Principles underpinning an EAP programme designed in collaboration with subject departments

Angela Hulme

The University of Leeds, UK

A.L.Hulme@leeds.ac.uk

Background to the EAP programme

In **summer 2016** Language Centre (**LC**) introduced a **6-week pre-sessional** programme composed of **9 subject strands**. Its overarching principle: close **collaboration** between **faculties / schools** and **LC** in order to introduce students to **academic practices** of their **future Masters** programmes.

Vision: faculties / schools provided **content** in the form of texts, assessment tasks and lectures; LC provided **EAP** and **programme support**. Named **Content-Based [CB]** programme.

Practicalities: LC developed an **EAP programme** based on content provided. **Subject specialists** acted as **content advisors** and most had some minor involvement in the programme delivery e.g. giving lectures.
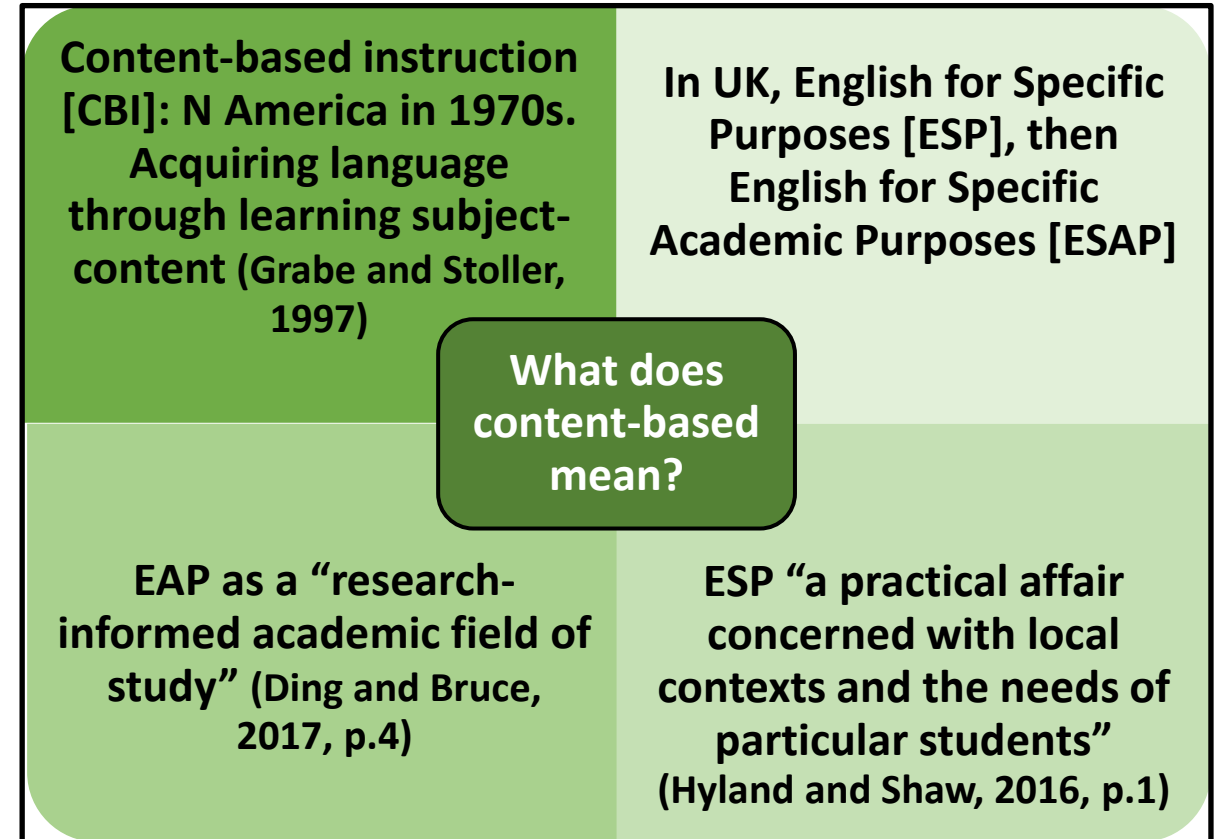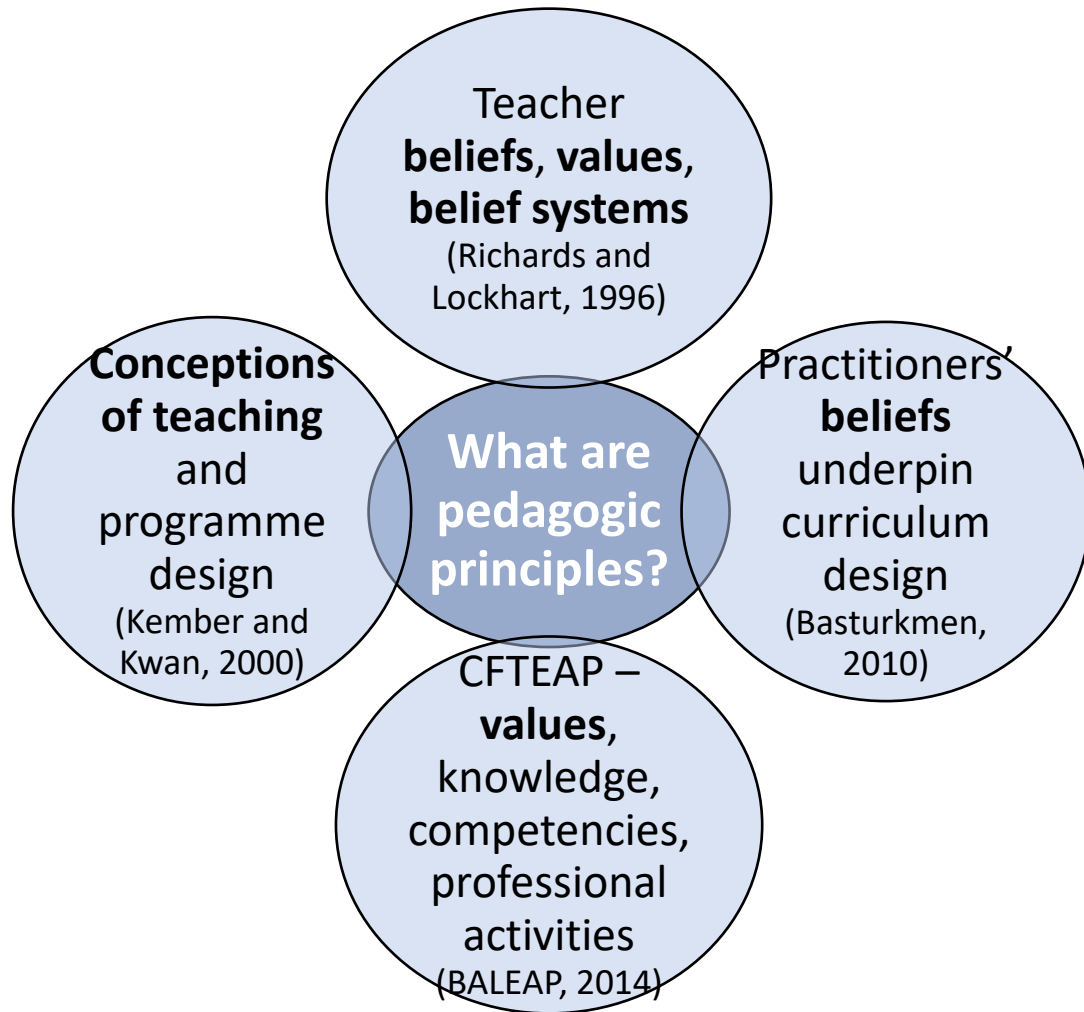
Wider benefits: CB programme feeds into **in-sessional** programme. It supports **post-graduate students** (international but also 'home' students) on their Masters programmes and PhD study.

My involvement: **course designer** and leader of strand, Business Management and Enterprise, 2016-2018.

My scholarship project: methodology

- Investigation into 2 questions:
  - **What do we mean by content-based (CB)?**
  - **What were the underlying principles of our CB programme?**
- Definition of scholarship: **practitioner research** – an attempt to investigate an issue relevant to my own context.   A messy process (Bond, 2020) and subject to time constraints.
- **Literature review**: Content-based and ESAP; pedagogical principles.
- Examination of **university documentation**: meeting minutes, briefing notes, module objectives / learning outcomes, course leader role descriptions, external examiner and inspection reports.
- **Survey** of **12 course designers**: semi-structured interviews, repeated listenings of recorded interviews, analysis of recordings, identification of themes.

My scholarship project: literature review

Teacher **beliefs**, **values**, **belief systems** (Richards and Lockhart, 1996)

Conceptions of teaching and programme design (Kember and Kwan, 2000)

What are pedagogic principles?

Practitioners' **beliefs** underpin curriculum design (Basturkmen, 2010)

CFTEAP – **values**, knowledge, competencies, professional activities (BALEAP, 2014)

Content-based instruction [CBI]: N America in 1970s. Acquiring language through learning subject-content (Grabe and Stoller, 1997)

In UK, English for Specific Purposes [ESP], then English for Specific Academic Purposes [ESAP]

What does content-based mean?

EAP as a "research-informed academic field of study" (Ding and Bruce, 2017, p.4)

ESP "a practical affair concerned with local contexts and the needs of particular students" (Hyland and Shaw, 2016, p.1)

At University of Leeds, 'content' is a term familiar to the wider University

My scholarship project: survey findings

What were the principles underpinning our approach to **content**?

EAP is concerned with authenticity, adopting **authentic texts, tasks and practices of the academic community** (Hyland & Shaw, 2016).

The programme's purpose was "to prepare students more effectively for their **future academic programmes**" (University of Leeds, 2015).

Module objective 3: Be developing an awareness and understanding of the **culture, context and discourse of academic study in the field of XXX.**

Academic practices and assessments of destination departments

1 designer disagreed

11 designers agreed

Course designer 1: "a lot of the academic practices and assessments came very much from the **nature of what the academic lead gave us.**"

Course designer 2: "**information about assessments** showed it's very important to communicate clearly in Maths."

Course designer 3: ""Another great thing about doing the content-based [courses] is that we started to understand the **complexity of what they [students] are studying.**"

What were the principles underpinning our **EAP practice**?

Needs Analysis

Academic skills

Genre analysis

Independent learning

Discussion of **student needs, genres, assessment tasks and practices** with "**secondary stakeholders**" (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016, p.560), i.e. subject specialists from departments.

Different approaches: "**less teaching of 'atomised' skills**"; "put the **onus on students** to find a little bit more about that"; "developing an **ability to communicate in academic life**."

Different approaches: analysis of **authentic texts** (student writing / academic texts), introduction to **range of texts**, **training students** to analyse own texts.

Important principle, but was **not discussed in detail**. Assumption: part of Masters study and process of individual learning.

Other principles: assessment tasks, CLT, communicative competency, educational theories, language systems, language learning strategies, learning outcomes, content knowledge, students' backgrounds, teachability, teacher knowledge.

My scholarship project: constraints and conclusions

Constraints on principles and course design had a significant impact:

- **official** requirements
- **deadlines**
- programme **length**
- **pragmatic** considerations
- professional **competencies**
- **collegial** approach
- **changes** in designers and leaders
- **varying degrees of involvement** by departments.

Conclusions

- Principles: **complex**, **evolving**, influenced by **stakeholders**, shaped by **constraints**, operating on different levels of **explicitness**, affected by issues of **competency**, **transparency** and **orthodoxy**.

- **Shared principles** should be basis for an **ESAP approach** to programme design.

- **Specificity** reflects **diversity of destination departments** and should be encouraged.

- At Leeds, there have been **changes** since 2016, but approach is **still ESAP**.

Discussion: some challenges and solutions

What are the challenges of designing an ESAP programme with subject departments?	Possible solutions
Need to meet **increased expectations of students and departments**. ESAP is preferable, but some programmes more English for General Academic Purposes, if students progress to wide range of receiving departments.	**Flexible design approach** needed. Extra-curricular input from departments could help. Ultimately, more buy-in from departments increases specificity.
Relationships with subject areas: variation in range of commitment / understanding from departments / subject specialists.	**Relationships between insessional lecturers and departments** increases willingness to participate in CB pre-sessional.
Complexity of ESAP programme: more specialised than general presessional, more evidence-based / based on actual knowledge of specific disciplines, and therefore more demanding of course developers.	**Consider training needs of course designers**. Provide training through different means e.g. participation in conferences / forums, reading literature, CPD (Ding and Campion, 2016)
Extra resources: delivering a complex programme is time-consuming.	**Course designers need ring-fenced time** to develop bespoke programmes / materials, but also support needed for administrative staff and directors.

Discussion: integration between EAP and disciplines

What can we learn about **integration** between **EAP** and **disciplines** at Leeds?

- **Pre-sessional** programme is now **more fully integrated** with **in-sessional** programmes. Academic journey starts on summer programmes and continues to in-sessional programmes. Many **pre-sessional programme designers / leaders** are also **leaders on in-sessional** programmes.

- **Close working relationship** between LC and other departments allows this to happen.

- Integration of **LC processes** with **university processes**. Pre-2016 LC had its own processes, but it is now fully aligned e.g. all courses in LC go before a Programme Approval Group.

- Also, pre-sessional programme is **sponsored** and **supported** at **faculty** and **senior executive group levels** – financial, strategic.

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