at a large Canadian university.

The evaluation employed a mixed-method, participatory design, generating qualitative and quantitative data to support program administrators in understanding students' needs and how to meet them, particularly how to prepare students for the communicative and linguistic demands of postsecondary study. Broadly, analysis of these data suggests that language proficiency assessments were not the most significant factor in students' academic performance in their degree programs. Students' performance in the program's credit-bearing disciplinary content course related to their later academic performance, and students defined the value of the program beyond linguistic factors. Engaging with stakeholder perspectives and examining student outcomes in terms of academic performance, we discuss these findings in relation to broader issues concerning EAP programs in higher education.

International Students and Canadian Postsecondary Education

Significant research in applied linguistics and education highlights the teaching and learning needs of international students beyond the linguistic skills measured by standardized language proficiency assessments used for university admission purposes. In addition to articulating the benefits of ongoing support for language development, empirical studies by Canadian researchers have identified the need to develop and support students' well-being (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Guo & Guo, 2017), intercultural competence (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018; Séror & Weinberg, 2015), academic literacies (Marshall et al., 2012), academic discourse socialization (Kobayashi, Zappa-Hollman, & Duff, 2017; Zappa-Hollman, 2007), reading comprehension and writing skills (Anderson, 2015; Neumann & McDonough, 2015), and critical thinking skills (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt, 2015; Chun, 2015; Lee, 2015). Furthermore, Canadian researchers have documented the challenges facing faculty in addressing these unique and pressing teaching and learning needs in the context of disciplinary courses, including distinguishing students' commu-

nicative competence from their subject area knowledge in assessment and evaluation (Ilieva, Beck, & Waterstone, 2014; Zappa-Hollman, 2018).

In the university context, institutional indicators of positive student outcomes often include persistence to graduation, credit accumulation rates, and grade point averages (GPA; Hodges et al., 2013). A number of factors can influence these academic outcomes, including age, motivation, educational background, social support, and language (Fox, Cheng, & Zumbo, 2013). However, operationalizing the English language proficiency (ELP) required for success in the postsecondary context is challenging because disciplinary courses provide the context and reference point for evaluating students' communicative competence, reflecting literacy, academic skills, and educational experiences (Hulstijn, 2011), and making it difficult to distinguish between language proficiency development and higher order thinking and self-regulated learning skills.

The use of standardized language proficiency assessments, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic test, to measure the benefits of EAP programs is viewed as problematic because these assessments are not designed to reflect short-term language gains, nor do they capture some of the skills taught in the EAP classroom (Alderson, 2000; Elder & O'Loughlin, 2003; IELTS, 2014). Moreover, research presents contradictory findings as to whether English language ability measured by standardized proficiency tests is a reliable predictor of academic success (Baker, 2016; Golder et al., 2009; Neumann, Padden, & McDonough, 2019; also see Jennifer MacDonald's "Sitting at 6.5" article in this issue). Some postsecondary institutions have introduced post-entry language assessment (PELA) as a means to address shortcomings in the use of standardized tests for identifying international students' ongoing language teaching and learning needs (Murray & Hicks, 2016). Similarly, like the program described in this article, some institutions have developed pathways to degree study after students complete a bridging program that uses classroom-based measures for evaluating preparedness for university study, although what these measures represent can be ambiguous. In general, these language proficiency assessments articulate observable language behaviour in academic contexts rather than academic performance or achievement.

Integrating Language and Content in Higher Education

Whereas students[1] may have demonstrated the required minimum ELP for entry into postsecondary institutions, engagement with disciplinary teaching, learning, and assessment throughout degree studies is key to the developmental process of advanced language learning (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012). Studies in second language (L2) writing have demonstrated that bi/multilingual international students' learning needs are similar to those of English-speaking students, in that all students need to master communica-

tion skills and conventions unique to their specific disciplines and/or fields of inquiry (Cumming, 1989; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2001). At a minimum, these educational demands suggest that students need opportunities to develop both content and language knowledge within their discipline, and to practice understanding and producing written and oral communication adhering to the rhetorical norms of the academic community to which they aspire to belong (Ferris, Hedgecock, & Hedgecock, 2013; Hyland, 2004). However, a critical approach also challenges the notion of traditional academic norms and conventions as necessarily reasonable and nonnegotiable, to support students in developing awareness of power relations associated with language in education and society (Benesch, 2013; Canagarajah, 2013; Chun, 2015; Kubota & Lehner, 2004). Finally, these processes are not only individual, but also reflective of the social and affective circumstances of the educational setting (Lee, 2015; Marshall, 2009; Preece, 2018), underscoring how particular social and linguistic practices come to be understood as appropriate (or not) for academic purposes (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

In the postsecondary context, language and communication tend to be in the background of teaching and learning across the disciplines. However, the inclusion of linguistic as well as content learning outcomes is key to maximizing language development and academic discourse socialization in education. Research emerging from scholarship on English medium instruction (EMI) and integrating content and language in higher education (ICLHE), particularly in Europe and Australia, has brought attention to the relevance of applied linguistics theories to higher education, particularly for understanding how to engage with the rich sociolinguistic realities of multilingual university settings (Dafouz & Smit, 2014; Murray, 2015; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). For instance, integrated language and content (ILC) instructional approaches such as content and language integrated learning (CLIL) have long been recognized in language teaching and learning, particularly in contexts where the classroom is the primary site for learners' use of the target language (Cenoz, Genesee, & Gorter, 2014; Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Llinares, 2015; Lin, 2016).

In the postsecondary context, wherein learning outcomes are not based on language, but on disciplinary content, student learning has been characterized as fluency in disciplinary discourses (Airey & Linder, 2009). Developing the social and semiotic practices of a discipline involves cultivation of the epistemological processes and habits of mind inherent in various disciplines and understanding how these practices engender particular kinds of meaning-making (Lemke, 2003). This perspective underlies what has been called a disciplinary approach to literacy instruction (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Gebhard, 2019; Moje, 2008; Schleppegrell & O'Halloran, 2011; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012), which anchors literacy learning in content areas, moving

SASKIA VAN VIEGEN & BRUCE RUSSELL

from generic strategy instruction to expanding participation in discipline-specific literacy practices.

Broadly, these various perspectives relevant to teaching and learning in higher education underscore how language is used to develop and communicate complex content knowledge. Although disciplines share common features in language use, they also engage in unique practices, with differences in how language constructs, disseminates, and evaluates knowledge, producing discipline-specific linguistic and communicative demands that tend not to be fully addressed in general EAP programs. Importantly, these understandings point to the value of engaging with disciplinarity and language for supporting international students in transition to degree studies at Canadian postsecondary institutions.

Integration of Disciplinary and Language Content in an EAP Bridging Program

The EAP Bridging Program (EBP) described herein is situated within a large Canadian research-intensive university in Eastern Canada. For academically qualified students[2] whose ELP assessment is below the university's language threshold for admission, the program offers a pathway to degree studies at the institution. Students who demonstrate achievement of an English language assessment that falls within the EBP admission range, such as IELTS Academic overall score 5.0 to 6.5, with no band lower than 5.0 and a minimum writing band 5.5, may be offered conditional acceptance, and pending successful completion of the EBP, full admission to the university. Successful completion of the EBP is defined as achieving a final grade of 60% or higher. Once students are given full admission, they may register for courses in their degree programs as would any other first-year student at the university.

The EBP has streams for undergraduate students in liberal arts and science, and applied science and engineering. Following an adjunct model (Fenton-Smith & Humphries, 2015), each stream requires students to complete one full-year undergraduate credit-bearing course related to their discipline, concurrent with three full-year noncredit English language and academic skills development courses, allowing students to begin accumulating credit toward their undergraduate degree during this bridging year. For students in the liberal arts and science stream, the credit-bearing course is in history (EBP100Y) and for students in the applied science and engineering stream, the credit-bearing course is an engineering practice course (EBP101Y). In both streams, noncredit courses include Academic Skills and Strategies, Critical Reading and Writing, and Academic Listening and Speaking. In the winter term, students add a noncredit, discipline-specific half course corresponding to their admission stream, selecting from among courses in economics, mathematics, engineering mathematics, psychology, science, and music. An overview of the program design is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
EBP Program Overview

Course	Weekly Hours	Duration	Instructional Time
Credit-bearing Discipline-specific course	2	24 weeks	48 hours
	1.5	24 weeks	36 hours
Academic Skills & Strategies	3	24 weeks	72 hours
Critical Reading & Writing	6	24 weeks	144 hours
Academic Listening & Speaking	6	24 weeks	144 hours
Noncredit Discipline-specific course	3	12 weeks	36 hours
Total			**480 hours**

Note. EBP = English for Academic Purposes Bridging Program.

EBP course materials include a variety of digital- and print-based academic content, including video recordings of academic lectures, short scholarly articles, empirical research abstracts, and library resources. Engaging with this content, instructors focus on lexis, grammar, and discourse of different text genres, supporting students to critically analyze how language functions as a resource for meaning-making in particular contexts. Teaching and learning tasks and culminating assignments are typical of what students are expected to accomplish during their undergraduate coursework, such as participating in group work, delivering presentations, conducting research, preparing annotated bibliographies, and writing reports and essays.

Methodology

Evaluation Purposes and Research Questions

The purpose of the program evaluation was to connect program policy and planning to implementation, examining the extent to which claims about program effectiveness and outcomes could be supported with evidence (Schwandt, 2003). The evaluation aimed to address a range of program delivery, support, and organizational needs, including accountability and decision-making purposes. In particular, the evaluation focused on whether and how the program contributes to students' academic performance in their degree programs. The following overarching questions guided the evaluation:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between international students' performance in the EBP and subsequent degree programs?

Research Question 2: What linguistic and academic competences are most significant for preparing international students for the transition to degree programs?

Participatory Evaluation

The evaluation followed a participatory methodology (Chouinard, 2013; Earl, 2004; Greene, 2000). Engaging program stakeholders in the process and practice of evaluation, the study was guided by participants' needs and concerns, and the requirements of the context. The rationale for this approach was based on a collaborative interest to generate knowledge about the program and to support its growth and improvement. In practice, this approach meant that program leaders, administrators, and faculty were involved in multiple stages of the evaluation process.

Mixed-Method Design. The evaluation took place between September 2013 and July 2015. For the purpose of complementarity (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989), quantitative and qualitative data were gathered to measure overlapping but distinct facets of the program. Institutional data from five cohorts of students in the liberal arts stream ($n = 470$) were collected[3], including standardized English-language proficiency assessment scores used for application and admission to the university and academic records. Qualitative data included focus groups with EBP faculty and tutorial assistants ($n = 13$) and open-ended interviews with broader university administrators ($n = 13$). Focus groups were also conducted with select current and former EBP students ($n = 25$).

Data Analysis. Data analysis comprised consecutive stages. Quantitative data were analyzed for broad trends and characteristics by an independent educational statistician using Access and SPSS statistical analysis software, including descriptive statistics, correlations, factor analysis, and regression. Analysis of these data provided substantive insights into students' academic performance, suggesting that language, while significant, was not the most important factor in students' academic experiences. Building on these insights, for the qualitative data, interview and focus group recordings were transcribed, and thematically coded using NVivo10 qualitative analysis software by members of the research team. The qualitative data generated explanatory understanding of the quantitative data, particularly what, beyond linguistic dimensions, contributed to students' experiences at the university.

Results

Quantitative data from student academic records were used to examine students' academic performance and persistence to graduation, including GPA in students' subsequent degree programs, EBP course grades, and standardized language proficiency assessments. These indicators were used by the program for performance measurement purposes, such as tracking and monitoring student progress after the EBP and identifying and supporting students facing persistent academic challenges during the EBP.

Undergraduate Degree Program Performance. Undergraduate degree program performance was considered as cumulative grade point average (CGPA) rather than annual GPA (AGPA); AGPA is a more dynamic measure that can change substantially year over year, whereas CGPA is a more stabilized measure calculated over several years. The CGPA ranges were determined based on the university's 4.0 scale and conversion table of letter grades to the following categories: Excellent, Good, Adequate, Marginal, Inadequate. The undergraduate degree program CGPA ranges for students who had taken the EBP are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

CGPA Distribution for Current and Former EBP Liberal Arts and Science Students between 2009 and 2013

	CGPA Ranges		
Category	Minimum GPA	Maximum GPA	Number of Students
Excellent	3.73	3.9	39
Good	2.7	3.69	172
Adequate	1.7	2.66	185
Marginal	0.76	1.68	62
Inadequate	0	0.52	12

Note. EBP = English for Academic Purposes Bridging Program; GPA = grade point average; CGPA = cumulative grade point average.

Notably, 396 students (84%) had a CGPA that could be classified as adequate or better. Although these students' ELP assessment was below the university's minimum threshold upon entry to their degree programs, these data suggest that the majority of EBP students were able to achieve an acceptable academic performance in their degree program according to the university's official grading scheme.

EBP Program Credit-Bearing Course Performance. EBP student performance in the program's credit-bearing undergraduate history course (EBP100Y) was considered based on students' final grade in the course. The grade categories were derived from the university's grading scheme (A, B, C, D, F) for four cohorts[4]. These data are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
EBP Grade Distribution (2009-2012 Cohorts)

EBP100Y Grade Distribution			
	Grade	Count	%
EBP100Y	A– to A+	73	20.1
EBP100Y	B– to B+	192	53.6
EBP100Y	C– to C+	77	21.5
EBP100Y	D– to D+	8	2.2
EBP100Y	F	8	2.2

Note. EBP = English for Academic Purposes Bridging Program.

This analysis shows that from a total of 358 students, 342 students achieved a final grade in EBP100Y that could be categorized as adequate or higher. Again, considering that students' ELP assessment was below the university's minimum standard, these data suggest that students were able to achieve acceptable final grades in a first-year undergraduate history course.

We also examined students' final grades in the EBP100Y course in relation to GPA during subsequent years of degree study. CGPA and AGPA were used as indicators of future academic performance after the EBP.[5] Significantly, students' final grades in EBP100Y correlated with their later CGPA (.681) and AGPA (.572).[6] Overall, the correlation suggests that the level of difficulty of the course was appropriate. If the course were too difficult, students would likely fall into higher CGPA categories in their later coursework. By contrast, if the course were too easy, students would likely slip into lower CGPA categories in their later coursework. However, these outcomes were not the case.

Standardized Language Proficiency Assessment. In consultation with program staff, students' ELP assessments (IELTS Academic and computer-based Test of English as a Foreign Language [TOEFL]) used for admissions purposes were grouped into high-, mid-, and low-range categories, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Standardized Language Proficiency Assessment Categories and Distribution (2009-2013)

	Cohort					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
High						
IELTS 6.5/TOEFL 79+	34%	26%	22%	20%	13%	21%
Mid						
IELTS 6/TOEFL 60-78	39%	53%	45%	41%	52%	46%
Low						
IELTS 5-5.5/No TOEFL scores below 69	27%	21%	33%	39%	35%	33%
Total	56	73	100	130	102	461

Note. IELTS = International English Language Testing System; TOEFL = Test of English as a Foreign Language.

Importantly, these data suggest that the standardized ELP assessment scores of the majority of EBP students tended not to be just below the university's threshold; rather, the scores were significantly below this threshold. Considering that most EBP students went on to achieve adequate or higher performance in degree programs, these data may suggest that EBP students were successful in the transition to undergraduate study at the institution, despite low ELP assessments.

Of particular concern within the EBP were students classified in the low-range category of ELP assessment. For this reason, we took a close look at these students' later academic performance across faculties at the university. Notably, about 70% of these students, from 2009 to 2012, achieved an Adequate or Good CGPA, with only 26% in the Marginal category, and 3% in the Inadequate category. We can conclude from these data that about 70% of EBP students in the category of Low ELP assessment were not at risk in their later degree programs, pointing to the limitations of relying solely upon language proficiency as a means of predicting students' academic performance in undergraduate degree programs. Moreover, these data suggest that the EBP is a useful pathway for admission of academically qualified international students whose standardized ELP assessment does not meet the university's minimum requirement. However, interpreting these data, it is important to recall the high academic standard for admission to this research-intensive university, wherein EBP students comprise those who have met this academic standard and can presumably maintain their strong academic performance, albeit with a need for further English language study. With results from the quantitative data in mind, we sought nuanced understanding of these findings from the emic perspectives of students and faculty in the program, as

SASKIA VAN VIEGEN & BRUCE RUSSELL

well as etic perspectives from other university stakeholders. Analysis of these perceptual data are presented below.

Student Perspectives. Although participating students tended to agree that grades and GPA were important to their experience in the EBP and in subsequent degree programs, students shared that personal growth and development were equally important. While grade scales provide a criterion referenced evaluation of student learning, learning itself is developmental and unique. Accordingly, participating students tended to view their language learning holistically, as the comment below illustrates:

> Marks sometimes doesn't really reflect, reflect how you, how you learn, what you learn. (Focus Group [FG]—4th-year Student, Biology)

This finding shed light on students' intrinsic motivations for language learning in the EBP, suggesting that evaluation of students' progress in the program should focus not only on assessment *of* learning, but also assessment *for* learning. While the program is positioned as a pathway for university admission, arguably gatekeeping, EBP students valued learning in general, suggesting that the program might concern itself with not only the diagnostic and summative, but also formative purposes of assessment to guide students' self-reflection, metacognition, and ongoing learning and development. Similarly, directing attention to what comprised the competences students valued for their transition to degree studies, participating students described more than language proficiency and academic skills. The quote below illustrates the kind of personal, social, and academic development that students seemed to value:

> I guess university is a place to prepare us to well-rounded individual, so I guess in terms of success we, we should look at all aspects of a person, not only academically but also interpersonal skills, communication skills and the people that made the activities they are all important. (FG—Current EBP Student)

Notably, this quote points to interpersonal and intercultural communication skills that are not articulated in EBP student learning outcomes. These aspects of academic socialization suggest that involvement and participation in academic communities extends beyond linguistic dimensions. Nonetheless, participating students reported that these processes of socialization did not come easily. The next quote points to a degree of struggle involved in these processes, as described by one participating student:

> Actually, when I first got here, I was very active in the campus activity, campus events, then when I found it is so hard to fit in when your language level is so poor, then I kind of feel like frustrated because it's hard to make accommodations with people and make

friends with them is so hard. Then I started to reduce my activities. Sometimes I sit in my room . . . sometimes I really force myself to emerge in with the campus to make me show up in more activities, to reach on more people. But sometimes it is really hard. (FG—3rd-year Student, Architecture)

This comment suggests participating students' opportunities for engagement were mediated by experiences of affect and well-being. For the EBP, this theme underscores the value in promoting students' self-efficacy and self-regulation and assisting students to cope with and surmount challenges of university life, particularly for international students whose family and support networks may be far away. Relating to this finding, participating students identified the role that supportive others played in facilitating their engagement and satisfaction throughout their transition to university study and beyond. Peers, teaching assistants, and faculty mentors were identified. The following quote highlights aspects of mediation and how this mediation supported student involvement and participation in university life, promoting positive affect and well-being:

In third year, first term I like felt it was to the bottom, but after that I, I tried to manage to get back, and start doing some research, some volunteer in the labs, so that was better . . . I feel like because um, you know, like I here so like in first year, second year all my friends still like Chinese. So um, and like we don't have that much interaction with um, like the professor or TA, or other people, only from the course. So, I didn't feel I was like my communication skill, working skill with local people here was, was improving but like uh, when I started doing like some volunteer work and, and uh, as a research uh, like I, I, I began to make friends with other people and learn yeah. And I feel it's much more useful. (FG—4th-year Student, Pharmacology)

Importantly, this quote points to the identity investment involved in students' academic socialization, and the situated nature of these processes. Students navigate and negotiate participation in particular learning communities, illustrated in this case by volunteering and research activities, in which students can begin to see themselves as legitimate participants. Similarly, participating students reported involvement that went beyond purely academic activities. From sports to clubs to leadership opportunities, these extracurricular spaces facilitated situated development of broader aspects of involvement. The following quote illustrates the depth and significance of involvement in university activities, which promoted both academic and personal development:

I really enjoyed the [university's] summer program. I have been to Italy and Hong Kong . . . because I really enjoy that, the experience of

being in Italy really changed my life, because in Italy, you know, it's quite different cultural, quite different language, and their point of view is just different from us . . . So yeah I mean like you, that experience made me like a global citizen. (FG—3rd-year Student, Actuary Science & Economics)

This finding pointed to experiences, beyond the EBP, that seemed to contribute to students' academic socialization and the kinds of competences that supported students' transition to university study.

Another common theme across participating student perspectives was the idea that the EBP had given them a step up, enabling a smoother transition to postsecondary study. Students noted, in particular, development of writing and research skills, as well as general preparation for university coursework, which they thought transferred to their subsequent coursework. The following quote illustrates:

I think it's a good, a good program for university life and uh, pick up some of the culture, it's a good experience. Well, for me it was just a program really prepare me both academically and uh, yeah, just academically prepare me a lot to really get me, get a start, I get started a head of time and hit the ground (FG—4th-year Student, Biology)

However, some participating students noted the program's emphasis on academic reading and writing neglected to prepare them for other teaching and learning activities at university, particularly how to write tests and multiple-choice exams. The quote below illustrates the diverse forms of instruction and assessment that students reported experiencing during their degree studies:

What I had in EBP is like a reading and writing and something, but during my psych classes through my first year classes, most of the classes require you to do multiple choice and so, that year the multiple, the multiple choice questions really upset yeah. (FG—3rd-year Student, Actuary Science & Economics)

This finding generated insight into the bias toward traditional language skills (oral communication, reading, writing) in the EBP, potentially overlooking the importance of other forms of instruction and assessment in higher education, such as developing technical skills and mathematical thinking. Relating to this finding, participating students reported interest in more context-specific integration of language and content in the program, particularly to meet the aims of preparing for transition to coursework in a range of disciplinary areas. The following quote illustrates students' interest in more diverse learning opportunities:

You do learn a lot so I think we need to preserve history but uh, we need to move, we need to add more subjects, we need to uh, have more courses about uh, our own uh, fields. So, I think uh, with when

it comes to learning, it's not enough so they need more courses. (FG—Current EBP Student)

Administrator Perspectives. Key administrator perspectives, articulated in interviews, were used to deepen understanding of how the university perceived the relationship between students' performance in the EBP and subsequent degree programs, as well as the linguistic and academic competences students needed to enhance to support their transition to degree programs. While stakeholders highlighted student involvement in extracurricular activities as important, they tended to prioritize academic performance, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

> Program success, we're looking at a good percentage of students completing the program and that they are doing fairly well in terms of their GPA, getting involved with student life, getting involved with research, sports teams, whatever it is they are interested in. So, having an active university life after the EBP but still maintaining a good GPA. (Interview [INT]—International Programs Staff)

Administrators noted that the EBP was part of a broader institutional commitment to supporting international students. They pointed to the program as an example of how the university took seriously its response to international student needs and internationalization mandates. In interpreting this finding, it is important to note that the number of students in the EBP was rather insignificant compared with overall international student enrolment at the University, raising questions about how well other international students are doing without the support and scaffolding of a program like the EBP. The quote below illustrates these discourses of institutional commitment:

> I think the EBP is part of what the Dean and the Provost can say, look we are accepting international students, but we are taking care of them, and we're looking after them, and we're making sure that they will have all the chances of success. I like the way the EBP is doing this, because it's not separating language instruction from content. (INT—Senior University Administrator)

Notably, the quote points to recognition that language is fundamental to disciplinary learning. This recognition demonstrates insight into the linguistic and academic competences EAP bridging programs in higher education should comprise. For instance, another theme that emerged was the perception that students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM disciplines) need to continue their technical learning during the EBP bridging year. For students coming from secondary school with a strong interest in science and mathematics, faculty administrators were concerned about interrupting students' progress in these fields, focusing on language at

the expense of STEM knowledge and skills. The comment below illustrates administrator concerns for students in STEM programs:

> The other challenge with the EBP program is since in their first year they don't do a lot of technical stuff, when they [students] have a year off of technical, they come back and their minds are a bit rusty and it takes a while for them to get back into the flow of doing calculus or doing like physics. (INT—Administrator, Engineering)

There seemed to be the perception that technical skills development was a core academic competence to support student transition to degree studies in some fields, pointing to the need for the EBP to give greater attention to teaching how language functions in technical disciplines.

Finally, administrators perceived the importance of socialization into the academic practices of postsecondary classrooms. The following quote illustrates:

> Some of the hope is that the students from the EBP come out better prepared, that they have better language skills . . . that they are able to contribute more in class, ask questions and engage in our community in a way that is different than students who haven't gone through the EBP. (INT—University Administrator)

As this quote suggests, evaluating international students' participation according to expectations for "model" students reveals faculty attitudes and beliefs toward international students, particularly high expectations for students to be engaged and enthusiastic in the classroom. Broadly, seeing student engagement and participation as an individual characteristic tends to overlook context, and whether the learning context is culturally responsive to international students' needs. Similarly, we noted that discussions about international students' communication skills seemed to maintain a view of communication as individual competence, rather than as a function of sociocultural, educational, or institutional dimensions. The quote below illustrates this bias, which may underlie deficit orientations to integration of international students in the university:

> Part of the, the issue is, is that, as much as our faculty members say they want those communications skills the way they test and the, the curriculum is designed it really um, puts a lot more focus on the math and the physics and they can get away without doing a lot of communication until they get to 4th year when all of a sudden, it's like you've got to write a thesis and the, and then the profs are like what are you trying to write, or when they are thesis presentations they have a, a lot of trouble um, doing those presentations. (INT—Engineering Faculty Member)

EBP Faculty Perspectives. Examining the linguistic and academic competences international students need to support their transition to degree studies, EBP faculty noted the need to support students in seeing beyond the expectations of discrete tasks and courses, toward broader processes of knowledge construction in higher education. For instance, the quote below illustrates faculty interest in building horizontal and vertical integration of learning within and beyond the EBP:

> In terms of content for example, one difficult, difficulty that often um, first year students have particularly is the ability to, synthesize information or um, build their own understanding or arguments um, from a bit of a distance right? Like you are focusing less on the trees and more on the uh, the forest so to speak. And that is a struggle throughout, you know, and, and trying to force them to think from lecture to lecture, to lecture as separate units, um, rather than thinking about how what we are talking about today connects to what do we, have been talking about in previous weeks. (INT—Social Science Faculty Member)

This quote highlights the centrality of building students' capacities for meaning-making and knowledge building. These processes deepen and develop synchronically across courses and disciplinary content areas, requiring students to transfer learning to different domains of knowledge construction and creation. Similarly, language faculty in the EBP described their role in helping students to draw on the scaffolding provided in the language classes to support their learning in the credit-bearing EBP disciplinary course:

> I try to reinforce students to build connections themselves between what's happening in the history course and what's happening in the content for our course because that's one of the key skills that we try to make is building connections and thinking creatively. (FG—Language Faculty)

However, we found that participating language faculty tended to describe their role as "giving" or transmitting these abilities. The quote below illustrates this transmission orientation:

> In engineering, you're really following their program and trying to give them the skills—and getting them to understand the expectations as you go. (FG—Language Faculty)

The persistence of skills-based language teaching methods is evident in this statement, harkening to the challenge EBP faculty described above in undoing orientations to learning as achieving a set of outcomes and about more than marks. Moving beyond a skills-based approach, EBP faculty also described critical approaches and interest in generating critical understandings:

SASKIA VAN VIEGEN & BRUCE RUSSELL

Rather than just saying "this is a history book it's, it's all true", you can get into who wrote this, who might have a problem with that, how do we know what's true here? I don't want to say the content is not important, but it's more about how, what, how can we trust this? Could there be a debate over what's written? Regardless of what it is; debates and thinking, reading between the lines. (FG—Teaching Assistant)

Promoting critical thinking manifests as supporting students to understand how ideas are developed and mobilized through lexicogrammatical and discourse features of particular genres. Disciplinary faculty in the EBP also described helping students understand how language functions in the construction of disciplinary knowledge. For instance, the following quotes illustrate how these tasks were approached in the engineering and history courses:

The professor would give them examples and problems to solve that were taxing in terms of language they used and sometimes they struggled to figure out what they are actually trying to find so we did that in a way to try to improve their problem-solving skills through the use of English. I think it's been well designed it wasn't just like here's some calculus you can do—he really tried to get them to understand and be able to communicate what they are looking for and how they solved the problem. So, it was a course designed very intentionally to get them to use technical skills but also use other skills in conjunction with them. (INT—Engineering Faculty Member)

With essays, I said to them you may have learned how to do an essay in your language skills classes, but you might not have learnt how to write a history essay, which is different. I try and teach them that side of it. (FG—Teaching Assistant)

We found that faculty teaching the EBP disciplinary courses recognized the integration of language and content, and the role that faculty play in teaching the conventions of literacy in their discipline. These efforts encompassed teaching both declarative and procedural knowledge—indexing how knowledge is produced in the discipline, and, concurrently, how this knowledge is formalized at a textual level, through lexicogrammatic choices and genres. The following quote illustrates:

The content of the, the content is, is there because you need the content to be able to—but if they forget uh, you know, if, if a year from now they don't remember and the actual content I, I, that's not, I think what they, they should get out of it. But if they still remember how that they, they you know, need to they need to look at things critically, or they, that they have to, perhaps, or how to, to evaluate

different kinds of academic sources in the library . . . more than actual little factual details and, so for example exams uh, we do have a, a final exam and a, and a term test um, they tend to be less about recalling it exact facts than building arguments and, and you know, writing an essay or things like that. (INT—Social Science Faculty Member)

Discussion

The first research question guiding the evaluation concerned understanding students' academic performance relative to their language proficiency and performance in the EBP. The evaluation found that academically qualified students were potentially able to bridge the linguistic demands of undergraduate study, for which the EBP may have played a facilitative and supportive role. Importantly, this finding should not be interpreted as universities not needing a minimum language proficiency requirement; rather, the finding provides a possible rationale for EAP bridging programs that prepare students for subsequent degree studies, particularly programs that are aligned with the disciplinary literacies students need for degree study.

The second research question sought to examine what linguistic and academic competences were perceived as most significant for preparing students for transition to degree programs. Perceptual data from interviews and focus groups shed light on not only the varied challenges international students can face, but also students' diverse learning goals, with some suggestion of how these experiences contribute to students' sense of well-being, investment, and participation in academic life (Darvin & Norton, 2014). For the EBP, these data were significant because they suggest that preparing students for transition to degree programs encompasses more than developing English language competence. These processes are similar to what other Canadian researchers (Duff, 2010; Kobayashi, Zappa-Hollman, & Duff, 2017; Morita, 2009; Seror, 2014) have identified in terms of the complex social and cultural aspects of academic discourse socialization. International students in the EBP negotiated participation across various social and socially situated contexts in the university, in language and disciplinary content learning, but also in extracurricular spaces. These processes involved various agents of disciplinary socialization, including peers, language and disciplinary faculty, as well as teaching assistants, and extended over multiple years, suggesting that academic discourse socialization is dynamic and ongoing throughout the course of students' undergraduate degree study. Broadly, these concerns suggest that language teaching in higher education is not a technical or instrumental activity, but an opportunity to socialize students in practices to gain access to, engage in, and critique new knowledge and learning communities.

Through its programming, the EBP provided some opportunities for students to develop these practices, particularly in the credit- and noncredit-bearing disciplinary courses in the program. Faculty noted the importance of apprenticing students into the language of the disciplines, underscoring the need to scaffold students' engagement with academic networks, communicative practices, and conventions (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). Broadly, these efforts point to the need for a disciplinary literacy approach to EAP in higher education, which can support students to understand how language works in particular disciplines, and to discover that as knowledge becomes more specialized and complex, so, too, does the language that constructs such knowledge (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010). Going beyond teaching and learning text genres and practicing language skills, a disciplinary literacy approach extends to the multimodal, multisemiotic dimensions of disciplinary knowledge—of which language is only a part—especially in less linguistically demanding academic domains such as engineering, mathematics, and computer science.

Language is core to developing and communicating conceptual understandings, thus, all disciplinary teaching and learning is fundamentally related to language teaching and learning. Moreover, disciplinary learning itself is "a form of critical literacy because it builds an understanding of how knowledge is produced in the disciplines, rather than just building knowledge in the disciplines" (Moje, 2008, p. 97). Higher education provides a natural context for supporting and developing these literacies, comprising not just transmission of conceptual or content-area knowledge, but also teaching students to *do* the discipline, for instance, as an engineer or historian, constructing knowledge through the complex of representations, tools, and activities of the discipline (Airey & Linder, 2009).

Broadly, the results of the evaluation suggest that the EBP addressed a range of linguistic and academic skills, encompassing both general and discipline-specific teaching and learning needs that can support international students in their transition to undergraduate degree studies at the institution. More specifically, the evaluation articulated the need for a concrete approach to disciplinary literacy, particularly to move the EBP along the continuum from general EAP to a more context- and discipline-specific ESAP model. However, the findings were subject to several limitations. Most critically, the qualitative data were self-reported; other sources of data, such as classroom observation data, or artifacts of student learning, could triangulate the findings presented herein. In addition, the statistical data analysis methods required consistent and comparable student records year over year. Going forward, the EBP has taken note of this need and has developed a data management protocol to specify systematic collection of data for future cohorts. Similarly, data were unavailable to compare EBP student academic records with records of international students who are directly admitted to the

university, which might have yielded further insights into the effectiveness of the EBP.

Conclusion

Many Canadian postsecondary institutions are under pressure to increase international student enrolment, often to 20% to 25% of the undergraduate student population. Bridging programs for international students conditionally admitted to postsecondary institutions offer pathways for admission to undergraduate degree programs, and play a critical role in the academic discourse socialization of these students. In general, the programs can be expensive (often more than CAD$10,000 per year), and long in duration (4-8 months) often without credit toward university degree studies. Moreover, credit-bearing English language studies, for instance, English as a second language (ESL) courses held in education or applied linguistics programs, tend to be offered only as lower division university courses. Taken together, these are compelling reasons to design and deliver effective EAP programs to support student learning in higher education and to evaluate, monitor, and report on whether and how the programs support students both during the bridging year and beyond.

Notes

1. The term *students* is used to reflect the assumption that all students are bi/multilingual, with rich linguistic repertoires and varying degrees of proficiency across languages; the term *international students* is used to refer to students specifically designated by the institution as those without Canadian citizenship or Canadian permanent residency, who pay international student fees.

2. Academic qualifications for the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Bridging Program (EBP) are identical to those for regular admission to the university; however, English proficiency requirements are lower than those for direct admission.

3. Consistent and comparable academic records for students in the applied science and engineering stream were not available, therefore, only data for liberal arts and science stream were included in the quantitative analysis.

4. Data for 2013 cohort were unavailable at the time of the quantitative analysis as final course grades had not yet been calculated.

5. For the 2013 cohort, both the cumulative grade point average (CGPA) and annual GPA (AGPA) are one and the same.

6. Calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficients where 1.0 is a perfect positive correlation.

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