Knowledge-oriented perspectives on EAP: Some tools for thinking and practice[1]

Steve Kirk, Durham University

The *Knowledge in EAP* PIM was conceived and planned to enable dialogue. The write-ups from the *world cafés* highlight just how far this was a success. I thought I'd have a go at continuing in something of the same spirit by presenting my own thoughts in the form of themed exchanges. These are essentially the same ideas offered at the start of the day in Northampton but reframed from the perspective of imagined practitioner questions and challenges. This functions to respond to some of the conversations and comments that emerged during the day. I hope this stays true to the original talk, while also underscoring for those not already invested in a knowledge-oriented perspective on EAP why these things might matter for practice and research in our profession.

These thoughts are introductions and signposts. My intention is to show briefly how opening up and thinking about knowledge on its own terms also opens up different ways of thinking about and practising EAP. This is not about offering answers, but rather about asking different kinds of question – to make visible things that perhaps we didn't notice before. Imagining alternatives is a first step towards development and change. New perspectives may lead to new ways of practising – whether in research, curriculum or the classroom. And hopefully, that will lead to enhanced educational experiences and outcomes for students. I do not go into great amounts of detail. There is a small but growing body of work that you can go to for more, if what appears here sparks an interest. The references at the end (and those that formed the pre-PIM reading) offer some focused and accessible treasure hunting.

Most EAP practitioners have good knowledge of grammar (whatever form this may take). Very few, however, have a good *grammar of knowledge*. The overarching argument here (and the starting point for the Northampton PIM) is that better understanding knowledge itself offers a potentially productive means of developing EAP practice and research. It is hard to understand and work with what we cannot see clearly or name. A starting point, therefore, is to dig into and problematise 'knowledge', in order to make visible some potentially important distinctions and to see greater nuance. This will not be for the purpose of theoretical reflection, however; this will be to suggest real-world implications and applications for the practice of EAP. The tools used for this digging work come from a social realist perspective on research and education. The six exchanges below each introduce one key idea and component concepts. These draw particularly on Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), a framework for educational research and practice developed by Karl Maton at the University of Sydney. LCT builds on the work of Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu, among others, and offers EAP concepts, case studies and approaches that may provide one avenue to explore in seeking to move the sector forwards.

---

[1] This is an expanded version of the opening talk given at the 'Knowledge in EAP' BALEAP Professional Issues Meeting (PIM), University of Northampton, 22 June 2019

'Knowledge' – What's the problem?

Exchange 1

Talk of knowledge is not new. People like Ken Hyland and Ian Bruce have both written about EAP practitioners needing to understand disciplinary knowledge and how it's produced. We know that student knowledge matters and that teacher knowledge matters. What's different here?

Talk of 'knowledge' is increasingly common in EAP practice and research. There is a growing recognition and acceptance in the research literature, as Susie notes in her introduction to these summary write-ups, that language choices are bound up with knowledge practices (Coffin & Donohue, 2014; Hood, 2011; Kuteeva & Negretti, 2016; Martin, 2011). It is not clear that we actually agree on what this actually means within and for educational practice in EAP, however. It's also not clear that we're necessarily always talking about the same things.

Knowledge is different from knowing

To take one example, we can look back at the opening comment to Exchange 1, above. The 'knowledge' in 'disciplinary *knowledge*' and 'student / teacher *knowledge*' is not of the same kind. The former refers to a body of theoretical and/or research insights that has been generated by a particular community and organised in some way (e.g. as frameworks; as journal papers; as textbooks; as module overviews). The latter refers to embodied *understandings* among individuals in a given community. This is also (intentionally) the case in the introduction further above, where I mention in passing that "…EAP practitioners have good *knowledge* of grammar…". Hyland's (2005) model of interaction (stance and engagement) is not the same as my understanding of that model. That seems self-evident, yet in discussing 'theoretical knowledge' or 'knowledge of language' we routinely collapse these differences: Knowledge is conflated with *knowing* (Maton, 2014).

Likewise, an EAP pre-sessional curriculum, as made material in the pages of a coursebook, study pack, class slides and/or e-resources, is not the same as what a student comes to learn and understand from that curriculum. We engage students via texts, tasks, language input and (perhaps) discipline-linked content, with very little problematising of these objects of instruction as forms of knowledge. There is very little, if any, interrogation of the form that (in this instance) curricular content takes. Social realist perspectives on knowledge suggest that the different forms that knowledge might take are far from trivial, and that these result in different forms of learning. Curricular content is not a neutral vehicle for the communication of academic knowledge (Bernstein, 1990). A 'genre-based approach' will manifest in various ways through the design decisions of materials writers. Text and task selection, the way this is made material through language and images, and how this is all then sequenced and paced[2] may result in quite different realisations of the 'same' approach. A social realist perspective argues that this can result in quite different forms of learning of the 'same' concepts / content (e.g. 'learning language' vs 'learning *about* language' vs 'learning *through* language' – cf. Halliday, 1993). This can include both the objects of learning: what Bernstein called the *instructional discourse*, and also the implicit messages transmitted through curricular design and pedagogic practice about legitimate ways of being, thinking and practising as

---

[2] E.g. implicit or explicit time /space devoted to particular texts or exercises

an EAP student (or teacher): what Bernstein distinguished as the *regulative discourse* (Bernstein, 1990; 2000). Thus, seeing knowledge[3], examining what shape it takes and asking what this means for teaching and learning become important concerns.

Exchange 2
My EAP is already informed by knowledge. I'm an ESAP teacher, I understand disciplinary differences and I bring that understanding to my materials design and to my teaching.

Biologists and classicists do different things, so they use different language. We know that (e.g. Hyland, 2004). The tendency in EAP practice, however, has been to strip away textual and linguistic insights from the values and practices which give rise to them. This leaves behind only the shell of what happens in our students' departments. To reduce the work of academics to only language provides an overly simplistic view of the task faced by students entering university and/or transitioning to a new disciplinary culture. Descriptions from genre analysis and corpus counts give us insights into *the what* of academic text and language patterns, but little view into how or why these choices also shape and are shaped by the knowledge practices they represent. Seeing inside knowledge can offer richer learning experiences for students, I think, and expands what it can (and should?) mean to be an EAP practitioner.

Splitting the atom: Knowledge takes different shapes in different contexts
Analytically separating knowledge out from how it comes to be known enables taking knowledge on its own terms. And looking across communities and over time reveals not only unity and stability but also diversity and change. To take disciplinary knowledge building practices in the university as an example, Bernstein argued that different concerns and objects of study across the faculties results in disciplines developing in quite different ways (Bernstein, 2000). Think, for example, of journal paper content in molecular chemistry vs analytic philosophy vs ancient history. The natural sciences, with their interest in generating ever more concise formulations of ever wider sets of phenomena and data, tend to build knowledge 'hierarchically'. Ever-growing insights and understandings of the world are captured as increasingly abstract generalisations, with each new formulation incorporating and building cumulatively on what has come before. Eventually (in principle, if not yet in practice), this builds towards a 'theory of everything', as is the goal in physics.

If we consider how research knowledge builds over time in EAP, it is not clear that is does so in the same way as physics. Something different is going on. Disciplinary language patterns established through corpus creation and analysis, for example, provide insights and generalisations that can be drawn on usefully for EAP materials production. Without an overarching theory of language, however, these insights are unlikely to build vertically towards an analogous 'theory of everything'. Instead, they build *horizontally*, replicating the same kinds of knowledge for different (con)texts – research article introductions in economics; conference bios in the humanities; lecturer discourse in undergraduate sociology seminars; etc. The result is a collection of linguistic patterns that remain

---

[3] Recognising knowledge as a product of human minds but not reducible to those minds is not new. Popper made it, for instance, writing about the philosophy of science (Popper, 1972). However, it is in the developments of Bernstein, through social realism to, in particular, Legitimation Code Theory that practicable insights for educational practice are really beginning to emerge. See the reference list for key works and suggested reading.

relatively isolated from each other. Each new corpus and study contribute another pattern that can stand *next to* others, but not one that *builds* on and *subsumes* others, enabling higher-level understandings of *why* different texts take the form that they do, or *why* they differ in the ways that they do.

There are different modes of inquiry and theorising in EAP, of course. EAP research draws on approaches that offer additions and alternatives. The point here is that 'knowledge' is not one thing: it takes different forms and builds over time in different ways, given the norms and values of given (academic) communities and their practices. 'Theory' takes many forms and this may enable or constrain the knowledge building potential of a field (Maton, 2014). Just as teasing apart 'knowledge', 'knowing' and 'knowers' enables different kinds of questions to be asked, so too does seeing that knowledge takes different shapes: What are the knowledge building practices in EAP research? How far are we building knowledge *cumulatively* and how far are we generating *segmented* insights that remain relatively unconnected (Maton, 2009)? To what extent is there variation, resonance and/or conflict across communities engaged in EAP oriented research? What are the principles that shape what constitutes valued knowledge in one EAP community compared to another? How does this shape who is perceived to be 'the right kind of knower' in EAP? What are the effects of segmented practices on the way we are perceived by other academic communities? What are the effects of segmented practices on the way we grow as a field? And how might adopting more cumulative knowledge building practices change the affordances for development and growth?

The diagram below captures visually Bernstein's distinctions between hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures. It is interesting to reflect on how research in EAP builds over time. When are we closer to the segmented practices of the humanities, offering new interpretations[4] on the same object of inquiry (texts)? As in the depiction of the social sciences below, how far might we see something akin to 'warring triangles' (Martin, 2007, p.59; Wignell, 2007) *within* EAP, with sometimes competing schools of thought each vying for status and legitimacy (e.g. ESP genre; Academic Literacies; Critical EAP)? How does seeing this help better understand the knowledges we are building? What opportunities does this offer to cross boundaries, towards more cooperative means of building the field?
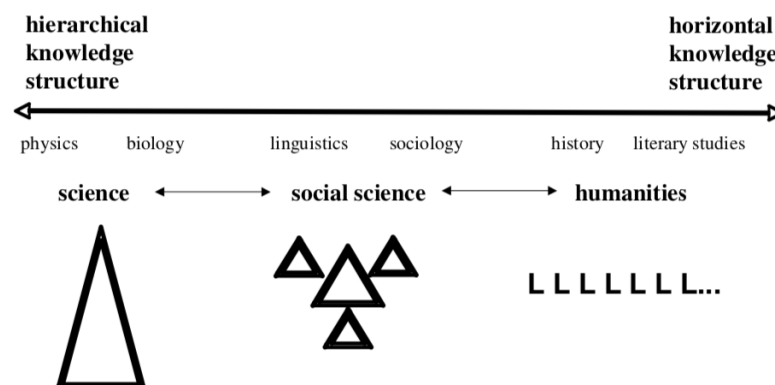
(Martin, 2011, p. 43)

---

[4] New 'languages', hence the 'L L L L L…" in Martin's (2011) diagram.

We can also apply the same thinking to curriculum practices and to pedagogy. If you have designed an EAP programme yourself or taught a course designed by someone else, consider what *form* of curriculum it was. Did it build *cumulatively*, with each object of instruction progressively subsumed and incorporated into what followed? Did the course build *vertically* (Muller, 2007; Maton, 2009), moving students beyond generic skills work (e.g. talk of 'skimming' and 'scanning' in reading) to higher level understandings of language and text? Or did the course sometimes (often?) build *horizontally*, proceeding through a collection of lessons, rather than a coherent course? Did the main objects of instruction ('topic sentences'; 'paragraph structure'; 'nominalisation'; 'essay structure') sit largely separate from each other, requiring the teacher and students to forge connections themselves? If the latter, what did this mean for the quality of student learning across practitioners with different levels of expertise? How far was the course cumulatively designed on paper but *segmentally enacted* in the classroom? In my early experience as a pre-sessional programmes director it was a stark moment of realisation to see the reverse: that our 'course' actually comprised a stitched-together series of lessons that relied on great teachers to weave it all together. I did not have the language then, but we had a segmental curriculum with (when we got lucky with summer EAP hiring) cumulative pedagogies.

These concepts thus offer EAP a new language to examine the basis of what we do. LCT offers additional concepts to explore and unearth *how* these structures develop (or do not). The Semantics toolkit, for instance, evolved to explain how it is that cumulative knowledge building is achieved (or not) in a research field, university curriculum or school classroom (Maton, 2014). Semantics has been enacted in a wide range of educational contexts now, for instance, to conceptualise and enhance curriculum design (e.g. Shay, 2012; Shay & Steyn, 2016) and teaching (e.g. Clarence, 2016). There is also growing work in EAP (Brooke, Monbec & Tilakaratna, 2019; Kirk, 2017; Kirk, 2018; Monbec, 2018; Szenes, Tilakaratna & Maton, 2015). This is facilitating greater shared awareness and understanding of the forms that EAP takes on the ground, and is enabling a more critical interrogation of how far such forms are the best we can do for our students.

Powerful knowledges

Once we see that knowledge takes different forms, it also becomes clear that not all forms are equal. Social realists identify theoretical knowledge, in particular, as *powerful knowledge* (Young, 2008). Theory is 'powerful' in the sense that it is not tied to a particular real-world context and thus has transfer potential *across* contexts. Asking EAP students to turn a verb phrase into a noun phrase might be a useful and practical task while redrafting a given piece of writing. However, if students understand the why and the how of nominalisation itself, this higher-order knowledge can be enacted and re-enacted across any number of pieces of writing. Indeed, on this particular area, SFL linguists have suggested that nominalisation is a primary means by which verticality (and thus powerful knowledge) is achieved through language (Martin, 2011, p. 44). Current talk of *the knowledge-rich curriculum* in mainstream school settings is also informed primarily by this concept of powerful knowledge, and by researchers in the Bernsteinian tradition (e.g. Rata, 2019).

Importantly, there is also a distinction to be made between the inherent value of a particular form of knowledge and access to, or 'ownership' of, this knowledge. As suggested above, knowledge is frequently reduced to minds that know. However, knowledge is also often reduced to social power (Bernstein, 1990; Maton, 2010a, p. 37). The questions asked in education have historically often

focused more on who has the knowledge (and who doesn't), rather than what form(s) that knowledge takes. This is potentially one of the risks of Critical EAP and Academic Literacies oriented pedagogies: an over-focus on critiquing 'knowledge of the powerful', rather than (also) facilitating access to 'powerful knowledge' (cf. Young, 2008). This is not to devalue such work, but rather to highlight the "knowledge blindness" that is seen as pervading much educational research and practice (Maton, 2014, p. 3-8).

The now infamous declaration from British Conservative Party politician Michael Gove[5] that "[…] the people in this country have had enough of experts…" is a classic example of knowledge-knower conflation and of (deliberately?) confusing what is known from who knows it. 'Knowledge of the powerful' concerns sociologically determined access to knowledge. 'Powerful knowledge' concerns questions of *epistemic power* (Maton, 2014); i.e. the inherent value of the knowledge itself. The call to reject what experts say neatly, rhetorically and dangerously focuses on the former while simultaneously but implicitly rejecting the value of the latter.

In passing, it is worth mentioning that the notion of 'powerful knowledge' is one area where social realism and LCT now differ. Where Young and others retain Bernstein's focus on theoretical knowledge as powerful, recent LCT studies suggest that different forms of knowledge may be powerful in different contexts. I return to *knowers* in education below (see exchange 5) and, very briefly, to questions of 'who gets to know?' and 'whose powerful knowledge?'.

Exchange 3

I'm a language teacher. I'm not a researcher and I'm not a theoretician. I realise some people might want to do this kind of thing but I prefer to live in the real world. I've got lessons to plan and students to teach.

Dichotomies are everywhere in EAP. The false binaries inherent in a comment such as above are common instances: teacher vs researcher; theory vs practice; abstract vs concrete. These are at best unhelpful and, at worst, debilitating and reinforcing of EAP's marginal status in the academy. There is also a rather dangerous moral charging implied by polarising the activities of EAP in this way, whereby one of the either/or choices is devalued through siding with one camp or other. We can see this, for instance, in Susie Cowley-Haselden's co-authored chapter (Cowley-Haselden & Monbec, 2019), another one of our pre-readings for the Knowledge in EAP PIM. Susie and Laetitia's survey of 40 EAP professionals revealed conflicting and conflicted practitioner relationships with theory, with "[s]ome respondents […] downplay[ing] theory by describing it as superfluous, both for the tutor and even more so for the student" (Cowley-Haselden & Monbec, 2019, p. 43). The converse view, that theory matters most and that practice has little to offer 'proper research', is equally unhelpful. We need to see the spaces *in between* the poles of (e.g.) 'theory' and 'practice'. We also need to see that 'theory' and 'practice' are rather blunt terms, masking the much richer reality of practices in EAP and across the university. Seeing *forms* of knowledge enables us to move beyond these binaries.

---

[5] Interview with Faisal Islam, Sky News, 3 June 2016. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGgiGtJk7MA

Topologies not typologies: Dissolving false binaries

LCT offers a different mode of thinking and theorising that helps to break down these dichotomies and see through to productive alternatives. It rejects *either/or* thinking and polarising cries of 'practical insights, please, not abstract theory!'. It embraces instead a *both/and* approach, opening up and exploring also the shades of nuance between poles.

The LCT dimension of Semantics (Maton, 2014), in particular, is proving fruitful in exploring meaning-making practices in education in more granular and productive ways. One component concept, *semantic gravity*, for instance, conceptualises practices in terms of how far they are embedded in, or abstracted away from, particular contexts of production. An EAP lesson on the page, EAP teacher talk or student writing can thus be analysed and understood as being *more* context-embedded (stronger semantic gravity) or *less* embedded (weaker semantic gravity). Movements between different strengths can then be traced visually as *semantic gravity waves* (Macnaught, Maton, Martin & Matruglio, 2013; Maton, 2013; Maton, 2014). Examples of a simple 'wave down' might be when a teacher provides an example in class to illustrate a grammatical concept (strengthening of SG). A 'wave up' might be, e.g., when a lesson moves from a practice task to generalising summary input (weakening of SG). In an EAP context, Monbec (2018) shows neatly how these concepts can be used to design, implement and teach an EAP curriculum that has students moving *between* engagement with metalinguistic understandings of, e.g., information structure in texts, generic practice tasks and discipline-specific follow-ups. This work also opens up spaces between the false binaries of EGAP and ESAP, as does my own work into EAP curriculum enactment (Kirk, 2018). As noted above, such studies, emerging from and feeding back into EAP practice, are growing and are beginning to suggest theory-informed *and* practical ways of seeing, understanding and working with knowledge(s) in EAP teaching, thinking and researching.

Knowledge *and* Language, Theory *and* Practice

Many EAP practitioners, perhaps through their TEFL based inductions into language teaching, have inherited a pedagogical grammar that separates language from the conditions of its production. Words and structures thus float free of the material contexts which shape them. CLT talks of teaching and learning language 'in context', but what this actually means is learning in *co-text*. Very rarely do you see textbook tasks asking questions about relations between participants, construal of events or notions of how speaker choice affects the kinds of meanings that are made. We have seen the material effects of this separation: a genericism in the realisation of EAP on the ground that almost certainly contributes to EAP remaining in the periphery of institutional understanding and investment. Yes, we're language teachers; but we need to be language teachers who understand how the knowledge practices among disciplinary specialists shape the textual choices that we help our students gain mastery over. As Paul Ashwin puts it neatly in a recent blog post, "skills without knowledge is no skill at all" (Ashwin, 2019).

Language *can* be separated from 'content' but the argument here is that doing so may be under-serving our students. Engaging with knowledge does not necessarily mean having debates with students over the intricacies of a theory in a given text that you're reading together (though it may, of course, for those with the background). It means also (or perhaps instead) understanding something of what underpins that text and how it came to take the shape that it did: Why is *this kind of* theory being drawn on? Why is this valued by the writer and by the academic community of

which they are part? How do these values and practices influence (and perhaps constrain) the organisation of the text and the language choices made? In Maton's terms, this is the difference between the *focus* of practices (here: textual content) and the *basis* of those practices: the underlying principles that shape how and why that content takes the form that it does (Maton, 2014, p. 31). Thus, we might distinguish between knowledge of the discipline (focus) and knowledge of *disciplinarity* (basis). Providing students with glimpses into knowledge practices may offer a richer apprenticeship into the academic cultures of which they are already, or will soon be, part of. This is also a richer form *knower building*, forging analytical skills that are *both* conceptual *and* grounded in texts, understandings of language that are *both* knowledge-oriented *and* transferable to other texts and contexts.

I think the separation of language practices from knowledge practices (and theory from practice, teaching from research) risks continued condemning of EAP units and their staff to the margins of academia (cf. Ding & Bruce, 2017). Or perhaps a better way of putting this is that re-connecting language with knowledge offers potentially productive routes to ways of thinking, speaking and practising that can dissolve false boundaries between what EAP practitioners do and what students and staff do in academic departments. This is not to overlook the material conditions of EAP practitioners, the precarity of contracts, and the institutional strategies and structures that constrain what EAP units can be (Hadley, 2015). It is, however, to suggest optimistically that there may be concrete paths to something better. We have agency within these structures and Ding, for instance, has argued that scholarship offers an important means of exercising this agency as one route to greater symbolic capital for EAP practitioners in the university (Ding, 2016; Ding & Bruce, 2017). I think a knowledge-invested approach to EAP curricular and pedagogic practice offers another route (and of course the two are probably interconnected, in that one facilitates the other).

Exchange 4
I get all of this in principle but not in practice. SFL…LCT…Academic Literacies…Epistemologies and ontologies. I don't see how I can use that in my teaching. It's too technical, too complicated. It doesn't seem very practically oriented.

When knowledge is moved, it gets changed: Recontextualisation
As already illustrated above, EAP does not come in one flavour. While there may be some degree of convergence in the research literature around, e.g., the merits of a specific-purposes approach over a general-purposes one, practice on the ground in EAP curriculums and classrooms remains highly diverse. This highlights the need to distinguish between different fields within EAP. The people, practices and purposes of *EAP research* do not (and cannot) match what an *EAP curriculum* seeks to achieve for a given context. The same people may or may not be involved; the curriculum may or may not be informed by research; and there is a need to create educational materials that are both 'teachable' by practitioners and 'learnable' by students. This means that insights from research must be selectively chosen, reshaped and integrated with other material as texts and tasks, and then structured and sequenced in some way – e.g. as a lesson, series of lessons or as linked webpages. Research knowledge must be *recontextualised* (Bernstein, 1990) as curricular knowledge.

Teaching materials represent no more than 'pedagogic potential', however. Just as there is recontextualisation from research into curriculum, there is further reshaping work to be done as texts and tasks are lifted off the page in pedagogic practice. Teachers must engage with a particular group of students on a particular day and within the context of a lesson sequence or looming assessment. This will inform the way in which texts are discussed, language explored and strategies offered. Curricular knowledge must be further recontextualised as teaching and learning.

Seeing EAP as interacting fields of practice…

It may be useful, therefore, to view EAP not as a single field, but rather as the three interacting fields of EAP research, EAP curriculum and EAP pedagogy[6]. The values, practices, actors and norms in each field may or may not overlap; and the degree of insulation/interaction between fields may also vary significantly across local contexts. The average university academic crosses field boundaries on a daily basis: insights from the lab (research) may become slides for a lecture (curriculum), which may then be discussed and further elaborated (or not) with students in a seminar (pedagogy). In the EAP context, there may be complete separation and an unfortunate division of labour: The researcher writes a paper for the Journal of EAP (research) that offers insights for practice, but that never becomes student-facing material (curriculum). EAP materials writers (curriculum) may neither engage with (or in) research and may not be teachers either. And EAP practitioners may be given no time for scholarship and may remain only consumers, rather than producers, of pedagogic materials.

Analytically distinguishing the fields of research, curriculum and pedagogy helps to provide a response for the imagined teacher comment that began this section. Insights produced in research may not easily or immediately cross into curriculum or classroom. Recontextualisation work is needed, precisely because the purposes for the work, the people involved and the affordances of the contexts are all different. The Sydney School of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), for example, is a theory of language that has built cumulatively over time towards a highly technicalised and theoretically powerful framework. This offers EAP, not just tools to describe patterns within a text, but also to account for similarities and differences *across* texts and contexts. These insights may not be immediately pedagogy-ready, however. Significant recontextualisation work may be needed to turn theoretical explanations into accessible, student-facing tasks and for teachers who may well have little fluency in SFL concepts themselves.

It is perhaps not seeing the need for this translation work that results, at least partly, in some EAP practitioners rejecting theory as useless or irrelevant. Successful recontextualisation can be pedagogically powerful, however. The *Language in Learning across the Curriculum* (LiLaC) course (Custance, Dare Polias, 2017) is one example of recontextualising Sydney School SFL for primary school teacher development[7]. Coffin and Donohue's *Language as a Social Semiotic* (LASS) framework (Coffin & Donohue, 2014) is an example of recontextualising SFL for the UK HE context. The work of John Swales offers an example in EAP: Swales's 1990 classic, *Genre Theory* is a book produced in and for the field of production (though ostensibly also a book for teaching professionals). The widely used *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (Swales & Feak, 2012) takes

---

[6] I will use 'pedagogy' here as a shorthand that includes teaching, learning and assessment
[7] In 2018 I joined a group of primary school teachers from the northeast of England to see this course in action, taught by an EAL specialist from Durham County Council

the theory and turns it into student-facing texts, tasks and explanatory input (curriculum), which can then be more straightforwardly enacted as classroom practice with EAP learners.

These concepts and distinctions originate in Bernstein's modelling of the *pedagogic device* (Bernstein, 1990). Bernstein's terms are *the field of production* (research, where new knowledge is produced), *the field of recontextualisation* (where this knowledge is selectively reshaped as textbooks / curriculums) and *the field of reproduction* (where curricular knowledge is again reshaped with students in teaching, learning and assessment). While Bernstein assumed essentially one-way recontextualisation from the university through curriculum into the (school) classroom, Maton has developed the model to recognise a more dialectal relationship between fields: e.g., that teacher practice can reshape materials, and that teachers can produce research (Maton, 2014, p. 43-53).

Seeing different fields and the need to recontextualise knowledge in taking it from one context into another highlights an important area of work that is rarely made visible – in EAP or elsewhere in education. We don't know enough about how this happens (or doesn't) in EAP, but it is clear that considerable expertise is involved. What is 'powerful' in one field may be experienced as inaccessible in another, if left untranslated. It is clear, therefore, that better understanding the nature of recontextualisation work may be important to breaking down the binary thinking referred to earlier, to seeing how theory can be made practical for EAP, and to making more explicit how EAP practice can be theorised.

Exchange 5

Is the student perhaps getting a bit lost within all of this (and maybe the teacher too)? Shouldn't we be focusing on the people here? We need to talk about power, agency, access, marginalised voices and our role in transformative practices in the university – not just 'knowledge'.

This is not an either-or debate. The focus on knowledge in social realism and LCT emerged as a reaction to the perceived "knowledge blindness" in education (Maton, 2014, p.3-8). Concepts, research and insights for development and change have evolved to open up this blind spot: to examine knowledge itself and the forms it takes, and to explore the impact this has for access, education and equity. A focus on knowledge does not throw the baby out with the bathwater, therefore; it simply seeks to redress the perceived imbalance. Indeed, as Maton reminds us, "there are always knowledges and always knowers – social fields are *knowledge–knower* structures" (Maton, 2014, p. 96).

Bernstein, social realism and LCT have always had an underlying drive for social justice. A common thread throughout much of the published research across these traditions has concerned visible and transparent access to knowledge as a means for equitable curriculums and pedagogies. Lisa Wheelahan has argued this powerfully in the context of vocational education, for instance, suggesting that *social access* (e.g. to the conversations of society, to full democratic participation) depends on *epistemic access* – access to powerful knowledge (Wheelahan, 2010). This perspective should resonate for EAP professionals, as this is surely an important part of what we do: provide students with the analytic tools, metalinguistic knowledge and metacognitive strategies that enable demystifying the 'rules of the game' in disciplinary discourse practices. It can also offer a lens that

can be turned to EAP practitioners' own practice and positionality. There are echoes again here of Ding's call for greater reflexivity and engagement in scholarship (e.g. Ding, 2016; Ding & Bruce, 2017), in that epistemic access (knowledge work through scholarship) can enable social access (fuller participation in the conversations of the university).

In South Africa, highly charged and emotive debates around decolonising the curriculum have also seen small but significant steps of positive progress with the help of seeing both knowledge and knowers. One example is the work at Stellenbosch University on decolonising the science curriculum (Adendorff & Blackie, forthcoming, 2020). Such transformative, theory-infused practice is (re-)connecting knowers, knowledge & troubled contexts. It is forcing crucial questions, not just about who has access to knowledge, but also about how educators and curriculums can engage with plural knowledges, "in careful, disciplined and non-essentialising ways" to develop "complex knowers" (Fataar, 2019. See also Luckett, 2016).

Knowledge is 'real' and shapes people and practices
Knowers shape knowledges, but knowledges also shape knowers (Maton, 2014). From a social realist perspective, knowledge is *real* (Bhaskar, 2008 [1975]; Maton, 2014). This is to say that knowledge, while not 'tangible' (or necessarily *true*[8]), can be shown to exert influence and have material effects back on people and practices – for instance in the structuring effects of a university textbook or lecture.

To take a pertinent example, we might think of an imagined EAP unit whose teaching and management staff have all entered EAP through EFL. Designated a 'student service', the unit is located together with the university's international office and has few links with academic departments, except in relation to admissions and IELTS scores. Teachers are directed to use a generalist textbook (the curricular knowledge for this example) that makes no reference to disciplinary differences and that teaches a single 'academic literacy'. No time or money is given to scholarship and teachers are too busy prepping classes to read on their own time. Largely unaware of alternatives, therefore, these teachers draw also on the pedagogic grammar of their CELTAs and DELTAs (or similar) to do the best they can for their students.

Hermetically sealed from other forms of knowledge and other ways of knowing, these EAP practitioners engage with their students and with each other through the prisms of the textbook and their EFL training. Through engagement with these particular forms of curricular knowledge, teachers develop an embodied sense of best practice that, while perhaps largely tacit and unrecognised, revolves around a core set of assumptions. These might include the belief that language can and should be separated from content; that short accessible texts make the best models for language work; that students' own ideas provide an empowering, learner-centred basis for written work; and/or that sharing and debating these ideas enables the effective development of critical thinking. Engaging in particular forms of curricular knowledge thus functions over time to guide and bound what constitutes legitimate content and ways of teaching and learning. Over time,

---

[8] Social realism holds the position that knowledge is *ontologically real* but *epistemologically relative* – i.e. knowledge generated by a community can shape beliefs and practices in ways that can be observed and measured (it is *real*); however, this knowledge is also understood to be fallible and, therefore, subject to change and improvement over time (it is sociohistorically *relative*). See e.g. Maton, 2014, p.9-14.

this shapes the dispositions of the staff. And, of course, this will also probably be true of the EAP students in their classes. Like the proverbial frog in the well, an EAP pre-sessional student on this programme may develop only a highly simplified sense of what it means, for instance, to grapple with academic texts and to draw on these to weave together an assignment for their destination department. Students engage with the ways of thinking and practising implicitly modelled via textbook tasks and classroom pedagogies, and develop (perhaps implicit) assumptions akin to those suggested above. They leave with an emaciated understanding of academic communication in a disciplinary context at a given academic level. Particular forms of curricular knowledge have shaped and constrained what it means to prepare for an English-medium degree.

This is an extreme caricature, of course, but I have seen programmes that are not far off this in the course of my career. Contrast this with an imagined alternative, where staff are scholarship active and connected to departments via educational collaborations. EAP staff talk of *disciplinary communication* not 'language support' and so departmental academics see how it is that EAP practitioners can contribute to *all* students' (and perhaps their own) spoken and written effectiveness. The university buys in, demanding pre-sessionals that are subject-invested and programmes are developed drawing on staff, genres and exemplar writing from receiving departments. EAP teachers are not subject experts but employ pedagogies that include students engaging substantively with texts chosen by their department. Together, perhaps with students as content experts and EAP practitioners as discourse experts, classes explore how meanings are made in and across conceptually challenging texts. This scaffolds them towards emulating similar forms in their own, departmentally agreed spoken and written tasks. This very different form of curricular knowledge (and thus pedagogic practice) embodies very different messages about what it means to do EAP and what it means to develop academic communication skills.

Imagined over course time for students, this will differently shape participant-knowers and their ways of thinking and practising. Seen over multiple course iterations for staff, engagement with discipline-invested curricular knowledge and with research knowledge through scholarship works to *specialise* (*sensu* Maton, 2007; 2014) these EAP practitioners in ways that are more likely to resonate with departmental academics. EAP teachers take this 'trained gaze' (Maton, 2010b; Maton, 2014) with them wherever they go, embodying[9] a way of seeing and of engaging with students, texts and language that can be brought to bear in *any* class. They are able to reshape and lift materials, investing them with knowledge that more closely meets the needs of students in the room – and perhaps in ways not necessarily given in the materials.

Knowledge shapes knowers (Maton, 2014). Different forms of knowledge differently shape our students. Different forms of knowledge differently shape us as EAP practitioners. Analytically making these distinctions forces important questions of EAP curriculums and pedagogic practice: Who are we helping our students become? What *form* of learning is enabled by this task / lesson / course? What values and dispositions are students developing through engaging with *this kind of* text / assessment / curriculum thread? How far do these dispositions reflect the ways of thinking and

---

[9] What I'm talking about here is, essentially, what Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus* formation, and what Basil Bernstein called *coding orientation*. Maton's LCT offers means of more easily operationalising these concepts to enable, for instance, seeing differences across contexts and change over time. See Maton (2014) and, in particular, sections on Specialisation, knower structures and knower-building.

practising in receiving departments? Moving towards programmes that more resemble course 2 than course 1 may be far from simple, given the affordances of particular institutional contexts. However, it seems to me that seeing knowledge and its effects makes it something of an imperative to work towards this.

This perspective connects knowledge with knowing and becoming (Barnett, 2004; 2005; Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007). A university education is and should be a transformative experience. It is our responsibility as educators to understand what constitute more and less enabling/empowering forms of curriculum and pedagogy for our EAP students. What kind of knowledge is being selected and recontextualised into the courses we design, inherit or buy? What structuring effects might this be having on students and staff? What kind of knowers are being shaped as a result, and what might that mean for agency, access and participation in the university?

Exchange 6

Knowledge, knowers, recontextualisation, semantic gravity waves…OK. Aren't you becoming blind to other approaches and alternative ways of thinking about things, though? There are lots of other theories out there. LCT is not the cure for everything.

There is no claim here that a social realist perspective offers a panacea. Indeed Bernstein (1977) and Maton (2014) stress the importance of having "allegiance to a problem rather than to an approach" (Maton, 2014, p. 19). What matters most is more effective student learning, better understanding of disciplinary discourses, how to teach in more inclusive ways, developing greater teacher reflexivity, how to use scholarship to enhance materials design, etc, etc. Solving these problems, or at least searching for productive ways forward, is unlikely to happen through sticking dogmatically to one way of working while shutting down other ways of thinking. The focus in this piece has been on social realist thinking (and LCT concepts in particular) as a means of seeing and understanding 'knowledge' in more nuanced ways, so as to open up new/refined possibilities for practice in EAP. It is only one avenue to explore (though I am suggesting that it may be a highly productive one).

Crossing disciplinary boundaries into new territory, discovering new theoretical lenses and alternative ways of thinking, and bringing these back into EAP represents, I think, something of the 'essence' of EAP as it has developed. Seeing this enables articulating what *kind* of field we work in (whether we're thinking about research, curriculum and or pedagogy). It also enables seeing through to what may represent one important means of moving forwards.

From EAP as 'discipline' to EAP as 'region'

Rather than using only the traditional term 'discipline' to describe academic research communities, Bernstein distinguished between what he called *singulars* and *regions*. Singulars are intellectual fields that are generally inwardly facing, "…oriented to their own development, protected by strong boundaries and hierarchies' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 52). Examples are chemistry, psychology and sociology (Bernstein, 2000, p.9). Regions, in slight contrast, are created by recontextualising singulars, combining disciplinary influences and turning these outwards: "Regions are the interface between the field of the production of knowledge and any field of practice" (Bernstein 2000, p.9).

Thus, for Bernstein, fields such as medicine, engineering, business, education and architecture are regions, rather than disciplines. These fields face both ways: inwards to the academy and outwards to professional practice. In this sense, EAP would appear to resemble a region more than a singular.

There are, of course, good reasons to maintain the term 'discipline' and I'm not suggesting we stop doing so. EAP has come of age intellectually and professionally and merits the status of discipline. The term embodies a currency and symbolic capital that are important. As a backstage thinking tool, however, the notion of a region helps to capture more accurately the sense in which EAP (as a field of research) is more like engineering that physics: EAP draws in theories and methods from elsewhere, such as corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, ethnography and critical theory, and turns these ultimately to the purpose of enhancing academic communication practices, agency and participation among students in English-medium higher education. We might perhaps also recognise similar region-like practices in EAP curriculum design and pedagogy, with relatively porous boundaries around what can be seen as legitimate forms of practice.

The concepts and thinking offered here from Bernstein and LCT thus represent one more, relatively new, source of input and influence for EAP. I very much hope there will be many others. We need to pull in other knowledges from other fields and work collectively to recontextualise productive insights for the continued, creative and constructive development of the sector. Not all theories or methods are equal, of course, and not everything will be worth drawing into EAP practice. However, I do think such exploration matters to our ability as a sector to grow and cumulatively build ourselves a knowledge base that is recognised, respected, valued and enables us to effect change in our institutions – and more widely in the higher education sector

Endings and openings

So this is, broadly speaking, where my opening talk ended. It was here that the Knowledge PIM day in Northampton then got properly started. I provide far more elaboration and illustration above than I did at the PIM, but the purpose was the same: to introduce a number of knowledge-infused principles / perspectives that might provide useful signposts for thinking and discussion.

I made then and make here no claim that knowledge oriented EAP practices do not exist. I am arguing rather a) that such practice is not visible, shared or pervasive enough, and b) that we do not share a common means of understanding and articulating the particular forms this does (or could) take. It is here that I think social realist thinking, and the concepts offered by LCT in particular, offer something very productive. Just as SFL offers EAP a means to make explicit and learnable how language functions to make valued meanings in texts, so LCT enables excavating and making explicit the knowledge practices that are most valued in given communities. Making visible these organising principles shaping practice is potentially of great value. Once made explicit, these principles can be shared, taught, critiqued, developed - and perhaps changed.

LCT offers both tools for thinking and operationalizable concepts for practice and research. These open up (e.g.) EAP curriculum and pedagogical practices to examination and scrutiny in new ways, enabling exploration of what knowledges are legitimated, how this shapes who is deemed a

legitimate EAP knower and the structures underpinning the ways in which EAP itself is shaped, enacted and reshaped locally by practitioners within particular institutional contexts.

The sketch here is very generalist. I do not go into the rich framework offered by the different, still-evolving dimensions of LCT. These include Specialisation, Semantics and, most recently, Autonomy (Maton & Howard, 2018). I do not provide much detail of Bernstein's work, on which much of LCT builds. I do not mention the critical realist underpinnings of LCT, or the close interdisciplinary links and developments that exist between LCT and Systemic Functional Linguistics. For the interested reader, the main go-to work is Maton 2014, but the other references below will provide signposts to the rich range of theory, research and practice focused work now being done.

I hope this sparks some reflection, some critical conversations and perhaps some inspired and informed shifts in practice. Please get in touch if so.

References

Adenorff, H., & M. Blackie (forthcoming, 2020). Decolonizing the science curriculum: When good intentions are not enough. In C. Winberg, S. McKenna and K. Wilmot (Eds), *Building Knowledge in Higher Education: Enhancing teaching and learning with Legitimation Code Theory.* Routledge.

Ashwin, P. (2019). Knowledge is power: the purpose of quality teaching. WONKHE. 16 June 2019. https://wonkhe.com/blogs/knowledge-is-power-the-purpose-of-quality-teaching/.

Barnett, R. (2004) Learning for an unknown future, *Higher Education Research and Development,* 23(3), 247–260.

Barnett, R. (2005) Recapturing the universal in the university, *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* 37(6), 785–797.

Bernstein, B. (1977) *Class, Codes and Control, Volume III: Towards a theory of educational transmissions*. 2nd edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bernstein, B. (1990). *Class, codes and control, volume IV: The structuring of pedagogic discourse*. Routledge.

Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity: Theory, research, critique* (revised ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Bhaskar, R. (2008). *A realist theory of science*. New York, NY: Routledge. (Original work published 1975).

Brooke, M., Monbec, L., & Tilakaratna, N. (2019). The analytical lens: developing undergraduate students' critical dispositions in undergraduate EAP writing courses. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *24*(3), 428-443.

Clarence, S. (2016). Exploring the nature of disciplinary teaching and learning using legitimation code theory semantics. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *21*(2), 123–37.

Coffin, C., & Donohue, J. (2014). *A language as social semiotic based approach to teaching and learning in higher education*. John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Cowley-Haselden, S. and Monbec, L. (2019) Emancipating Ourselves from Mental Slavery: Affording Knowledge in our Practice. In M. Gillway (Ed), Proceedings of the 2017 BALEAP Conference: Addressing the state of the union: Working together = learning together (pp. 39-46). Garnet Education.

Dall'Alba, G., & Barnacle, R. (2007). An ontological turn for higher education. *Studies in higher education*, *32*(6), 679-691.

Ding, A. (2016). Challenging scholarship: A thought piece. *The Language Scholar*, 6-18. Available at https://languagescholar.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/12/Language-Scholar-Winter-2016-Issue-0.pdf#page=5

Ding, A., & Bruce, I. (2017). *The English for academic purposes practitioner: Operating   on the edge of academia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fataar, A. (2019) 'Towards a pathway to pursue knowledge in the South African higher education laboratory'. *Researching knowledge, decolonisation and the quest for inclusivity and social justice*. Panel discussion. Third International Legitimation Code Theory Conference, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, 4 July 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SK9eQ3Lk_9M&t=1212s

Halliday, M.A. (1993). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, *5*(2), 93–116.

Hood, S. (2011). Writing discipline: Comparing inscriptions of knowledge and knowers in academic writing. In F. Christie, & K. Maton (Eds.), Disciplinarity: Functional Linguistic and Sociological Perspectives (pp. 106-128). Continuum.

Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. University of Michigan Press.

Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies*, *7*(2), 173-192.

Kirk, S. (2017). Waves of reflection: Seeing knowledges in academic writing. In J. Kemp (Ed.), *EAP in a rapidly changing landscape: Issues, challenges and solutions*. Proceedings of the 2015 BALEAP Conference. Garnet.

Kirk, S. (2018). *Enacting the curriculum in English for academic purposes: A legitimation code theory analysis* (Doctoral thesis). Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/12942/

Kuteeva, M., & Negretti, R. (2016). Graduate students' genre knowledge and perceived disciplinary practices: Creating a research space across disciplines. *English for Specific Purposes*, *41*, 36-49.

Luckett, K. (2016). Curriculum contestation in a post-colonial context: A view from the South. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *21*(4), 415-428.

Custance, B., B. Dare, & J. Polias (2017). *Teaching ESL students in mainstream classrooms: Language in learning across the curriculum*. 4th Edition. Lexis Education.

Macnaught, L., Maton, K., Martin, J.R., & Matruglio, E. (2013). Jointly constructing semantic waves: Implications for teacher training. *Linguistics and Education*, *24*(1), 50–63.

Martin, J. R. (2007). Construing knowledge: A functional linguistic perspective. In F. Christie & J. R. Martin (Eds.), *Language, knowledge and pedagogy: Functional linguistic and sociological perspectives* (pp. 34-64). Continuum.

Martin, J. R. (2011). Bridging troubled waters: Interdisciplinarity and what makes it stick. In F. Christie, & K. Maton (Eds.), Disciplinarity: Functional Linguistic and Sociological Perspectives (pp. 35-61). Continuum.

Maton, K. (2007). Knowledge-knower structures in intellectual and educational fields. In F. Christie & J.R. Martin (Eds.), *Language, knowledge and pedagogy: Functional linguistic and sociological perspectives* (pp. 87–108). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Maton, K. (2009). Cumulative and segmented learning: Exploring the role of curriculum structures in knowledge-building, *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 30*(1), 43–57.

Maton, K. (2010a). Analysing knowledge claims and practices: Languages of legitimation. In K. Maton & R. Moore (Eds.), *Social realism, knowledge and the sociology of education: Coalitions of the mind* (pp. 35–59). Continuum.

Maton, K. (2010b) Progress and canons in the arts and humanities: Knowers and gazes. In K. Maton and R. Moore (Eds), *Social Realism, Knowledge and the Sociology of Education*. Continuum.

Maton, K. (2013). Making semantic waves: A key to cumulative knowledge-building. *Linguistics and Education*, *24*(1), 8–22.

Maton, K. (2014). *Knowledge & knowers: Towards a realist sociology of education*. Routledge.

Maton, K., Hood, S., & Shay, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Knowledge-building: Educational studies in legitimation code theory*. Routledge.

Maton, K., & Howard, S.K. (2018). Taking autonomy tours: A key to integrative knowledge-building*. LCT Centre Occasional Paper 1*(June), 1–35.

Monbec, L. (2018). Designing an EAP curriculum for transfer: A focus on knowledge. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, *12*(2), A88-A101.

Muller, J. (2007) 'On splitting hairs: Hierarchy, knowledge and the school curriculum', in F. Christie and J. Martin (Eds), *Language, Knowledge and Pedagogy*. Continuum.

Popper, K. R. (1972). *Objective knowledge: An evolutionary approach*. Oxford University Press.

Rata, E. (2019). Knowledge-rich teaching: A model of curriculum design coherence. *British Educational Research Journal*.

Shay, S. (2012) Conceptualizing curriculum differentiation in higher education: A sociology of knowledge point of view *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34(4): 563–82.

Shay, S., & Steyn, D. (2016). Enabling knowledge progression in vocational curricula: Design as a case study. In K. Maton, S. Hood & S. Shay (Eds.), *Knowledge-building: Educational studies in legitimation code theory* (pp. 138–157). Routledge.

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2012). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills* (Vol. 1). 3rd Edition. University of Michigan Press.

Szenes, E., Tilakaratna, N., & Maton, K. (2015). The knowledge practices of critical thinking. In *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education* (pp. 573-591). Palgrave Macmillan

Wheelahan, L. (2010). Competency-based training, powerful knowledge and the working class. In K. Maton & R. Moore (Eds.), *Social realism, knowledge and the sociology of education: Coalitions of the mind* (pp. 100–116). Continuum.

Wignell, P. (2007). Vertical and horizontal discourse and the social sciences. In F. Christie, & J. R. Martin (Eds.), Language, knowledge and pedagogy: Functional linguistic and sociological perspectives (pp. 184-204). Cassell.

Young, M. (2008) *Bringing Knowledge Back In: From social constructivism to social realism*. Routledge.